Samuil Micu, Philosophe?

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The question I wish to raise, as suggested in the title of my paper, is whether Samuil Micu, polymath and priest and one of the leading figures of Romanian intellectual life in Transylvania in the latter decades of the eighteenth century, merits the epithet **philosophe**?[1] The answer lies in the extent of his connection to the dominating current of ideas in eighteenth-century Europe, known to contemporaries, as well as to posterity, as **Lumières** or **Aufklärung** or **Enlightenment**. Thus, we must also ask whether Samuil Micu shared the ideals and the aspirations of those who were its theorists and propagators, the philosophes.

As a number of historians of the eighteenth century have pointed out, there were many Enlightenments. There was, of course, the Enlightenment in France, but there was also the Enlightenment in Great Britain and in The Netherlands, where many scholars insist, the Enlightenment had its beginnings in the seventeenth century. An Enlightenment took form in Germany and in southern Europe, in the Habsburg Monarchy and Russia, and in the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia and among the Romanians of Transylvania. Each displayed distinctive features and each reflected a climate of opinion different from all the others. But the Enlightenment was by no means solely a movement of ideas; political,

[1] By the French term, **philosophe**, I mean the intellectual of the eighteenth century, particularly in France, who used reason and knowledge to combat injustice and ignorance and ensure human progress. He was not the abstract thinker, the cultivator of ideas for their own sake that we associate with the term, **philosopher**, in our own days.

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economic, and social foundations came under the scrutiny of philosophes and influenced the specific form that the grand ideas of the Enlightenment assumed in the different parts of Europe.

If there were many Enlightenments, there were also many philosophes. They were the creators of the Enlightenment, and they moved it forward from its beginnings, in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, to its maturity, in the middle of the eighteenth century, up to the 1770s. Of an infinite diversity of opinions and talents and only intermittently subjecting themselves to organization, they nonetheless shared certain fundamental traits. Perhaps, above all others, the one that defined them best was their willingness to take intellectual and spiritual risks, "*to dare to know*," as Kant described their mission. They were cosmopolitan in outlook and education, and they were men of the city; they were addicted to knowledge, and they were practitioners of reason; they were skeptical of things as they were and unsparing in their criticism, and yet they were optimistic and certain of human progress; they were advocates of many causes and used the pen with great effect to convince others of the rightness of their causes; and they were focused on this world, on man and his material and spiritual well-being. A certain *esprit de corps* arose among them, as they came to know one another, if not always personally, then by the written word. Yet, despite their common struggle, they remained individuals, and they were moved by different aims and they used different means, for they could not but respond to the particular political and social environments in which they thought and wrote.

II

It was in this sense, of a unity of purpose and of a diversity of means, that Samuil Micu (1745-1806) participated in the European Enlightenment.[2]

[2] Among the many works on this theme, the following are particularly valuable: P. Teodor, ***Sub semnul luminilor: Samuil Micu***, Cluj-Napoca, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000; L. Blaga, ***Gîndirea românească în Transilvania în***

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It touched him deeply. The persuasiveness of its principles and the reasonableness of its aspirations stimulated his own thought and led him into new and productive paths. But his reception of the Enlightenment was a process of selection and adaptation, as he perceived a convergence between its certainties and goals and his own strivings to improve the lot of the Romanians and, as he thus eagerly applied its critical spirit to the prevailing political and social order in eighteenth-century Transylvania. It was, then, in the combination of his concern for the Romanian nation in a Transylvanian setting and of his adherence to the critical spirit and idea of progress of the European Enlightenment that we find the essence of his vocation as an East Central European philosophe.

True to the ideals of the Enlightenment, Micu was committed to reason and knowledge as the levers of human progress. He approached both the theory of knowledge and the solutions to practical problems from the general perspective of philosophy. By "philosophy," he meant the examination of the causes and the nature of things by human reason, a common eighteenth-century definition. He revered philosophy as the foundation of knowledge and as the primary means of investigating the human condition. He also saw in philosophy the essential framework within which he could elaborate his ideas on the origins and identity of the Romanians. For all these reasons, he was an avid reader of philosophy and a diligent translator.

