MIRCEA ELIADE BETWEEN AUTOCHTHONISM AND EUROPEANISM

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Abstract: Mircea Eliade was a historian of religions, a philosopher as well as a writer. He taught philosophy and history of religions at the University of Bucharest, the Ecole pratique des hautes études in Paris and the University of Chicago. As a diplomat, he served as cultural attaché at the Romanian Embassy in London and the Romanian Legation in Lisbon. He never returned to the country after the communist regime was established in Romania. His studies and syntheses are characterized by an original view on the relationship between sacred and profane. He made an outstanding contribution to the history of religions, mythology, shamanism and symbolism.

Keywords: autochthonism, europeanism, nationalism, national identity, Western European model, Orthodoxy, Romanian values, history of religion.

After the First World War, Romania unexpectedly succeeded, after all the misfortune that had befallen it during the years of conflict, in finalising its territorial unity. The joyful event led, however, to the establishment of a collective amnesia, although in the spring of 1918 General Averescu had prompted the delimitation of liability and the punishment of the persons responsible. The poor equipment of the troops and the employment of the wrong military strategies led to the blood bath of 1916. Unfortunately, not long after that, he himself abandoned the idea (Constantiniu 2008, 309).

Or, this symptom was only an aspect of an earlier malady which had been eating up the Romanian society, namely avoiding acknowledging any mistakes and especially assuming any responsibility. The political class did not manage to overcome the little struggles for power and personal interests in favour of promoting national interest. Ștefan Zeletin emphasised in his war journal that all the simple combatants, himself included, were aware of the fact that the defeat was not due to the enemy but to the "sins of our own leaders". Most of them agreed that, after the war, Greater Romania had to be rebuilt on a new foundation that would no longer have anything in common with the past. Which failed to happen, as he sadly confessed: "here, everything is forgotten" (Constantiniu 2008, 310).

The interwar period also saw a large debate unfolding in regard to the path that Romania should take in the future, the focus being placed again on the central concern of the cultural Junimea movement of the 19th century. Most politicians and intellectuals were affiliated to three main directions: some claimed that the process of implementation of the Western model should be continued, involving urbanisation and industrialisation; others supported the promotion of rural-agrarian and Orthodox traditions, which was equivalent in their opinion to keeping their own identity; a third direction involved maintaining the positive elements of the traditional way of life and also the development of the benefits offered by the European social and economic progress. Both politicians and intellectuals engaged in this dispute, which was the main theme of the interwar period. Heated debates regarding the future of Romania led to the individualisation of two large groups, the Europeanists and the Traditionalists (Hitchins 2015, 182).

The Europeanists claimed that Romania could not diverge from the promotion of social and economic progress according to the Western European model. The Traditionalists emphasised the agrarian nature of the country and supported the idea of adopting

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development models which would succeed the authentic social legacy. Among the Europeanists, Eugen Lovinescu and Ștefan Zeletin were the most notable, and both believed that "Westernisation" was a crucial historical stage in the evolution of the country (Hitchins 2015, 183). On the other hand, the Traditionalists identified models "in the autochthonous past" and believed that due to the preponderantly rural nature of the country, "cultural and institutional imports" from the West could not be adapted to the Romanian society (Hitchins 2015, 184).

Traditionalist concepts manifested in various forms. Nichifor Crainic promoted the reinstatement of the Eastern Orthodox dogma. Lucian Blaga emphasised, in his own turn, the virtues of Orthodoxy and national specificities, but his approach included a larger, more European spectrum. In the vein of the same traditionalist ideas, Nae Ionescu theorised trăirism, "a form of existentialism". He considered that Romanian spirituality relied heavily on Orthodoxy, which had separated Romanians from the catholic and protestant Europeans. Numerous young intellectuals became his adepts, among whom the most notable were Mircea Eliade and Emil Cioran. They embraced the idea that Orthodoxy had had a significant role in outlining the fate of the Romanian people, but also proposed analysing several "meanings of existence" (Hitchins 2015, 186).

