A HERMENEUTICAL UNDERSTANDING OF MOXA'S UNIVERSAL CHRONICLE

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Abstract: *The Universal Chronicle written by Mihail Moxa consists of an apparent collision between the monk's Christian vision and his utilization of pagan beliefs. Understanding and analyzing the coherence of these apparently different tracks of theoretical thought are integral to applying a heuristic approach of his work.*

Keywords: *beliefs, pagan, Christianity.*

1. Taking into consideration Moxa's religious background, it should not come as a surprise the fact that praising the Lord and His creation occurs so often in the text. What can be regarded with a wonderous eye are the sorcerers, spells, fears, and habits of the people that gave life to the times mentioned under the chronicle's covers.

The compilation of several sources of inspiration that made up *The Universal Chronicle* was completed in 1620 by the Christian Orthodox monk, Mihail Moxa, who signed his manuscript *Moxalie* (meaning *sinner*), according to an old practice among the monks for showing humility.

1.1. The first chapter of the writing is *De începutul lumiiei dentîiu*[1], where the monk finds it necessary to explain the undertaking of the difficult historian's role:

(1) "Vom lua acest greu, să-i și cu préget. Ce darurile tale, iale ne răcoresc sudorile noastre... Iată și noi, de cât ne iaste putérea, spunem cu adevăr." (Moxa, 4v: 99)

The writer's statement is legitimate, who did not state it in order to show off the high effort implied by the proposed approach, but to offer his reader an excuse with respect to errors of translation that he could have done, the excuse being repeated in the text:

(2) "Acestea cum ne fu putérea noi scrisem." (Moxa, 21r:114)

In what concerns the truth of those stated in his writing, the author agrees with the opinion of Lucian of Samosata, whose writings could not have been foreign to him, as he was a monk. The Greek satirist claimed that the historian should be bold, not bought, self-controlled, candid, impassioned for truth: "Istoricul trebuie să fie îndrăzneț, nevândut, stăpân pe sine, neprefăcut, împătimit de adevăr." (Diaconescu, 1986: 340)

1.2. The chronicle's storyline ends when Constantinople is taken by the Turks, after having recorded almost 7millennia, to be more precise, 6998 years, the last chapter being titled *De Ț[a]rigrad, cum l-au luat turcii*[2].

In order to make the chronicle coherent, the Romanian linguist Nicolae Iorga implied that Moxa first connected the sources in Slavonic: "a început înădind pe slavonește, înainte de a da o traducere românească a corpului de cronici, a cronografului înădit de dânsul." (Iorga, 1988: 291)

2. It has been long speculated that an author, as creator of a writing, differs greatly from the person he/she is in everyday life. False. A historical book will always

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[1] "About the beginning of the first world".

[2] "Of Tarigrad, how the Turks took it".

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reveal more than its writer initially intended, most often – his/ hers traits of character. This happens partly because an author, evoking various historical episodes, can hardly refrain from giving value judgments, especially when he/ she belongs to a system which justifies its mere existence precisely through this practice.

2.1. Our first world history book written in Romanian starts with the Divine Creation, for which the chronicler consulted the Holy Bible:

(3) "Începutul lui Dumnezeu, ce fu făcătoriu desăvârșit lumiei: | Dentâiu făcu ceriu fără stéle, numai cu cuvântul féce, și-l frâmsețâ Dumnezeu cu frâmsețea lui."[1] (Moxa, 4v-5r: 99)

For the fourth day the monk uses information from antique astronomy, according to which there are seven main planets: the Sun and the Moon, and the rest of five planets known at that times, which the author counted from the farthest: Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, and Mercury; Uranus (discovered in 1781), Neptune (1846), and Pluto (1930, considered now a dwarf planet) were yet to be discovered:

(4) "Puse pre Cron mai sus, al doile Zevs și al treile Aris, al patrul[e] Soarele, de luminează lumiei, al cincile Afrodit, al șasele Ermia, și Luna mai jos, și îmblă nepărăsit, după zisa lui Dumnezeu, careaș în rândul ei."[2] (Moxa, 6r: 100)

The legend of Creation continues describing the rest of the seven days, being sensibly noted by the monk, as the linguist Ioan Bogdan wrote in his study – *Scrieri alese.* (Bogdan, 1968: 628)

