



DIMITRIE CANTEMIR PROMINENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ROMANIAN ENCYCLOPEDIISM

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ABSTRACT

This year was declared the Dimitrie Cantemir Cultural Year in Romania, taking into account that 350 years have passed since the birth, respectively 300 years since the death of the most famous encyclopedist of Romanian culture. The work of the Moldavian savant contributed to an extraordinary cultural development, also marking the beginning of the theorizing of new ideas in literature, history and philosophy. His works were appreciated by contemporaries of his time in European countries with advanced culture, for which international recognition came to him in his lifetime through his election as a member of the Berlin Academy. Having real qualities of analysis and synthesis of events, as well as the desire to verify any information he referred to, all this led to the creation of an impressive work. In this work we want to point out his main contributions to the cultural edification of the Romanian nation, emphasizing the innovative initiatives of his main writings.

Keywords: *Dimitrie Cantemir; Descriptio Moldaviae; Hieroglyphic history; History of the Ottoman Empire; The Princely Council;*

INTRODUCTION

Creator of a noteworthy work, Dimitrie Cantemir opens the series of encyclopedic personalities from Romanian culture. Anthropologist, historian, writer, linguist, orientalist, philosopher, geographer, politician, etc., Cantemir is one of the most important scholars of the Romanian nation, enjoying an enviable fame in the environments of Eastern and Western Europe. Being the son of a ruler, he spent his adolescence in Constantinople, being his father's guarantor, whom he inherited after his death. He received a good education and the fact that he lived for a good period of time outside his native places put him in the position of getting to know people, places and sharing ideas among the most different, which opened his spiritual horizon.

He lived for many years in Constantinople, as a capuchin (ambassador of the ruler of Moldavia), studying at the Orthodox Patriarchate Academy, where he came into contact with the scholars of the time and the ambassadors of Western countries. From an early age he was attracted to deep things, knowledge and new things, studying Philosophy, Latin and Greek, reading religious and folklore books, having contact with the works of chroniclers from Moldova and Wallachia from whom he learned everything that could be known about his country. He was fascinated by the history of the Ottoman Empire, by the diverse culture of the Turks, learning, on this occasion, the Turkish, Persian and Arabic languages. He loved Moldavia, whose ruler he was twice, March 1693-April 1693 and 1710-1711, wanting the liberation of Moldavian land from Turkish occupation.

Neculce described him in *The Chronicle of Moldavia* as "... impatient and angry, vicious when drunk, and he got the name of a bad man. And now, coming with the reign, he don't know how to lose his bad name: he had only grown older, his life had only faded, where was there no peace? That's how good and gentle he looked! The door was open to everyone and he was not proud, he talked to all the children... He was a learned man. Only in the judgments he couldn't do very well, maybe because he lived for a long time in Tarigrad, abroad. He was not stingy and his things wanted to be praised".¹ At some point, he settles in Russia where he will continue his literary and scientific work, being firmly convinced that the truth must also prevail in terms of the history of the nation, in particular, the history of the Romanian nation.

1. THE BIOGRAPHY

Dimitrie Cantemir's life cannot be presented as a simple biography, being too rich and too full of political circumstances of great historical significance to be properly detailed.² As I have already pointed out, he received a good education even in the country, his father wanting to give him all the knowledge of the world so that he entrusted him to the monk Ieremia Cacavela from whom he received lessons in philosophy and literature, as well as knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages. Sent to Constantinople as a guarantor, he learns Turkish, Persian and Arabic, learns Turkish customs, history, literature and music, but also attends the courses of the famous Academy of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Fanar, where he learns ancient Greek and Latin.³ Dimitrie lived among Turkish cultured people and among Christian ambassadors, he was friends with intellectual people from whom he had much to learn. The foreigners said of himself that he was an educated young man, with a very pleasant conversation, which he carried with great ease in the Latin language. Also, Cantemir is described as a pleasant young man who imposed himself by the beauty of his features.



Source: *Demetrii Kantemirs ehemaligen Fürsten in der Moldau, historisch-geographisch und politische Beschreibung der Moldau, nebst dem Leben des Verfassers und eine Landcharte. Frankfurt und Leipzig, 1771*

¹ Neculce, Ion. *Letopiseșul Țării Moldovei* (București: Editura Litera, 2001),. 192-193.

² Minea, I. *Despre Dimitrie Cantemir: omul, scriitorul, domnitorul* (Iași: Editura Viața românească, 1926),. 17.

³ Călinescu, G. *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (Onești □ Editura ARISTARC, 1998),. 40.



2. DESCRIPTIO MOLDAVIAE – THE FIRST MONOGRAPHIC WORK IN ROMANIAN LITERATURE

The work of the Moldavian savant meant an extraordinary cultural development for those times, but also the beginning of new theories and ideas, which enriched the values of the centuries to come. His works were recognized and appreciated by contemporary personalities from European countries that had a highly developed culture.