Micu's principal contact with the European Enlightenment was through its incarnation in the Habsburg Monarchy. The Austrian Enlightenment, as it came to be known, played a paramount role in shaping his intellectual development. At its heart, lay two complementary

secolul al XVIII-lea, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică, 1966 (on Micu, p. 133-170); D. Ghişe and P. Teodor, ***Fragmentarium illuminist***, Cluj, Dacia, 1972 (on Micu, p. 20-100); I. Lungu, ***Şcoala ardeleană***, Bucureşti, Editura Minerva, 1978; S. Micu, ***Scrieri filozofice***, P. Teodor and D. Ghişe, editors and authors of the introductory study, Bucureşti, 1966; N. Mladin, I. Vlad, A. Moisiu, ***Samuil Micu Clain - Teologul. Viaţa, opera şi concepţia teologică***, Sibiu, 1957; Zoltán I. Tóth, ***Klein Sámuel és az erdélyi román felvilágodás***, Cluj, 1947.

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movements of the latter years of Maria Theresa's reign (1740-1780) and the reign of Joseph II (1780-1790) - Catholic reform, which was mainly spiritual and educational, and Imperial reform, which aimed at the rationalization of economic and social life and the reinforcement of central authority, at the expense of the provincial nobility. Catholic reformers imposed upon the Enlightenment in the Habsburg Monarchy its peculiarly Catholic and Austrian character.[3] They were eager to place their faith on a rational foundation and to use reason and persuasion to convince both the clergy and the faithful of the truths of their beliefs. They were, thus, opposed to the dogmatism and intolerance practiced by the Jesuits and in 1759 were instrumental in depriving the Jesuits of their control of the censorship and of the theological and philosophical faculties at the universities.

The Catholic reformers and the Imperial Court often worked together. Notably, they joined forces to promote an ambitious restructuring and expansion of education for both the parish clergy and their parishioners, and strove to improve the pastoral care of the faithful by the local clergy. The reformers insisted that students have new-method textbooks that would engage them in thinking about what they were reading, rather than allow them to settle for rote learning, and they wanted to provide the clergy with the most authoritative texts of the sources of their faith, thereby inspiring them to teach its doctrines with well-founded arguments rather than by appeals to authority. At a more mundane level, the Court pressed forward with constitutional and legal reforms and a restructuring of agriculture and taxation.[4] Of enormous importance, also, was the growing public discussion of reform accompanying these changes, especially under Joseph II, who was thus determined to persuade his subjects of the benefits of enlightened rule from the centre.

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[3] See E. Wangermann, ***Reform Catholicism and Political Radicalism in the Austrian Enlightenment***, in R. Porter and M. Teich, editors, ***The Enlightenment in National Context***, Cambridge, 1981, p. 127-140.

[4] E. Winter, ***Barock, Absolutismus und Aufklärung in der Donaumonarchie***, Vienna, 1971, p. 155-193; A. Schaser, ***Josephinische Reformen und sozialer Wandel in Siebenbürgen***, Stuttgart, 1989, p. 25-102.

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III

Samuil Micu elaborated his own distinctive vision of the Enlightenment within this general atmosphere of reform. He was not alone. He belonged to a small intellectual elite that had gradually formed in the course of the eighteenth century, and he shared their world of ideas and their aspirations. The majority were the products of Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic secondary schools in Transylvania and of Roman Catholic institutions of higher learning in Vienna and Rome. Educated in the new, enlightened spirit of the times, they were unusually receptive to the ideas of the Enlightenment, especially in its Austrian variant. They were optimistic about the possibilities for human progress, and, conscious of their own leading role in Romanian society, they were certain that change must come from above, from the enlightened, by which, of course, they meant themselves. They were also of a practical bent and were little given to abstract speculation, for their attention was focused on the immediate problems of Romanian society, notably education and civil and political emancipation. Their immense and varied productivity - histories of the Romanians, grammars of the Romanian language, theological commentaries and volumes of sermons, school textbooks and translations of works of all kinds - was aimed at improving the general welfare of the Romanians.[5]

Samuil Micu and his colleagues formed a vibrant intellectual community at Blaj, the see of the Greek Catholic bishopric in Transylvania. At the center of their community were three schools - a seminary, attached to the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, whose tasks were to train priests and offer a general education; the middle school, which became a lyceum, with a curriculum common to such institutions in the Habsburg Monarchy, where classical languages, German, Hungarian, mathematics, ancient history, and

[5] On the intellectual elite, besides the works cited in footnote 1, see D. Popovici, ***La littérature roumaine à l'époque des lumières***, Sibiu, Editura Centrului de Studii şi Cercetări privitoare la Transilvania, 1945 and D. Prodan, ***Supplex Libellus Valachorum; din istoria formării naţiunii române***, revised edition, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1984.

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philosophy were taught; the elementary school, where pupils learned the fundamentals of reading, writing and religion. Between 1754 and 1772, an average of three hundred students attended these schools each year. Their teachers came from among the monks of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity and, later, of the Monastery of the Annunciation, who had had advanced theological and philosophical training abroad.[6] The schools and monasteries brought together clerics who shared a common intellectual heritage and developed an esprit de corps, similar to that among the philosophes in Western Europe.

