"US ABOUT THE OTHERS". ETHNICAL IMAGES AND EXPRESSIONS OF THE ROMANIAN SCHOLARS OF THE XVII-th CENTURY[1]

Abstract: *In their writings the Romanian scholars have most often presented their compatriots in relation to the others, dealing not only with their military and political acts, but also with their culture and mentality. But the main factor taken into consideration was the religious one to which was added the effect that the contact with "the other" had on the Romanian community. Our study discusses an approach from the perspective of the XVIIth century Romanian literary discourse of the way in which the Other was perceived, as the close or the far away stranger. The observations will indicate the connection between the Romanian mentality and the attitude towards the Other, expressed by means of using stereotypical expressions, prejudices and superficial images.*

Key words: *mentality, prejudices, religious*

The groundwork theoretical

For the Romanian world of XVIIth century, as well as for any medieval society, dominated by religious convictions, the main criteria for social and assessment perception in the ethical-religious one (Delumeau, 1986: 41)[2]; the attitude towards the religion of the majority and the behaviour towards the community have been the main landmarks in the formation of social representations.

It is noticeable that, in perceiving the other, Romanians have resorted, during time, *to social comparison*, followed closely by *the generalization and simplification* of the differences, developing patterns on which social representations were established. But the resulting *social categories* have been supported by conducts through which they were *communicated to other* members, belonging to different generations. Because they remained at a peripheral level, having no intention to understand the differences (Căzan, 2001: 207-216)[3] in order to accept them, they represent pre-modern means of social knowledge and social acknowledgement.

The stereotypes and prejudices developed by the Romanian community have been subordinated to *the modalities of manifesting social knowledge*, in which social perceptions were associated to happenings, gestures and thoughts about which their members "knew well". Apart from their cognitive role, the social representations of those of different ethnic groups had and still have a great importance in the development and preservation of *self-image (*Costin, 1958 : 202-215); being the means to simplify interethnic relations, they lead to self-knowledge, implicitly to strengthening the social cohesion. This way, invoking the differences to other peoples was made to the purpose of shaping the conscience or reforming the morals of their own community, especially when the author of the observations was a member of the upper clergy. For the great hierarchs Antim Ivireanu and Dosoftei (Dosoftei, 2005 : 136) the references to the pagans became a pretext to mark out and incriminate the moral decadence of the Christians, but also an impulse to correct their lives. That's why Antim Ivireanul was drawing the attention of his contemporaries: "What people curses like we do, about law,

[1]Alexandrache Carmen, "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galati-D.P.P.D., carmen_alexandrache@yahoo.com

[2] The stranger was seen always by medieval man with afraid, fear, with suspicion.

[3] In the Middle Ages the ethnic barriers were less important than those religious.

BDD-A6126 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:45 UTC)

about a cross (…) and about all the church's mysteries? Who from the pagans does this or who rebels against laws like we do?" (Ivireanu, 1997 : 182).

Having these observations as a starting point, we want to highlight certain aspects through which the extra-Carpathian Romanian society (XVII-XVIII centuries) "characterized" the other ethnic communities.

For a better analysis we have started with the Romanian old literature, especially with the work of the chroniclers from the Romanian aria. It was natural to do so because the first concerns on this point belong to the chroniclers. Either they are interested in social groups or their own community; either they mention them in the terms of some observations, these mentions are valuable for understanding the society's attitude towards the ones that are part of other ethnical structures, so as for explaining their own schemes of ethnical perception. But, the analysis of these aspects presume assuming some risks, meaning the awareness of the observation and interpretation point of view's subjectivity and implicitly of the emotional reactions which generates, as a relativity conclusions. For these mentions to become specific features of the social group they must be verified.