Harmonious personality, man of the Renaissance, bridge between ancient and modern chronicle literature, philosopher and physicist, Dimitrie Cantemir is among the few local intellectual figures who managed to receive international recognition during his lifetime by being elected as a member of the Berlin Academy of Sciences, on his diploma writing "philosopher among kings, but also king among philosophers". At the request of this institution, he will write *Descriptio Moldaviae*, which includes clear and precise information about Moldavia. In no other work of his does the personality of Dimitrie Cantemir appear so strongly outlined as in this monograph. Initially, the work was supposed to have a geographical character and provide clear and precise information about Wallachia and Moldavia. Moldavia map⁴ present in the work was mapped while Cantemir was in Russia. Particular attention is paid to the description of customs.

Thus, marriage was guided by church laws, the initiative belonging to the young men, being considered a shame when the girl asked the man. When a boy liked a girl, he would send suitors to her parents. When the girl's parents agreed to the marriage, the suitors along with the groom's relatives would go to the girl's house. The ritual by which the parents gave the girl to the wedding was an ancient one and full of emotion.⁵ Like the wedding, the funeral in the Moldavian nation was carried out according to the laws of the Eastern Church. The body of the deceased was washed with warm water and dressed in the best clothes he had. It was expected until the third day from the date of death, so that any suspicion of clinical death would be removed. On the third day, the neighbors gathered to lead the dead on the last journey. After the funeral service, the body of the deceased is buried in the church yard. Mourning is different depending on the person of the deceased. If the deceased was a peasant, his sons were obliged to walk with their heads uncovered for six months, regardless of the season, and to let their hair and beard grow.

The boyars did the same, but only for forty days.⁶ Related to faith, Cantemir emphasizes the fact that Moldavians do not recognize the Hell, but believe that small sins can be forgiven even after death through the prayers of the church and with the help of alms. Apart from Wednesdays and Fridays, they fast four times a year, and in the forty-day long fast and the fast devoted to the Holy Virgin, they do not even eat fish.⁷ Among other customs described, a special place is dedicated to the "hora" and the "călușar", dances "with heresy", with their help the sick can be cured. About the fairies, they say that they love the young and beautiful boys, but that their love often turns into hate and they kill them with various diseases.

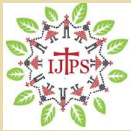
An interesting chapter is the one entitled *About the temperaments of the Moldavians*, which raised numerous positions because the Moldavians are described in not very pleasant colors. As if he had sensed the repercussions that were to appear, Cantemir justified himself

⁴ Crețu, Bogdan. *Dimitrie Cantemir Perspective interdisciplinare* (Iași □ Editura Institutul european, 2012), 146.

⁵ Ibid., 210-211.

⁶ Ibid., 215-216.

⁷ Ibid., 220-221.



and believes that the Moldavians "will find it more useful if we clearly show them the flaws that make them ugly, than if we deceive them with gentle flattery and clever exonerations," emphasizing that "in the character of the Moldavians, apart from the true faith and hospitality, we do not easily find anything that we could praise."⁸ Thus, they are haughty and scheming, quarrelsome, what is in their hearts is also on their lips, and they do not value education very much. Fatalists by nature, they go to war carelessly, being convinced that God decides the day of death.

Cantemir can also be called our first dialectologist, he observed the differences between the dialects of the Romanian language and the fact that the speech of the inhabitants of the Wallachia "is somewhat harsher" than that of the Moldavians. As for Slavonic, he calls it "barbaric", unknown to the vast majority of people, even the priests not understanding what they preach in the church. Placing great value on education, he praises the initiatives of Vasile Lupu and Șerban Cantacuzino who had established Greek schools and printing centers, but also Miron Costin, whom he considers "the best chronicler that Moldavia had it".

3. THE PRINCELY COUNCIL OR THE SAGE'S QUARREL WITH THE WORLD - THE FIRST PHILOSOPHICAL WORK IN ROMANIAN CULTURE

Another important work by Dimitrie Cantemir is *The Princely Council or the sage's quarrel with the world*. These two characters correspond to Body and Soul or Macrocosm and Microcosm. The identity of World-Body-Macrocosm and Wise-Soul-Microcosm is affirmed by the author in the contents of the book, but also in the title.⁹ Although it confronts two totally opposite conceptions of life, *The Princely Council* is a document that belongs to the secularization period of South-Eastern Europe.¹⁰ Starting from the idea that the World is the divine creation, the conversation between the World and the Sage is a violent one from the first lines. The World is accused by the Sage of being deceitful and treacherous, the gifts it offers, wealth, dignity and beauty, being fleeting.

The World fights back and brings into question the happiness emanating from the human being after benefiting from what it offers. The correspondence theory between the macrocosm and the microcosm interprets the World as an instrument of virtue that ensures the human being eternal life and wealth, the illusory beauty of the world, and debauchery is among the main dangers that the human being should avoid.

The World can be understood as the prison of the human being, devoid of happiness and light, thus forcing him to come to the conclusion that the only solution is to distance himself from the world. If we were to refer to a similar work in universal literature, it would be Philip the Solitary's *Mirror of the World*. The difference between the two works lies in their conclusions: *The Mirror of the World* believes that contempt for life and the world is natural asceticism, while Dimitrie Cantemir believes that the fight against life takes place while the human being is alive, not after death. The conclusion he reaches is that the reader who will read his book "will benefit both in this passing life and in the life to come."