Although we have no reason to refer to Romania felix, we cannot ignore the fact that important progress was made in the interwar period in many different areas: despite the economic crisis of 1929-1934, in 1938 Romania reached the highest level of economic development in its entire history, and in the cultural area several famous names began to stand out, such as Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, or Eugen Ionescu, who gained global fame. This fact did not cancel, however, the serious malady that was eating at the Romanian society. The long foreign domination prevented the development of a strong bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the weak Romanian bourgeoisie established the national state and initiated the consolidation of industry. Despite all these efforts, the "oriental Turkish Phanariot legacy" could not be removed from the Romanian society and the governing class's political conduct. Additionally, an obvious fracture existed between the governing class and the governed people, derived from the lack of a middle class. As such, the civic spirit, which is vital to a functional democracy, could not develop (Constantiniu 2008, 311). In these circumstances, it is no surprise that democracy remained feeble and that when it was forced to face against legionary and royal totalitarianism it quickly collapsed.

The legionary movement opposed democracy and supported the totalitarian state, Christian teachings, autochthony and Romanian values. It criticised the vices of politicking and considered Jews as the primary cause of all the problems existing in the Romanian society. The solutions proposed by some of them were radical. Legionaries promoted a religion-based nationalism and had a paramilitary organisation, which led to attracting an increasingly high number of followers (Constantiniu 2008, 322).

In the interval between 1934 and 1937, the legionary movement became more and more powerful, the explanation for this growth pertaining to the internal and international conjuncture. In the interwar period, Greater Romania had not yet known a truly functional democracy: the parties in power would end up by compromising themselves, and moral decadence arose the dissatisfaction of intellectuals such as Nae Ionescu, Radu Gyr or Mircea Eliade (Scurtu...).

Mircea Eliade let on that he was not interested in politics, but his writings clearly had a manifest political undertone. Criticism brought against the parliamentary regime also meant contempt against democracy and the "values of modern European civilisation". His scepticism also manifested with regard to the process of Europeanisation of Romania, while commending the "autochthonous, Romanian world and Orthodoxy" (Petreu 2016, 129).

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Unlike many of his contemporaries, such as Alexandru Vianu, Bucur Țincu or Eugen Ionescu, Mircea Eliade did not become acquainted with France during his academic studies. This country kept its democratic regime throughout the interwar period, when, on the contrary, many of the European states adopted authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, seen as a viable alternative. Nevertheless, he visited Italy several times, a country which could not improve his view on democracy. He subsequently went to India and became fascinated by the culture of this country. He then discovered a "peasant civilisation" which he claimed to span across China and to Portugal, including the Romanian space. He identified the "universality" of the Romanian world, which he saw as part of a network of peasant civilisations (Petreu 2016, 131).

This model of "archaic peasant civilisation universality and unity" was, in fact, conservative, "obsolete". A model which part of the intellectual and political elite had been struggling since the 19th century to eliminate from the Romanian society and especially from the Romanian mindset. As any change of mindset depends on the long duration of history, as Fernand Braudel had rightfully claimed, this model was obstinately resilient, opposing the Western model despite certain evident progressive transformations. This view probably acquainted him with the "regressive and rural" model supported by legionaries. The road to being an Iron Guard supporter was longer than the one taken by Cioran. Only from November-December 1935 onwards do the texts show clear indication of this aspect, as he expressed his allegiance to Ion Zelea Codreanu through the ideas expressed therein. Underlining the fact that Eliade was "converted" two years after Nae Ionescu had become the unofficial ideologist of the Iron Guard movement, Marta Petreu says that, besides his teacher's influence, his particular perspective on national specificity and the future of Romania was also important (Petreu 2016, 132).