The internal chronicles in the service of ethnicity

An analysis on these issues on them, from the Romanian point of view, should begin from the premise that the Romanian chronicles represent *the voice*, *the mirror* and *the means to analyze* their contemporaries. Therefore, the subjectivism, the stereotypes and the prejudices do not become impediments in our approach, but filters of social perception on which we are focusing our attention, in a manner in which we can see their effects regarding standardization, in the relationships carried by Romanians with the other ethnic groups: representations, gestures and attitudes.

During that historical time, identity was expressed more through the collectivity; *tradition* and *custom*, *voice of the people* and *the town gossip* filtered individual reactions, acting on the physical and intellectual levels, as well as on the affective one, changing knowledge and behaviour. They either enforced a set of attitudes, a certain way of observing and understanding reality, either started public reprobation, neighbors' resentments, or even living their own sorrows, the community succeeded in some manner to remove the dangers of social dissolution. This is why the foreigner was perceived in a collective sense, his features becoming representative for his entire community. When the foreigner is mentioned in the documents in the singular, but not in an individualized sense, the detail acts as a category that offers specificity to the social group he belongs to; it is a label that does not need proving anymore. Unfortunately, in the chroniclers' writings, the mentions that might have led to ethnic (self) characterizations are few, untidy and unverified. This situation favored the launching of modern intellectual disputes that either claimed the idea of the excessive tolerance of the Romanians, either their snugness (the starting point was the Moldavians' "laziness" remarked by Dimitrie Cantemir, or their carelessness, their lack of habit of talking about them (Cantemir, 1956 : 206).

Without any doubts, the vision on others (the foreigners) expressed by the chronicle, perceived as exponents of the Romanian collective mentality, shows very few nationalist accents (Căzan, 2001 : 210). In general it can be noticed that the mentions with ethnic character do not seem to constitute a purpose in themselves, but they were produced by the chroniclers' following intentions:

- to explain some actions through the way of being of those who did them,

BDD-A6126 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:45 UTC)

- to demonstrate the critical concerns of the authors, that enlarged the domain of the events, including the cultural-ethnic based observations.
- to show the interest in the "history" of "other countries", inserting the events occurred in their own history in order to make them understood easier.
- to remark the unusual in what regarded the specific of other communities.
- to justify their own statements by specifying the collective attitude towards the other social groups.

The "observations" of ethnic nature made by Romanian scholars were made in the context and seem to have the role of social labels, even if they had been shaded by the events that actualized them. In this way, the narrative gained more concision, the desired simplification leading to the abandon of the development of details and the increase in the arguments. The emotional elements of the tales were preserved, but they had the purpose to *personalize the message*, becoming *a bridge* that connected the community to which the authors belonged and to which the writing was addressed.

This writing style we believe was determined more by the external factors, and less by the undertaking of a mission regarding the sense of the directions in the European literary evolution. Romanian literary conscience seems to have been sensitized by the consequence of those unstable times, by the more and more accentuated haste in political and military events, by the high costs of printing, by the clearer outline of the poplar patriotic sentiment, by the assertion of the social ideas in that age. Therefore, the chroniclers' style of writing, somehow in concordance to other European writings of the kind, was situated between two boundaries:

a. the chronological record of the events (*the monolithic approach to the events)* (*Ibidem*) small sketches of the time, accompanied often by political and moral-religious comments;
b. the presentation of facts in a memorialistical manner, resembling to short journals or reports of the time, in which the concerns towards presenting the facts in their causality context compiled, but also for the recreation of the atmosphere, to touch the emotional fund and the Christian morality.

In both situations, we come across political ideas, states of spirit and intellectual orientations of the period, which strengthens the conviction that the chronicles were a paid for political literature, "responsive" (Giurescu, 1906 : 8-9), written by people who were no scholars, but politicians. This fact was remarked in that period by the foreign travel Del Chiaro: "each nobleman has his own written chronicle, in which he praises or criticizes the life of the rulers, according to how well his family had to do under their rule" (*Călători*, 1983 : 386-387).

To continue, I will exemplify the tendency of the chroniclers' to simplify the narration with the help of the actualization of images and ethnic expressions, those being subordinated to the actions taken during the time on the Romanians.

