# *MEDIEVAL PATTERNS IN MIRON COSTIN'S WORK*[1]

***Abstract**: Medieval culture is a specific phenomenon, very different from the contemporary concept about the culture. Being at the interference of the great cultural areas of Occident and Orient, the medieval Romanian culture got into contact with numerous synthesis due to the assimilation and adoption through its own values of influences coming from these areas. This attributed it an original feature in the South-Eastern European cultural context.*

*Outstanding representative of Romanian Humanism, Miron Costin, studies in his entire work numerous medieval model, from themes and literary motives to the cultivation of the deep respect towards the written word.*

***Keywords**: medieval models, chronicle, philosophical poem, Humanism, culture.*

In the Romanian area during the Early Middle Age, the cultural process developed on two levels, interacted: the popular culture and the elevated culture (elitist). These two levels, in what concerns the Middle Ages do not turn up concomitantly. On the background of the popular culture, essential to the existence of the people, the elevated culture shows up depending on the existence of several factors.

Firstly, its advent depends on a certain level of the socio-political life, secondly, it takes into consideration the specific of the medieval culture, with religion in a determinant position, being necessary the settlement of a clerical organization. In this way it is founded a political and spiritual elite, that one side requires and on the other it is capable of ensuring a high quality cultural activity. In the same time, there are created favorable conditions for the integration into a more wide cultural space, which contributes to the acceleration of the cultural processes through the contacts with the more advanced cultural patterns.

Romanian culture in the 16$^{th}$ century, the period of genesis and birth of the Romanian Medieval States, allows us to already foresee the beginnings of a written culture. Firstly, we can mention the intensification of the manuscripts circulation, preponderantly with a religious character, written in the old Slavonic.

The medieval human being has got a different mentality than the modern one, living in a different cultural horizon. Medieval being is definite as a *homo religious,*who communicates with God, believes in divine signs and wonders, worships the holy relics goes on pilgrimages to the holy places. He sees the world as a divine creation, is obedient to God. Reality offers signs especially to those who are initiated: monks and priests, astrologers from courts, the voivode himself ruled as God's anointed on earth. The medieval mentality confronts with the great plague and cholera epidemic, natural catastrophes (earthquakes and floods), long periods of drought and famine, wars that sometimes last decades. Everything generates the feeling of instability of the world and uncertainty of life.

The religious mentality of the Middle Ages had a great influence upon the Humanism Miron Costin, too, the heir of Grigore Ureche. Miron Costin's work represents a deeply understanding of the literar, of the literature status, so that we can say that, together with him and his contemporary, Dosoftei, it is born the Romanian literary consciousness.

Studying in Poland, during the influence of Baroque literature and culture, made him acquire certain convictions regarding literature. It is not just about the

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historiographic literature, aspect that explains the diversity of his work, but also the tendency to theorize, to systemize, to gloss around the idea.

Miron Costin started writing poetry in a period when it was not at all an usual habit. The first poem of philosophical meditation in Romanian culture, entitled *Viiața lumii* (*World's existence*) is probably written between 1671-1673, in lines counting between 13-14 syllables and represents the moment when Miron Costin expresses his humanist conception about life and human kind. The poem – first published by B.P.Hasdeu in "Satyrul", in 1866, with Latin letters, comprises, in original, 130 lines written in Cyrillic, a small "treaty" of versification and the attempt of a literary theory in "Predoslovie, Voroava la cetitoriu". In the introduction of *Viiața lumii*, Miron Costin said: „mai mult să vază că poate şi în limba noastră a fi acest feliu de scrisoare ce să chiamă stihuri. Şi nu numai aceasta, ceşi alte dăscălii şi învățături ar putea fi pre limba românească".