They were drawn together, in the first instance, by the sense of mission they shared to free the Romanians from centuries of subjection to the privileged three nations (Magyar noble, Saxon and Szekler) and four churches (Calvinist, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Unitarian) and restoring them to a place in Transylvanian affairs, befitting their noble Roman ancestry and their majority of the population. An earlier generation of Orthodox clergy and faithful, at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth had tried to achieve these goals by agreeing to a church union with Rome, but the new Greek Catholic Church and its clergy had had no success in gaining recognition as a fourth privileged nation. Yet, the Church Union had opened up to young Romanians, especially candidates for the Greek Catholic priesthood, unprecedented opportunities for education in Roman Catholic institutions in Transylvania and abroad.[7]

Now, the intellectual community at Blaj took a scholarly approach to the problem of Romanian emancipation. Micu's activities were characteristic of the group. He himself assembled the evidence of noble identity in

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[6] I. Mârza, ***École et nation (Les écoles de Blaj à l'époque de la renaissance nationale)***, Cluj-Napoca, Centre d' Études Transylvanes, 2005, p. 51-82, 182-184; N. Albu, ***Istoria învăţământului românesc din Transilvania până la 1800***, Blaj, 1944, p. 173-197.

[7] R. Câmpeanu, ***Un efect spectaculos al Unirii religioase: integrarea elitelor româneşti din Transilvania, Partium şi Banat în sistemul catolic de învăţământ în prima jumătate a secolului al XVIII-lea***, in ***Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Historica***, nr. 6 / II, 2002, p. 127-140.

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pioneering works of history and language. He was the first to set down in detail the so-called theory of Daco-Roman continuity, which formed the core of the modern idea of Romanian nationhood. In such works, as ***Scurtă cunoştinţă a istorii Românilor*** (composed in 1796) and the four volume ***Istoria şi lucrurile şi întâmplările Românilor*** (composed in 1800-1806), he argued that the Romanians were the direct descendants of the Roman legionaries and colonists, who had settled in Dacia (which had encompassed much of Transylvania and the territory between the Carpathians and the Danube), in the second century, and that a Romanized population had inhabited this area uninterruptedly, until the arrival of the Magyars in the tenth century. Micu and his colleague, Gheorghe Şincai, offered further proof of the Roman origins of the Romanians, by demonstrating the Latin origins of Romanian in their ***Elementa linguae Daco-Romanae sive Valachicae*** (Vienna, 1780). The distinctive note in these writings was Micu's ability to view the emancipation of the Romanians within the broad context of the Enlightenment's faith in human progress and preoccupation with the general good.

The place of the decisive encounter between Samuil Micu and the Enlightenment was a city, Vienna. If we may ask the question, "*What would Diderot have been without Paris or Rousseau without Geneva*?,"[8] then, in the same way, we may wonder what Micu would have been without Vienna? He spent two long periods there - the first, 1766-1772, as a student at the Pazmaneum Institute, founded in 1623 to promote Catholicism in Hungary, and the second, 1777-1783, as prefect of studies at the College of "St. Barbara," established in 1773 to train priests for the Greek Catholic Church from all over the Habsburg Monarchy.

During his first sojurn, he took courses at the University of Vienna, in canon law and theology, that brought him into direct contact with the innovative spirit of the Catholic reformers, but he was also attracted to science, and he studied physics, mechanics and mathematics, in addition to

[8] P. Gay, ***The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism***, New York, 1966, p. 15.

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his major subjects, theology and philosophy.[9] We may reasonably assume that he was also drawn to the immensely popular courses taught by two influential Aufklärer of the time, Anton von Martini, on natural law and Joseph von Sonnenfels, on political economy. He may also have become acquainted at this time with the ideas of the German philosopher Christian Wolff (1679-1754) and the German legal scholar Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), both of whom had striven to reconcile reason and faith and had set down the constitutional norms of enlightened despotism.

During his second stay in Vienna, Micu was preoccupied with writing and translating, producing works that showed his deepening commitment to the principles of the Austrian Enlightenment. Noteworthy is his translation of ***Elementa philosophiae recentiores usibus iuventutis scholasticae*** (Cluj, 1771) by Friedrich Christian Baumeister (1709-1785), one of Christian Wolff's disciples. This project, in particular, suggests Micu's adherence to a rationalist philosophy. Two other, original works, which he published in Vienna, ***Dissertatio canonica de matrimonio juxta disciplinam Graecae Orientalis Ecclesiae*** (1781), on the institution of marriage in the Eastern Orthodox Church, and ***Dissertatio de jejuniis Graecae Orientalis Ecclesiae*** (1782), in which, among other things, he subjected fasts to the scrutiny of reason, were further statements of his faith in enlightened principles. His grammar of Romanian, ***Elementa linguae Daco-Romanae sive Valachicae***, intended as a textbook for students at "St. Barbara," was also an instrument of enlightenment, for he viewed the study of grammar and the perfection of language as essential for the diffusion of knowledge and the reinforcement of logical thinking.