Between 1927 and 1935, Eliade published numerous and varied works: essays, articles, journals, novels, texts on the history of religion, unveiling the image of a highly valued author. What is surprising is the fact that, apart from having a remarkable work capacity, Eliade seemed to possess several personalities. If either of these personalities "cracked", Eliade would evoke mythical causes: it was a test of fate, an initiatory trial. This vision was due to the "ultimate foundation" of his thinking, the "metaphysical foundation" of the personality having an archaic or even archaic and religious nature. Between 1932 and 1933, Eliade became acquainted in the autochthonous cultural environment with a series of themes which had become current: "the new man, revolution, right-left, sacrifice, nationalism, spirituality-politics binomial, history-politics binomial, elites", which became recurrent themes especially in his publishing work (Petreu 2016, 132). Expanding on some of these subjects, Eliade gradually came closer to the Iron Guard, although he denied his whole life having conducted any legionary politics. He believed that he had approached spiritual principles in an age where the Iron Guard was not in power anyway, therefore it was only a spiritual movement and not a political one. By politics, Eliade understood political parties, elections and voting of decisions. Since the political parties in Romania did not interest him and he took no national decisions, he considered himself to be apolitical (Petreu 2016, 137). Through a series of subjects of interest such as archaicity, rurality, religion or sacrifice, Eliade became acquainted with the Iron Guard and its doctrinal elements: Christianity, the new man, sacrifice, the nation. He was then impressed by its public manifestations: the organisation of religious service and requiems. Without these impulses he would have probably retained the position of an apolitical intellectual, expressing archaic, autochthonous and conservative sympathies. However, he saw the Iron Guard as a "political and spiritual movement" that Romania needed. Mircea Eliade's "conversion" to the Iron Guard happened sometime between November and December 1935, claims Marta Petreu (Petreu 2016, 142).

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She asserts that the completion of this stage was also aided by Nina Mareș, who had become his wife in 1934, and by his visit to Germany, in 1936. Nae Ionescu's influence was only a secondary factor. On the contrary, Emil Cioran's influence, with his violent language, cannot be neglected.

In the summer of 1938, Eliade was arrested and admitted to the camp in Miercurea Ciuc. The regime prohibited the legionary press and as such Eliade was forced to stop any propaganda in favour of the Iron Guard. However, his admiration for the right extremist wing and the totalitarian state continued to exist, as it permeates from the pages of Salazar and the Revolution in Portugal (1942). From The Portugal Journal we discover that Eliade was still sympathising with the right extremist wing during the war and that after he realised that Germany would be defeated he proceeded to "dressing up" his own biography. Also during the war, he started regretting not having had the opportunity to study in Paris during his academic years. After two visits to Paris, in 1940 and 1943, where he met Cioran, he decided to no longer return to the country, where he could receive an academic position following an examination. The events recorded in The Portugal Journal reveal that a new stage in his life started, namely the renunciation of autochthonism and archaism and the adoption of a comprehensible, European view: "In Paris I learned something decisive: one cannot obtain results in the universal field of sciences by activating within a limited minor culture" (Eliade 2010, 264).

His first novels preceding the period of his exile were in the form of journals. They evoked his incursion into India and expanded on the subject of erotic love. His own experiences provided him access to self-knowledge. In Isabel and the Devil's Waters (1930), he investigated the demonic nature of his own being. In Maitrey (1933), he approached the process of initiation of a young man into the mysterious oriental world. The heroes of Return from Paradise (1934) and The Hooligans (1935) are part of that generation of young people who desperately want to develop their potential and are terrified by a prospective failure (Hitchins 2015, 218).

After his release from the detention centre in Miercurea Ciuc and a brief period of time spent at a sanatorium in Moroieni, Eliade needed a new start. Leaving for diplomatic work could have meant his salvation. Therefore, on April 1st, 1940, after an intervention by Alexandru Rosetti, Constantin C. Giurescu – Minister of Propaganda – offered him the position of cultural secretary in Romania's Delegation to London. He stayed in London for ten months, following from the British capital the unfolding of events in the country. He sadly received the news of Nicolae Iorga and Virgil Madgearu's assassination by legionaries, emphasising in his memoirs: "By these assassinations, the team of legionaries who committed them thought to have avenged Codreanu. In fact, they cancelled the religious purpose, of sacrifice by the legionaries executed under Charles's reign, and have irremediably compromised the Iron Guard. The killing of Nicolae Iorga, the great historian and brilliant cultural prophet, will stain the Romanian name for a long time to come" (Handoca 2000, 90).