The motto he uses is paradigmatic: the saying „deşertarea deşertărilor şi toate sunt deşarte" from Ecleziast. *Viiata lumii* combines pesimistic reflexions regadring the fate of the human being and the univers, their futile, pesimistic and unpredictable features, with optimistic thoughts regarding the ability of humans to avoid the fatale fate, by moral act and thinking, patterns offered by the Middle Ages. The theme *fortuna labilis*, sadness generator, links some literary motives, also me at Pre-Romanics. The futility of time creates this apocaliptical picture: „Trec zilele ca umbra, ca umbra de vară; / Cele ce trec nu mai vin, nici să-ntorcu iară. / Trece veacul desfrânatu, trec ani cu roată, / Fug vremile ca umbra şi nici o poartă / A le opri nu poate. Trec toate prăvălite/ Lucrurile lumii şi mai mult cumplite//".

The perishable does not expect the humans, but also the whole universe. There is something rotten at the basis of this world and the poet feels thai it is not, as the phylosoph would say, the most beautiful of the worlds and so it is expected the inexorable end „Fum şi umbră sunt toate, visuri şi părere, / Ce nu petrece lumea şi-n ce nu-i scădere [...]. Ceriul faptu de Dumnezeu cu putere mare ,/ Minunată zidire, şi el fârşit are./ Şi voi, lumini de aur, soarile şi luna, / Întuneca-veți lumini, veți da gios cununa. / Voi, stele iscusite, ceriului podoaba, / Vă aşteaptă groaznică trâmbița şi doba/".

The source of the pattern *fortuna labilis* (changeble fate), widespread in the Antique and Middle Ages literature, is found by the chronocle, just like Matei Basarab does, especially in the Bible (by Ion Hrisostom), the Ecleziast being the writting where he found his first source of inspiration. Another Biblical source quoted by Miron Costin himself are the David's Psalms. In the same time marked by the Antique Clacissism (with ideatic remains from Ovidiu – *Triste*, *Pontice*, Horatio – *Ad Postumum*, *Odes*, Vergilius – *Georgice*), the writting also uses local sayings (eg „Years cannot bring what time can"). It is possibe that the theme having been suggested to the author while he was translating a fragmant from the work *De rebus gestis Alexandri Magni* by the Latin Historian Quintus Curtis. Other possible sources *Ram's Histories* the collection of stories and riddles of the 13th and 14th centuries *Gesta Romanorum cum aplicationibus moralistis ac mysticis.*

"Poetical works, firstly, made a new era and taught at another spiritual age the Romanian culture" as noticed E. Negrici, laying stress on the creation literature (Negrici, 1996: 41)

The poem *Viiata lumii* is made after a compositional model in four times: *theme exposure* – fortuna labilis, by the motto in the Eclezist; *its exemplification* or *argumentation* – the paradigmatic row of cases that strengthens the theoretical



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considerations about the precarity of the human life, the enumeration of some past glory situations; *lamentation* – that goes to the motive *ubi sunt?* (where am I?), derived from *fortuna labilis* famous during the Medieval era , being also invocated well-known characters from the universal History, as victims of the Fate; *the epilog*, where it is suggested a humanist solution for the instability of the world – the superiority of a moral life and the advice *carpe diem* fundamentally retional. It is not to be forgotten that the poem we are talking about was composed during a period of time of instability and weakness of habits during the reign of Duca-Voda, in order to provoke ceratin considerations, as well as it is to be remembered the existence of certain opinions that supported the belief that the patterns such as *fortuna labilis* and its derivations – *fugit irreparabile tempus* ( the futility of time), *ubi sunt?* – would be tipical for the Baroque atmosphere of that time, and in a less manner they should be seen as „borrowed disertations" or idea tributary to a model.