2.2. The storyline runs its course in Troy, where Priam ruled with his lady:

(5) "domniia Priam și avea doamnă, și născură dentr-însă feciori mulți, de-i chema ca vrea." (Moxa, 21r: 114)

In this chapter, titled *Împărățiia Troianilor*[3], the wrong translation of the source is notable. Moxa's assigning the premonitory dream to Priam, when actually his wife, whose name is not recorded (Hecuba), is the one having it:

(6) "păru-i că văzu un tăciune aprins eșind den trupul mueriei lui și o déde de o parte vânt, de arse cetatea | toată. Și spuse acéstea filosofilor. Ei răspunseră că ară fi mai bine, ce va naște să-l arunci în foc."[4] (Moxa, 21v: 114) Obviously, this will not happen, Alexander, being left to chance (in a field), is rescued by shepherds.

The writer often uses memorable phrases to refer at the immutable destiny:

(7) "Ce iaste să fie, nu se poate tréce."[5] (Moxa, 21v: 115);

(8) "Însă ochiul derept le véde toate. Deci cine ce face, lui face."[6] (Moxa, 83v: 164);

(9) "Așa plătéște Dumnezeu cui nu știe har de bine ce-i dă."[7] (Moxa, 96r: 173);

(10) "Ce pre cine-l ferește Dumnezeu, în deșert cugetă rău mintea omenească!"[8] (Moxa, 99v: 175).

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[1] "The beginning of God, who was the perfect maker of the world: First he made the sky without stars, only through the word He made it, and He embelished it with its beauty".

[2] "He placed Chronos above, Zeus the second, and third Ares, the Sun fourth, that illuminates the world, the fifth Aphrodite, the sixth Hermes, and the Moon below, and each planet moves unforsaken after God's saying, each on its way".

[3] "Trojans Emperdom".

[4] "It seemed to him that he saw a burning ember emerging from his woman's body, and a gust of wind blew it, burning the fortress down. And he said these to the philosophers. They replied ‹‹it would be better if he threw whatever she would give birth to in the fire››".

[5] "Whatever is to happen, one cannot avoid".

[6] "But the righteous eye sees it all. So, whatever someone does, he does it to himself".

[7] "This is how God pays he, who does not know the good gift he has received".

[8] "To the one God guards, no harm can come".

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2.3. Moxa gives as example the Solomon's teachings from the Bible:
(11) "Ce era adevăr pilda lui Solomon: Certarea nebunului fluer iaste!"[1] (Moxa,110r: 182)

About Jesus Christ the monk wrote (this phrase was added by the writer, not translated from his sources) the following:
(12) "Şi fu I[su]s Dumnezeu şi om, şi făcea ciudese mari şi multe, şi învăţa oamenii cu adevăr, şi mulţi crezură întru I[su]s, că vindeca toate boalele dentre oameni."[2] (37v: 126)

3. Examples of witchcraft are given almost from the beginning, as pagans believed that some people could foretell the future:
(13) "Deci Enea cu câţi notase cu nunsul feceră vraje şi luară plăzuit, că le zise script să noate de acolea spre apus..."[3] (27v: 118);
(14) "Miră-se de-aciia împăratul, plăti şi acéle trei şi le arătă vrăjitorilor."[4] (32r: 121)

3.1. Moxa gives up the legend of Romulus and Remus, noting that they were found by a swine herd, whose wife called *Lupa* (meaning female wolf) had given birth to a stillborn. They took in the twins and raised them as their own:
(15) "Iară Dumnezeu-i cruţă că-i găsi un porcariu, anume Festul, şi féce bine că-i duse acasă-şi, iară muiarea lui, Lupa, născuse un cocon mort, că fu voia lu Dumnezeu."[5] (29v: 119)

3.2. Strange things were found while digging for a church, as happened in *Tulie*'s time, or even voices that asked people to found a city could be heard (Eneas did):
(16) "săpând temeliia afund în pământ, aflară un cap de os, de curea sânge cum ară | fi tăiat atunce, şi-i era faţa caldă, ca de om viu."[6] (32r/32v: 121);
(17) "Enia înţelése că se vor mulţi pe acolo şi auzi glas de-i zise să zidească acolea cetate."[7] (28r: 118)