IV

An inquiry into Micu's contributions to philosophy, history, theology, and politics will suggest the depth of his involvement in the Enlightenment.

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[9] P. Teodor, ***Samuil Micu: Traduceri şi prelucrări filosofice***, in Idem, ***Interferenţe iluministe europene***, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Dacia, 1984, p. 119-131.

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His work in these fields combined originality and adaptation, and he emphasized the practical and the relevant, as the general welfare of the Romanians was foremost in his thoughts.

In philosophy, Micu was not an original thinker, but his understanding of the nature and tasks of philosophy and his choice of works to translate place him well within the main currents of the Austrian Enlightenment, and reveal his affinities to the spirit of the general Enlightenment. He was, as already suggested, an adherent of Christian Wolff, and through Baumeister's popularizing manual he was the chief disseminator of Wolff's theories among the Romanians. He may even have taught Wolff's philosophy at Blaj.[10] In his own researches in other disciplines he made clear his sympathy for Wolff's dictum, that the main purpose of philosophy was to know the causes of things through the use of the mind. As he put it himself, "*Philosophy is nothing other than...the habit of seeking and knowing the sufficient causes of things*."[11] His translations not only offered Romanian students and intellectuals access to the sources of the Austrian Enlightenment, but they also performed the indispensable practical service of expanding the philosophical vocabulary of Romanian, as he searched for, and often had to create equivalents of Latin and German terms in his own language.[12]

It was in history that Micu made his most original contribution to Romanian intellectual life of his own time, and to that of later generations. History was a lifelong vocation, because he expected history to perform a multitude of tasks. At first glance, his enthusiasm for history, especially the kind of history he wrote, might appear to disqualify him from membership in the society of philosophes. Men of the Enlightenment are often thought of as being concerned mainly with the formulation of general principles about morality and religion, writing a kind of philosophical history, a general history, designed to reveal the principles of human nature and, in so doing,

[10] P. Teodor, ***Sub semnul luminilor***…, p. 251.

[11] ***Ibidem***, p. 253, citing S. Micu, ***Loghica***, Buda, 1799, p. 8-9.

[12] L. Blaga, ***op. cit***., p. 166-170.

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providing coherence to human history, independent of the Divinity. These are qualities we expect to find when we open the great histories of the mature Enlightenment, Voltaire's ***Age of Louis XIV*** and Gibbon's ***Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire***.

Micu's histories do not, on initial perusal, seem to be in harmony with the spirit and ideals of the Enlightenment. In contrast to Voltaire and Gibbon and others, he wrote a particularized kind of history, that is, a history to explain and interpret specific realities, especially that of the Romanians. Unlike many philosophes in the West, who displayed a certain disdain for event history, as merely a means of measuring human advances over the past, a time of darkness, they contrasted with the bright future they themselves were engaged in building, Micu could not be indifferent to history. To be sure, he, too, looked forward to a better world, but, for him, the past was a source of inspiration; in it, he discovered proof of Romanian identity and the means of restoring the Romanian nation to greatness. He thus had great faith in the didactic and moral value of history for Romanians, and he hoped that, by describing the achievements of their Roman ancestors, he could inspire them to perform similar grand deeds.[13]

Despite what might appear from a broad European perspective to be Micu's parochial interest in history, his major works are a constant reaffirmation of the spirit and aims of the Enlightenment. He would undoubtedly have subscribed to the dictum of Lord Bolingbroke, the English statesman, in his ***Letters on the Study and Use of History*** (1752), that history was philosophy teaching by example. History, for Micu, shared one of the tasks of philosophy - to get at the causes of things, in this instance, the origins of the Romanians, and the reasons for their downfall. He used the same means that Western enlightened historians did - reason and the critical approach to sources - to discover the truth. Like them, he also perceived in human history a meaning and a coherence that had their origins in the nature of men themselves. The attention he gave to activities,

[13] S. Micu, ***Scurtă cunoştinţă a istorii Românilor***, edited by C. Cîmpeanu, Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică, 1963, p. 3-4.