Miron Costin speaks in *Predoslovie* about „cum ieste de lunecoasă şi puțină viiața noastră şi supusă pururea primejdiilor şi primenelilor". He wrote poetry because he had excellent examples of this kind of „feliu de scrisoare" both in the laic literature and in the christian one (and he enumerates authors) and also to be seen that „şi în limba noastră poate a fi acest feliu de scrisoare ce să chiamă stihuri". On the other hand, he wishes he protected the reader from the evil parts of the world, warning him that everywhere he could have difficulties („greotăți"): „Citeşte cu bună sănătate şi cât poți mai vârtos de primejdiile lumii să te fereşti, cu ajutorul preaputernicului Domnului Dumnezeu". So, three goals: lyrical, technical and didactic. All are ennumerated under the sign of the patriotic duty in order to prove the poetical virtues of our language, as impressive as in Vergilius' Latin. Costin inaugurates a fertile direction in our lyricism, the philosophical poetry, having its roots in the various topic of the Middle Ages.

The Medieval poet's mentality pays attention to the roarig of his time, no matter how agitated he is, but he does not fear, because he knows that God does not wish the death of this world and of the human being. (Negrici, 1996:56).

The main role in his work id occupied by the two writings *Letopiseţul Țării Moldovei* de la Aron Vodă încoace and *De neamul moldovenilor*, but his work is even more vast. Miron Costin wrote epigrams and memory, „where the stance of memoirist and philosopher is dominating" (Mazilu,1991:28), poem of philosophical meditation (*Viiața lumii*), epic poetry (*Poema polonă*). The first historical treaties are designed by him. There, in (*Cronica polonă şi De neamul moldovenilor*), is prefigurated the scientifical approach of historical phenomena, starting with a strict documentation, as the representatives of Scoala Ardeleana will do.

The respect for the written word is considered as the respect for a gift let by God. „Lăsat-au puternicul Dumnezeu iscusită oglindă minții omeneşti scrisoarea, dintre care, dacă va voi omul, cele trecute cu multe vremi le va putea şti şi oblici" (*De neamul moldovenilor*). By writing the being can achive the eternity „scrisoarea ieste lucru vecinicu". By reading he meets the Creator, and also „agonisim nemuritoriu nume"; „Cu cetitul cărților cunoaştem pe ziditorul nostru, Dumnezeu, cu cetitul laudă îi facem pentru toate ale lui către noi bunătăți…". So the responsibility of the one who writes either his thoughts or what he had seen and heard, will be even greater.

Before the ending of the *Letopiseţului Țării Moldovei* in 1675, Costin wrote in Polish a *Cronică a țărilor Moldovei şi Munteniei*, a paper of outmost importance for the Medieval Romanian diplomacy, he, being the one who inaugurated the diplomacy of the culture, in order to inform the foreigners about the History of Romanian people, persuading them about the importance of supporting the Romanian wishes. The



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chronicar does not talk on behalf of Moldova, but of all Romanians, so that he becomes a pioneer (Zamfirescu, 1981:117).

*Cronica polonă* (1677) *şi Poema polonă* (1684), written before *The chronicle* and the work *De neamul moldovenilor* (1675 respectively 1686), approaches the aspect of the origin of the Romanian language and the Romanian people that the Polish sources were ignoring. That is why he writes then in Polish. These works are too little known the first that have as goal the elucidation of a topic that was called *the chronicles' quarell* (Panaitescu, 1965).

*Just like other Humanists* (Udrişte Năsturel, Nicolae Milescu, Dimitrie Cantemir), Miron Costin too takes some opinions that individualize him: the idea of country seen as a home, the supreme sacrifice as a duty towards the people, the ancestors worship, the Latin origin of Romanian , the idea of unity of people, the status of Romanian as a Romanic language, rich in expressive resources, able to express deep truths and to serve artistic purposes, the idea of elevation through virtues and culture (Moceanu, 2002: 81).

Beyond the literary and documentary value of Miron Costin's main writing, we are also suggested, for the first time in our literature, an experience of writing, not only of the reality of life an intelectual experience, coming from the consciousness or spiritual values' supremacy. Through witing (prized by the author as much as reading), the human condition can be saved from the time hardships, and the human being has he chance to defeat, as a later writer used to say, the „force of circumstances"

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