The ethnical images

a. "The enemy of Christians"

Those "unsettled" enemies (especially those of different "law"), do not keep their word, but they say one and do the Other (Costin, 1958 : 57). The Turks, Tatars and other "pagan languages" were cursed for their unfriendly gestures towards Romanians, disturbing the order of the Christian land and serving another God (Maziliu, 2001 : 231u). This is the reason they are sometimes called "unclean" ("necurăței") (Dosoftei, 2005 : 35), "agareni", „avani", „ pagans evil" („păgâni răi"), „demons" („diavoli"),

BDD-A6126 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:45 UTC)

„arrogant" („trufaşi"), „cursed" („blestemaţi"), „crazy" („nebuni"), „wicked" („răi"), „voracious" („lacomi").

The observation are contextualised and its seem the ethnic labels. For exemple, about the turks it says that they are "unstable, they not comply with their words, they some others are saying" (Popescu, 1963 : 200). The Turk is like the "weather", "gentle when is time for gentleness, proud and keen when it's time for haughtiness (Costin, 1958 : 58). To Radu scribe („logofăt") Greceanu, the Tatars are those with "a pagan custom", who commit "robberies and destruction as a habit against Christians" (Greceanu, 1970 : 107).

Beginning with the 18th century, the Turks are no longer the pagans, but the masters of the Romanian Land .

Those who attack, destroy, kill, rob with no mercy the civilian population can be nothing than pagans, even if they call themselves *Christians*. Costin, *Letopiseţul*, p.18. . The Cossacks are "restless" (Popescu, 1963 : 66-67), they managed to surprise through unexpected and "peace breaking" attacks, this is why it was said about them that "they do not keep their word" (Pseudo-Amiras, 1975 : 55).

b. The Damned (*heretics* and *cursed,* those who are denied the entrance in the celestial Jerusalem).

The European anti-Semitism promoted, in certain degrees, the image of the Jew („jidov") guilty of hagocide, deicide, infanticide, and iconocide (Oişteanu, 2001 : 272-363), deeds that are making the salvation of his soul impossible. This is why there is no surprise that a case similar to those known in Europe was "encountered" in Moldova (at Oniscani, în the (Voivode) Racovita Mihai's time. Pseudo Amiras's Chronicle retold about a 5 years old child who was mutilated and then murdered by the Jews (Pseudo-Amiras, 1975 : 101). However, we do not know any other mention of the kind.

In fact, the Romanian society preserved the Christian hostility towards the Hebrews, without the violent accents and without an emotional re-actualization; most narrative texts are reduced to expressions such as "pagans" (Letopiseţul Cantacuzinesc, 1975 : 129), „heretics", „awful" („procleţi") etc., offering no other details or explanations. The only reference that accompanied the Jewish label was evoked often in juridical texts, in the public system, being associated to the biblical episode of the crucifying of the Savior.

c. The other next to Us (the other Romanians and Christians)

Amongst the elements that are particular to one ethnic group, the chroniclers added language and history (Eclesiarhul , 1987 : 116).

In the same time, those became factors of unity between Moldavians and Valachs, and also factors of interethnic link (with the Italians in particular). Miron Costin claimed that the difference between Moldavians and Valachs is based on their names (Costin, 1958 : 269), and they together are different from other peoples, among other things, by their clothing (*Ibidem* : 247).

Conclusion

The chroniclers' opinions about foreigners were expressed according to the context and the consequences of their relations established with the Romanians.

The writings did not insist on the physical appearance of the members of other ethnical groups, maybe because they were not important in that period, or maybe because they were already known (Romanians were used to the presence of foreigners, a fact that was proven by enough mentions about the existence of several peoples in the

BDD-A6126 © 2012 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:45 UTC)

Romanian Lands); what mattered to the Romanians was the kind of relation the ethnic groups established with them. I believe that the author, bearing in mind the resentment towards "the pagan people", hated because of the destructions they caused repeatedly to Romanians, did not make any effort to study them, taking for granted the cliché image of this people.