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other than politics and war, and to men, other than kings and military leaders suggests the use of history as a means to explore human nature and grasp the spirit of the times. He was, after all, interested in theory; he made original investigations of the nature of community and meditated deeply on the relationship of East and West, themes that transcended political boundaries and ethnic concerns.

As for questions of faith, religious organization and social mission, Micu's adherence to the Catholic Reform movement decisively influenced his thinking. More than any other intellectual commitment that he made it set him apart from many philosophes in the West. Although, like them, he never ceased his efforts to reconcile faith with reason, he remained staunchly Christian in thought and deed.

He was devoted to the Greek Catholic Church, which he venerated as a peculiarly Romanian institution. It signified for him the fusion of the Romanians' Eastern Orthodox spirituality and their Roman-Latin ethnic and cultural heritage. Yet, however much he prized the connection with Rome, he resisted all attempts to make his church more Roman. Although at times he was critical of certain practices, such as fasting, and was often at odds with his diocesan administration, he nonetheless spared his church of the unremitting attacks, which the enlightened in the West directed against the Roman Catholic Church. Unlike them, he did not treat his church as a bastion of obscurantism and as an obstacle to progress. Instead, he recognized the vital role it had played in defending the Romanian ethnic community against Magyar Calvinists and Saxon-German Lutherans, and he assigned to it prime responsibility for the education and moral upbringing of the peasantry.

The Catholic Reform movement could easily accommodate Micu's attachment to his church and, at the same time, could allow him to work within the boundaries of the Enlightenment. He fully shared the reformers' efforts to persuade both the clergy and their parishioners of the truths of their faith, by appealing to reason and good sense. He was certain that knowledge was the key to human progress, in general, and the Romanians' revival, in particular. He admonished the clergy not to be satisfied with

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merely learning the church rituals, but to study philosophy and theology, and establish schools.

He spared no effort himself to further his cause, by producing an impressive variety of original works and translations to enlighten the clergy, among them, ***Dissertatio canonica de matrimonio*** and ***Dissertatio de jejuniis***, already mentioned, and ***Propovedanie sau Învăţături la îngropăciunea oamenilor morţi*** (Blaj, 1784), a book of sermons, meant to inspire the clergy and to serve as models for their own preaching to the faithful.[14] In religious matters, as in other domains, his appeal was to the mind rather than the emotions as a means of understanding God's design for man. He was thus wary of enthusiasm and revivalism, especially among the lower orders of society, and he denounced the leader of an Orthodox movement in Transylvania in 1759-1761, the monk Sofronie of Cioară, as "*a common man, ignorant and savage*."[15] In the final analysis, then, he stood for a rational religion. But he never embraced deism, and never engaged in attacks on Christianity, as a source of knowledge, or an explanation of the world, as it was.

Among other aspects of the Catholic Reform movement that attracted Micu's support was its advocacy of a return to the original, early foundations of Christianity. His translations of the Church Fathers, notably Basil the Great,[16] and his researches into the acts of church councils[17] were, in part, scholarly explorations and, in part, a determined effort to find canonical justification for limiting the centralizing ambitions of the Papacy and the bureaucratic controls of diocesan bishops. He also shared the spirit of tolerance characteristic of the age, as he urged reconciliation with the

[14] P. Teodor, ***Sub semnul luminilor...***, p. 168-170, 176-177.

[15] S. Micu, ***Scurtă cunoştinţă...***, p. 119.

[16] N. Mladin, I. Vlad, A. Moisiu, ***op. cit.***, p. 46-52.

[17] ***Ibidem***, p. 84-89.

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Orthodox in Transylvania and, on a broader scale, looked for ways to reunite the Eastern and Western churches.[18]

Micu's views on political structures and the art of ruling were in accord with those of the enlightened in Vienna and, in general, in Western Europe. His thinking was hierarchical. He seems to have accepted the teachings of Christian Wolff on the subject, as interpreted by Baumeister, who granted the emperor responsibility for directing the affairs of men in this world, and relieved him of any earthly limitations on his power, subjecting him only to the oversight of God, from whom he derived his authority; in an ideal society, he was to rule his people as a wise, understanding parent.[19] The mark of a good subject was how well he obeyed the emperor's laws. Yet, Micu imposed certain limits on the imperial will; the sovereign could not order his subjects to do anything that was contrary to the laws of nature or the commandments of God. If he did, then they were not bound to obey, for otherwise they would perish.[20]

Micu did not say in so many words how the emperor's subjects should resist, if he was unjust and oppressive. In any case, he rejected revolution. As an alternative he advocated gradual, systematic reform carried out by the enlightened and the education of the masses, which would enable them to free themselves from ignorance and superstition, the main causes of their unhappy state.