Once the bombings on the British capital were launched, Eliade withdrew to Oxford where he started working on two projects, both in the literary and scientific research fields, which will put their stamp on a large part of his career. The novel The Forbidden Forest, which he started drafting there, would go on to represent the "quintessence" of his literary approach. Referring to the history of religion, he started working on the Treatise, which he would complete in Paris. When the adhesion of Romania to Germany was made known, Eliade proposed to quickly leave Great Britain to return to Bucharest, but the countless approvals he had to obtain from the English authorities prevented him from doing so immediately. He would remain in that country for another six months (Tănase 2017, 78). He did not manage to leave Great Britain even after he was appointed in his new position in the

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capital of Portugal. He was in London when the legionary rebellion unfolded (January 21st-23rd, 1941). In his Memoirs, he expressed his shock to the crimes committed by the legionaries, emphasising that they had betrayed the ideal of the movement, the "legionary sacrifice" and Codreanu's ideas, suggesting that he disapproved of the changes introduced by Horia Sima, the new legionary leader. On February 10th, he left to occupy his new position (Tănase 2017, 80).

The journey to Portugal happened as a result of his appointment on October 21st, 1940, as press secretary and then cultural adviser attached to Romania's Delegation in Lisbon. He lived in Portugal for almost five years and conducted an intense activity translated into multiple areas of concern such as diplomacy, essay writing, memoir writing, folklore research, literature, playwriting, philosophy of culture and history of religious ideas. Since the beginning of his stay in the capital of Portugal he took measures to organise cultural exchanges between the two states, and he contacted the editors of local newspapers and magazines to publish information on Romania.

Paris was an essential stage in the perfection of his intellectual development. On September 16th, 1945, he arrived in the capital of France, excited and full of expectations. He was still in Portugal when he started contacting some of the greatest Portuguese and European people of letters. Among them were names such as António Ferro, Fernanda de Castro, Ortega y Gasset, Georges Dumézil, Jean Cocteau, Paul Morand, René Grousset, Carl Schmidt. Once he got to Paris, Eliade contacted the French intellectuals with whom he had established cordial relationships, to help him gain access to the local cultural environment. Georges Dumézil supported him the most, especially from a financial point of view, obtaining for him various "small services" (Tănase 2017, 137). Didier Eribon emphasised that Eliade had come to Paris with great financial struggles and accompanied by the criticism of the new regime in Bucharest. Both himself and Lucien Febvre supported him as much as they could (Eribon 1987, 94). Dumézil helped him hold classes at the Sorbonne, conclude contracts with French publishing houses, write for the publication Critique or benefit from financial subsidies from the Centre de recherche scientifique. His access to the French intellectual circles was facilitated by specialists in Oriental studies, Eliade being a member of the Société Asiatique since December 14th, 1945. As a result, he managed to conclude contracts with a series of publishing houses to publish his older and newer scientific contributions. Dumézil continued to support him, offering him the opportunity – due to his being the director of the Ecole pratique des hautes études – to hold classes and conferences in this institution. The same Dumézil introduced him to Gustave Payot, who would later publish his Treatise on the History of Religious Ideas. Later on, Eliade mentioned repeatedly that Dumézil had been the one who had paved his way for an international career. After the latter settled in the United States, he did not forget Eliade and supported him so that he could publish his works in that country, inviting him to hold classes in Chicago (Țurcanu 2005, 570).

At the end of 1945 and the start of the following year, he was working intensely to finish two books: Yoga Techniques and Treatise on the History of Religious Ideas. The second work, completed between 1945 and 1947, would appear in Parisian bookshops in January 1949, placing him among the great authors on the history of religion. In Paris he continued to work on his reference novel, The Forbidden Forest, which was written in Romanian between 1949 and 1954 and would see the light of day in 1955 with the title Foret interdit (Handoca 2000, 125).

After the publishing of his book Yoga Techniques, welcomed with great praise by the greatest minds of that time and commended in extremely favourable reviews in professional magazines, Eliade really made a name for himself in the French intellectual world. In his

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memoirs he expressed his delight and especially his surprise to these reactions, unexpected for him (Eliade 1993, 140). But since the past cannot be erased that easily, in Paris he experienced his first problems due to it: he could not get the contract with the Sorbonne University. Adalgiza Tătărescu, Eliade's adoptive daughter, recounted a relevant story: on the poster of a conference he was to hold for the Ecole pratique des hautes études, someone had drawn a swastika, which meant that his disputable past was known in certain circles in Paris, although the scholar had carefully tried to hide it. Since he was set to obtain tenure in this institution, the Ministry of Education had to receive the approval of Romania's Delegation in Paris, but they refused to grant it to him, reasoning that Eliade was a "doctrinaire of fascism". In 1947 he requested a "monthly allowance" from the Centre de recherche scientifique, which was not approved (Tănase 2017, 137).