Predictions were something usual for ancient times:
(18) "Şi semnă un numărătoriu de stéle ceasul când va muri, şi fu aşa."[8] (40v: 128);
(19) "‹‹Socoteşte-ţi atâta şi frâmseţile!››, că-i cunoştea în stéle ce va fi."[9] (56v: 144)

People of those times believed in signs, rulers included:
(20) "Atunce se întunecă soarele şi alt semn încă fu, că născu o muiare o fată, ce nice avea ochi, nice mâni, nic[e] picioare | numai ce avea coadă ca de péşte."[1] (75v: 157)

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[1] "That it was true the Solomon's teaching: instruction to a fool is like whislting!"; "Fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Solomon, Proverbs, 1:7).
[2] "And Jesus was God and man, and He did great and many wonders, and He taught people truthfully, and many followed Jesus, because He healed all sicknesses of the people".
[3] "So Eneas and the people he spent the night with had made a spell and followed the prediction, as it was suggesting to spend the night from there westward".
[4] "The emperor was then surprized, payed again for those three and showed them to the wizards".
[5] "And God spared them for a swine herd found them, on his name Faustulus, and he did well taking them home, as his wife, Lupa, gave birth to a stillborn, for it was the will of God".
[6] "Digging the foundations deep into the ground, they found a skull, and blood was flowing as if it had just been cut off, and his face was warm as a living person's".
[7] "Eneas had understood that their number would increase and heard a voice saying to build a city there".
[8] "And a soothsayer predicted the time when he will die, and happened as foretold".
[9] "*Consider for yourself this much and your charms!*; for he read her fate in the stars".

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3.3. The chronograph's author gladly gives up the absolute knowledge, being a predecessor for the poet George Coşbuc (*Nu cerceta aceste legi,/ Că eşti nebun când le-nţelegi...*) or for the philosopher born several centuries away, Lucian Blaga:
(20) "Ce, cum nu poți ajunge naltul ceriului, nice adâncul pământului, nice marginea lumiei, şi cum nu se pot număra stélele ceriului, nice năsipul măriei, aşa nu se poate afla adâncul scripturilor."[2] (139r: 202)

4. The work that has been the subject of this study was accomplished by the monk's toil to compile several sources of inspiration, who added some more information when he felt appropriate. Although he was an erudite monk, sometimes he made several translation errors, but by his lively manner of outlining the episodes in Romanian, the reader will certainly forgive his confusions. Writing a universal history, he could not have left aside the beliefs, practices, and some of the strage features belonging to the people he described in his chronicle. Bringing God into the light, as well as stating that Christianity is the true belief, cannot be considered anything else but a logical consequence of the author's religious education that has been projected into his writing as well. For example, Saint Constantine the Great, the first christian emperor fought rentlessly against pagans, and thus he was praised by the author:
(21) "Şi abătu de surpă casele idolilor şi astupă capiştile unde purta ellinii sfara dracului, şi le sfârşi toată spurcăciunea lor. Şi deşchise beséricile creştineşti, şi se lărgi | preste toată lumea ca cu un bucin de aur glasul lui, de la marginea pământului până în margini, să răsună cătră credința lui H[risto]s."[3] (55v/55r: 139)

The author has the distinctive merit of being one of our earliest writers and his efforts of understanding the philosophical chaining of life events can definitely be considered: "un pas spre cultură, spre cultura națională, spre cultura lumii."[4] (Voiculescu, 1986: 10)

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[1] "The sun darkened then and it was yet another sign, a woman gave birth to a girl, who had no eyes, no hands, no legs| she only had a tail, as fish have", interesting thing to call the newlyborn a girl, in that situation.
[2] "For, as you cannot reach the high sky, or the deepths of the earth, or the edge of the world, and as the stars cannot be counted, or the sea sand, thus one cannot find the deepths of the Scriptures".
[3] "And he destroyed the houses of idols and he covered the temples where the Greeks had put the Devil's sign, and he ended all their filthiness. And he opened the Christian churches, and his voice widened all over the world like a golden trumpet, from one edge of the earth up to the other edges, that echoed to the faith of Christ".
[4] "a step toward the culture, toward the national culture, toward the world culture".

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