Micu's model ruler was Joseph II. His decrees introducing enlightened reforms and his promotion of education, especially, fascinated Micu and his colleagues. By reorganizing and centralizing his vast realm, he shook the established order in Transylvania to its foundations and convinced the Romanians that there was room for them in a structure that, until then, had denied them the rights and benefits they thought they merited. He also made

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[18] L. Gross, ***Istoria „Marii Schisme" de Samuil Micu***, in ***Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Cluj-Napoca***, nr. 33, 1994, p. 241-250.

[19] S. Clain (Samuil Micu), ***Legile firei, itica, şi politica sau filosofia cea lucrătoare***, 2 vols., Sibiu, 1800, vol. II, p. 387, 392. This was a translation and adaptation of Baumeister's ***Elementa philosophiae recentioris...*** (1771).

[20] ***Ibidem***, vol. II, p. 397-398.

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the Romanian elite a part of the general movement for reform, by relaxing the censorship and encouraging a wider discussion of change. Micu was enthusiastic in his praise of Joseph's abolition of serfdom and his other measures to improve the well-being of the "*unfortunate masses*."[21]

It is evident that Micu's admiration for Joseph had mainly to do with his contributions to the revival of the Romanians. Yet, there was a fundamental contradiction in his appraisal of what he took to be Joseph's contributions to improving the status of the Romanians. Joseph measures indeed seemed to be in harmony with the aspirations of Romanian intellectuals, but his goals were different from theirs. He discovered in the Romanians useful instruments for curtailing the privileges of the entrenched orders of society, but he had no intention of overturning political and social structures in order to accommodate a peasant people, he judged incapable of managing their own affairs, let alone helping to govern a vast empire. In consolidating the diverse lands, he ruled into a centralized monarchy, he relied on well-established institutions - the bureaucracy, the army, the dynasty, and the German language. The furtherance of self-determination for the Romanians and his other subjects was farthest from his mind. By contrast, Micu and his colleagues sought recognition of distinct peoples, in the first instance of the Romanians, a goal that Joseph could never sanction, since, to do so, would be to promote a state within a state. Nonetheless, Joseph's reforms showed Romanian intellectuals how tightly the ideals of the Enlightenment were intertwined with their own advocacy of nationhood. They thus perceived in his brand of absolutism striking evidence of how reason and knowledge could be harnessed to accelerate beneficial change, and thus ensure the progress of the Romanians.

The attitude Micu displayed toward the mass of the peasants was typical of the ambivalence Europe's enlightened directed at the "commonality." He sympathized with their hard lot, which he knew from frequent pastoral visits in the company of his bishop, Grigorie Maior (1773-1782), and he urged landlords to treat the peasants, who worked their

[21] S. Micu, ***Scurtă cunoştinţă...***, p. 44.

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estates, with compassion and justice.[22] But he was not a radical reformer, who would take direct action to eliminate abuses. Rather, he intended his sermons and other writings and his support for schools to be the proper means of improving conditions in the villages. He also felt a strong sense of community with the peasants. When he and his colleagues used the term "nation," they did so in an ethnic sense and meant the Romanian people as a whole, regardless of social class. Yet, despite these sympathies, he remained conscious of the immense gulf that separated the educated from the peasants. He could not imagine simple villagers as the masters of their own destiny, or as members of the political nation. Instead, he foresaw a long period of tutelage, during which, the ignorance of the peasants would be gradually eradicated and they could be trained to take a useful part in public life.

Micu rejected violence as a solution to peasant grievances against their landlords. The massive peasant uprising in Transylvania led by Horea, in the fall of 1784, provoked a crisis of conscience in Micu and his colleagues, which brought to the surface all their ambivalent feelings toward the common people. On the one hand, they recognized the rightness of peasant grievances, but, on the other, they condemned the destruction of lives and property, as the height of irrationality. Micu's reaction was typical. In his four-volume ***Istoria*** he praised Joseph II for having abolished serfdom, which he likened to "*a form of pagan slavery*,"[23] but, in the next breath he called Horea and his cohorts "*accursed men*," and condemned their killing of landlords and burning of manor houses.[24] Such an attitude was in keeping with the enlightened spirit of the times and is a revealing commentary on the aspirations of Romanian intellectuals. They had committed themselves to reason and positive knowledge, which, they were certain, would regulate the

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[22] S. Clain, ***Legile firei...***, II, p. 406-407.

[23] S. Micu, ***Istoria Românilor***, 2 vols., Bucureşti, Editura Viitorul Românesc, 1995, vol. I, p. 123. This is the first published text of Micu's four volumes ***Istoria***, which was edited by I. Chindriş.