Encountering so many obstacles in Paris, he gladly accepted the proposal to hold the Haskell Lectures at the University of Chicago. Eliade chose the path of a new start, once his dream to build an academic career for himself in Paris shattered.

Settling down in the United States of America, in a different environment than the European one, was a brave decision, but Eliade relied on the idea that it would not be final. In this period, he placed almost his entire focus on his activity as historian of religion, alongside that of professor. Joachim Wach, the head of the Department of History of Religion within the University of Chicago Divinity School made him an official offer to teach in the United States, first by holding the Haskell Lectures and then as a visiting professor. Due to this fact, he obtained the visa for the United States and left the European continent on September 17th, 1956. The proposal was received warmly, since Eliade wanted to escape his financial struggles and build an academic career for himself, also fleeing from his legionary past (due to this past, he could not even hope to obtain tenure in Paris) (Tănase 2017, 167). However, the past would soon catch up with him in the United States as well, when the Israeli magazine Toladot published in 1972 an incriminating article about Eliade.

For almost three decades he was a professor of the history of religion at the University of Chicago, period in which his celebrity reached the highest peak. His first year of teaching activity at the new university was quite difficult. He was approaching the age of 50 when he had to adapt to an academic environment different than the one in Europe, as the American student was more pragmatic and had a different mindset and culture than the European one (Handoca 2000, 130).

After Joachim Wach died, Eliade was appointed head professor of the Department of History of Religion in his place. He was to stay in the United States for another four years, which he had not initially predicted. In fact, he would stay in this country until the end of his life. In the United States, his contributions to the history of religion brought him great success: Yale University consulted him for a programme similar to the one carried out at the University of Chicago; many of his French-published books saw the light of day in English translation; he became a member of several cultural groups, and his success to the general public reached new heights due to his accessible and personal style in presenting his ideas. Furthermore, Eliade paved the way for teaching the history of religion nationwide in the United States. At the University of Chicago, he groomed entire generations of specialists in this field of study, later promoted in various American universities (Tănase 2017, 167). In this context, literature and memoir writing were perceived by Eliade "as a means of keeping the Romanian identity".

He decided, for obvious reasons, to hide his legionary past. After obtaining his citizenship he risked deportation if it became public, exiled intellectuals being aware of this concern harboured by Eliade. However, after the Second World War, Eliade continued to express in his Journals and Memoirs his sympathy for certain members of the Iron Guard,

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especially for Ion Moța. This attitude may be interpreted as a "defence mechanism" against the accusation brought against him for his legionary past, but he insisted on the Christian and Orthodox spirituality of the Iron Guard, through which he justified his juvenile adhesion (Tănase 2017, 167). Nevertheless, Eliade preferred to knowingly ignore the "blameable" elements of the ideology of this movement.

As he was nearing 60 years of age, he received the title of Doctor Honoris Causa from Yale University. Later on, he would obtain similar distinctions from a large number of universities, among which notably Sorbonne (1976). Numerous academies offered him membership: the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the British Academy, the Austrian Academy of Sciences and the Royal Flemish Academy. His prodigious scientific career was completed with the treatise A History of Religious Ideas, published at the French Payot publishing house in three volumes, between 1976 and 1983. Close to the end of his life he undertook a difficult task, that of "working" as editor-in-chief for an extensive work: The Encyclopaedia of Religion, which appeared after his death at the MacMillan publishing house, in 16 volumes (Handoca 2000, 139).

The life of Mircea Eliade can be divided into two great periods: his youth, which he spent in Romania and was marked by the influence of the legionary doctrine, and his exile. In exile, Eliade avoided adopting any form of political affiliation. However, the career of the brilliant Romanian scholar was marred by his unclaimed legionary past which never stopped following him like a shadow.

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