In conclusion one might say that in the Romanian mentality, ***the foreigner*** is defined in relation to the Christian by means of the ***dichotomy evil- good***. At the same time it must be emphasized the fact that the images and the expression which have an ethnic character have been used at a superficial level, in order to simplify the narration, the events being thus more important than the explanation of the interethnic relationship. The chroniclers do not create portraits, but they write descriptive passages, based on the social representations of the community. The lake of information about the other led to superficial generalizations, and the political- economical context in which the relationships were built has led to prejudices and stereotypes, to mental clichés. These, having either positive or negative connotations, have developed standardizations in the relationship with concluded: "there is no such thing as a clear consciousness of the rapport between one ethno-cultural community and another" (Zub, 1996 : 337). But this fact was not intended by the chroniclers. Focusing on events and showing interest in their political aspects, the chroniclers'17-th century have proven a careful concern not only for emphasizing them, but also for adapting their literary language to the expectations of their readers. A concrete, simple, but attractive and direct approach was necessary. Thus, today, by means of their literature, the historians can find out more about the spiritual life of their people (Iorga, 1925 : 9) but also to follow the movement of ideas in the European space.

References

Cantemir, D., *Descrierea Moldovei*, ed. Petre.Pandrea, ESPLA, Bucureşti,1956.

Căzan,Il., „Ungurii în cronistica românească. Secolele XVI-XVIII", in *Studii şi materiale de istorie medie*, XIX, 2001

Costin, M., *Opere*, ediţia. P.P.Panaitescu, ESPLA, Bucureşti, 1958

Delumeau, J., *Frica în Occident (secolele XIV-XVIII). O cetate asediată*, trad. M. Moraru, vol II, Editura Meridiane, Bucureşti, 1986

Dosoftei, *Psaltirea pre versuri tocmită*, Editura Princeps Edit, Iaşi, 2005.

Eclesiarhul, D., *Hronograf (1764-1815)*, ed. D.Bălaşa, N.Stoicescu, Editura Academiei, Bucureşti, 1987.

Giurescu, C. *Contribuţii la studiul cronicelor muntene*, Tip. Bukurester Tageblatt, Bucureşti, 1906

Greceanu, R., *Istoria domniei lui Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu voievod (1688-1714)*, ed A. Ilieş, Editura Academiei, Bucureşti, 1970

Iorga, N., *Istoria literaturii româneşti*, vol. I, Tiparul Românesc, Bucureşti, 1925

Istoria □ării Româneşti (1290-1690). Letopiseţul Cantacuzinesc, ed. C. Grecescu, D. Simionescu, Editura Academiei, Bucureşti, 1975

Ivireanu, A., *Opere*, ed. G. Ştrempel, Editura Minerva, Bucureşti, 1997

Maziliu, D. H., *O istorie a blestemului*, Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 2001

Oişteanu, A., *Imaginea evreului în cultura română. Studiu de imagologie în context est-central european*, Editura Humanitas, Bucureşti, 2001

Popescu, R., *Istoria domnilor □ării Româneşti*, ed. C. Grecescu, Editura Academiei, Bucureşti, 1963

Pseudo-Amiras, *Cronica anonimă a Moldovei (1661-1729)*. ed. D. Simionescu, Editura Academiei, Bucureşti, 1975

BDD-A6126 © 2012 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:45 UTC)

Zub, Al., *Despre studiul alterității la români*, în *Identitate şi alteritate în spațiul cultural românesc*, culegere de studii cu ocazia celui de-al XVIII Congres Internațional De Ştiințe Istorice, Montreal, 1995, Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", Iaşi, 1996
xxx *Călători români despre □ările Române*, vol. VIII, Editura Ştiințifică, Bucureşti, 1983

BDD-A6126 © 2012 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:58:45 UTC)