[24] ***Ibidem***, vol. I, p. 124.

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society of the future, and they had assigned to themselves leadership of the movement to create the new, enlightened era. But Horea and his followers, the "*simple folk*," had ignored them and had taken measures into their own hands. The peasants had, in effect, transgressed, because they had failed to grasp the fundamental truth that they could not gain justice by themselves through "blind violence," but would have to wait for the intellectuals to secure it for them through enlightened laws and institutions.

Micu and his colleagues provided their own, enlightened example of how to seek justice. In 1791, they submitted to Emperor Leopold II (1790-1792) a petition for the restoration of the ancient rights of the Romanians, accompanied by lengthy proofs of the justice of their demands, drawn from history and legal sources. In this imposing document, which came to be known as the ***Supplex Libellus Valachorum***, they tried to convince the Imperial Court of the rightness of their cause, by bringing together positive knowledge and sober reasoning. They betrayed their allegiance to enlightened principles, also by proposing that a national congress of Romanian representatives be held to deliberate on the most appropriate ways of satisfying Romanian aspirations.[25] All Micu's and his colleagues' hopes of obtaining recognition as a fourth nation were dashed by the Court's rejection of the ***Supplex Libellus Valachorum*** and by the reaction to Joseph II's reforms, that followed the accession of the conservative Francis II to the Habsburg throne in 1792.

As for the culture of the common people, Micu displayed the same ambivalence toward it, as he did toward its creators. As a promoter of light and progress, he could have little sympathy for a culture filled with magic spells and superstitions, all of which, he thought, discouraged clear thinking and thus prevented both material and spiritual progress. In his ***Învăţătura metafizicii***, based on a manual of philosophy by Baumeister, which he translated between 1787 and 1790, he praised science and was eager to show

[25] D. Prodan, ***Supplex...***, p. 455-467.

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how the causes of phenomena ("*the connection of things*") followed fixed laws operating in nature.[26]

Here again, we see the tension between Micu's commitment to reason and enlightened principle and the emotional need, felt to further the emancipation of the Romanians. Although he was conscious of his role as an enlightener who was thus obliged to combat popular culture, he found himself turning again and again to that very culture in order to discover evidence of the Romanians' Roman-Latin heritage. He was at pains to show that many of the customs and beliefs he observed among the peasants were exactly those which the "*ancient Romans of Italy had had*," such as elements of the marriage and funeral services, various charms and magic spells, and observances of Christmas and New Year.[27] Yet, despite his keen interest in folklore, he had no intention of promoting or collecting folk litterature, which he persisted in decried, as the disseminator of false ideas and wrong thinking.

V

It is perhaps time to return to the question posed at the beginning of this paper: Was Samuil Micu a philosophe? It might be useful, first of all, to recall what a philosophe, in the general meaning of the term was and was not. A philosophe was a particular kind of philosopher, which does not fit the definition in our own day. A typical philosophe of the eighteenth century was not given to abstraction or the exploration of ideas for their own sake. Rather, he was determined to make ideas relevant to social reform and political change. He asked fundamental questions about man and nature and God; he wanted to find the causes behind the appearance of things; and he

[26] S. Micu, ***Învăţătura metafizicii***, in S. Micu, ***Scrieri filozofice...***, p. 128-136.

[27] S. Micu, ***Scurtă cunoştinţă***…, p. 84-88; I. Muşlea, ***Samuil Micu-Clain şi folclorul***, in ***Revista de folclor***, vol. 1, nr. 1-2, 1956, p. 249-257.

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used reason and a critical spirit as his tools. Then, too, he was anxious to communicate his thoughts, not just to a small elite, but also to a wider audience, if only indirectly, and he was not fazed by the variety of ideas or the differences of opinion, or even the occasional lapses of consistency and logicality that he encountered in his exploration of man and society.

This description, in the main, I think, fits Samuil Micu. He was, as we have seen in his defense of the Romanian nation, concerned about the social relevance of ideas and their applicability to prevailing social and political conditions, and he was eager to use reason and knowledge to grasp the meaning of things both in this world and the next. Above all, what clearly stamps him as a man of the Enlightenment, was his participation in that great shift in Enlightenment thinking, that occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century, when the concept of liberty replaced order, as the primary focus of thought. Micu, I am certain, was primarily concerned with men's freedom. Even though, he continued to respect order, order was important for him, now mainly as a condition for the exercise of freedom.

We may think of Samuil Micu as a man of the Enlightenment also in his role as a mediator between East and West. It was a role for which his vocation as a Greek Catholic cleric had admirably prepared him. The Church Union with Rome had represented the thrust of the West into a largely rural, agricultural society, but the new Greek Catholic clergy remained steadfast in their attachment to the Eastern Orthodox spiritual tradition. By integrating himself into the currents of the Austrian Enlightenment, Micu deepened his role as an intermediary between two cultures, as he strove to harmonize Romanian social and intellectual traditions with the thought and spirit of the West. In his broad cultural horizons, his manifold intellectual activities, his firm commitment to reason and learning, and his admirable open-mindedness, he was one of the creators of the Romanian Enlightenment in Transylvania. He merits the title **philosophe**.

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Samuil Micu filosof?

Rezumat

Format la şcolile Blajului, Romei şi ale Vienei, educat în spiritul iluminismului austriac, din care a selectat însă acele aspecte care puteau fi cel mai bine adaptate la realităţile româneşti, Samuil Micu şi-a construit o viziune proprie asupra noii mişcări ideologice, manifestate în Europa secolului al XVIII-lea. Legăturile sale cu iluminismul, modul în care a împărtăşit şi promovat idealurile acestuia, îngăduie autorului să încerce să găsească răspunsul la întrebarea: a fost Samuil Micu filosof?

O cercetare atentă a activităţii sale oferă un răspuns limpede la această întrebare. Astfel, dacă iluminismul - care nu poate fi considerat doar un curent de idei, ci o mişcare cu fundament politic, economic şi social - a fost creat de filosofi, dacă principiul după care s-au condus adepţii săi - indiferent dacă vorbim de iluminiştii francezi, englezi, austrieci sau români etc. - a fost cel enunţat de Kant, „*să îndrăzneşti să cunoşti*," dacă iluminiştii au fost oameni educaţi, raţionali, care ştiau să folosească argumentul cunoaşterii în susţinerea cauzelor lor, atunci, da, Samuil Micu a fost, cu siguranţă, un filosof, un iluminist.

Contribuţia lui Samuil Micu în diverse domenii, precum filosofie, istorie, teologie şi politică este considerabilă şi evidenţiază adâncimea implicării sale în iluminism.

În filosofie, Samuil Micu nu a fost un gânditor original; dar, în contact cu scrierile lui Wolff - a cărui filosofie este posibil chiar să o fi predat la Blaj - şi ale lui Baumeister, a devenit principalul propovăduitor al ideilor acestora în rândul românilor; a crezut cu putere în principiul lui Wolff, conform căruia, obiectivul filosofiei este de a cunoaşte cauzele lucrurilor prin raţiune.

Ca istoric, Micu se manifestă cu originalitate, dar interesul său pentru istorie nu îl dezavantajează ca filosof. Istoria sa nu pare a fi, la prima vedere, în concordanţă cu spiritul iluminismului; nu a abordat istoria într-o manieră specific iluministă, precum Voltaire sau Gibbon, ci a scris o istorie particularizată, prin care a încercat să evidenţieze realităţile româneşti. Micu a

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crezut cu tărie în valoarea educativă şi morală a istoriei, considerând că aceasta îndeplineşte, de fapt, una din îndatoririle filosofiei: aceea de descoperi cauzele lucrurilor.

Gândirea religioasă a lui Micu a fost profund influenţată de Reforma catolică şi nu a încetat nici o clipă să spere într-o reconciliere a credinţei şi raţiunii, într-o reconciliere a bisericilor. A fost convins că mai buna pregătire a clerului, care trebuia să-şi diversifice educaţia şi să participe activ la înfiinţarea şi susţinerea şcolilor, stătea la baza ridicării intelectuale a românilor. În acest sens, el inaugurează seria ***Propovedaniilor***, pentru a oferi preoţilor modele de predici.

Micu a adoptat punctul de vedere politic promovat de Viena şi de statele vestice; monarhul-model a fost Iosif al II-lea, alegere uşor de înţeles dacă ne gândim la măsurile pe care acesta le-a luat în favoarea românilor, deşi nu poate să nu accepte şi ideea că, în final, obiectivele împăratului erau diferite de cele ale românilor.

Samuil Micu corespunde astfel definiţiei filosofului secolului al XVIII-lea; interesul său pentru reforma socială şi politică, felul în care a încercat să răspundă unor întrebări fundamentale despre natură, om şi Dumnezeu, efortul de a descoperi cauzele raționale ale evenimentelor şi, nu în ultimul rând, participarea sa directă la schimbările care au avut loc în secolul luminilor, ne conving că Samuil Micu îşi merită pe deplin locul între filosofii secolului al XVIII-lea.

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