⁸ Cantemir, Dimitrie. *Descrierea Moldovei* (București: Editura Librăriei Leon Alcalay, 1909), 95.

⁹ Bădărău, Dan. *Filozofia lui Dimitrie Cantemir* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1964), 294.

¹⁰ Cantemir, Dimitrie. *Divanul*. Ediție îngrijită și studiu introductiv de Virgil Căndea (București: Editura pentru literatură, 1969), 11-12.

4. HIEROGLYPHIC HISTORY - THE FIRST NOVEL IN ROMANIAN LITERATURE

The evidence of the full maturation of the savant Dimitrie Cantemir is represented by *Istoria hieroglyphica*, considered the first allegorical novel in Romanian literature, a political pamphlet, in which he borrows a modern literary method, placing the middle part at the beginning and the beginning at the middle.

The novel reveals and presents for the first time the classes and social categories of the Romanian society at that time, also offering their characterization, in the form of a pamphlet.¹¹ The portraits made by the author belong to important figures of the political life of the time, only that his subjectivity makes him exaggerate the qualities of those close to him and accentuate the negative features of his enemies. The central theme of this work is political life with its characters, embodied in animals.

The reader will be enlightened only after reading the key at the end of the book as to their identity.¹² The criticism that Cantemir exposes includes not only vehement personal attacks, but also general attacks or addressed to the superiors of Romanian society at that time. The image of the "theatre" of the world is revealed to us through the characters who are made to reveal their true character in front of the reading public. We can consider that this work is also a social and political satire, one of the most penetrating in our ancient literature.

For the most part, the boyars of Moldavia were likened to beasts that enjoyed killing innocent people, and the boyars of Wallachia were considered birds of prey.¹³ Hieroglyphic history is original through the chosen way of presenting historical events seen from the perspective of the author who was involved in them.



Source: *The complete Cantemir manuscripts. Vol. VII. The Hieroglyphic History: Unpublished Facsimile Manuscript.*

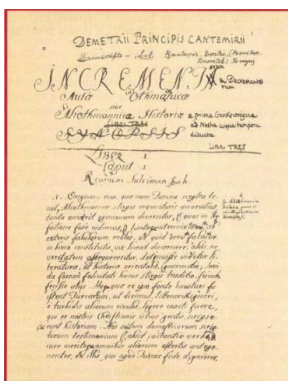
¹¹ Ibid., p. 27.

¹² Rosetti, Al. *Istoria literaturii române* (București □ Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1970), 566-567.

¹³ Ibid., 567-568.

5. HISTORY OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE - THE FIRST SCIENTIFIC WORK ON THE HISTORY OF THE TURKS

The writing that established Dimitrie Cantemir as a famous historian in Europe is the History of the Ottoman Empire, a work written at the same time as the Description of Moldavia, but finished in 1716. This was considered for a long time the document with scientific authority regarding the history of the Turks. The fact that he spent many years in Constantinople meant that he participated in all the political events of the time. Particular attention is paid to the description of Ottoman institutions, monuments and schools, but also to the political organization of the Turks.¹⁴ The work is carefully supplemented with explanatory footnotes on many aspects presented in the text, especially those related to the history of the Romanians. The first mention is occasioned by the story of the reign of Murad I and the battle of Kosovo (1389), in which detachments from Wallachia also participated, as allies of the Christians. On the battlefield, the Christians were defeated and Murad was killed by a Serbian soldier. In this work, the word Romania appears for the first time when it presents Șerban Cantacuzino as "prince of Romania". Through this work, Cantemir informed civilized Europe that the great Ottoman Empire, recognized for its conquests, was at the beginning of its decline, also revealing their battle tactics so that they become vulnerable to the opponent.¹⁵



Source: *The complete Cantemir manuscripts. Vol. IV. Incrementorum et decrementorum Aulae Othmannicae: original facsimile manuscript.*

6. THE CHRONICLE OF THE ROMAN-MOLDO-VLACH ANTIQUITY: "THE CLEAN MIRROR OF THE ROMANIAN NATION"

Through this history, Cantemir proves to be a worthy follower of Grigore Ureche who wanted the history of the Romanian nation to be written in his language, but also of Miron Costin who compared the book to a mirror in which the reader must look to know which are its roots. That is why he also advises those belonging to the Moldovan nation to look in this book as in a clean mirror to see their face, old age and the honor of the nation.¹⁶ The chronicle is an erudite work that includes a bibliographic list of no less than 150 names of authors and titles and that summarizes the history of the Romanians. The objectivity of the author is emphasized by him whenever he has the opportunity, often stating that "my friend is Plato, my friend is Socrates, and more than words, truth is my friend."

¹⁴ Ibid., 574-575.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Cantemir, Dimitrie. *Hronicul vechimei a romano-moldo-vlahilor* (București: Editura Albatros, 2003), 178.



CONCLUSIONS

Dimitrie Cantemir remains the most prominent representative of Romanian encyclopedism, his work giving him this well-deserved status. Petre P. Panaitescu was among the first to include Cantemir's creation in Renaissance humanism: the admiration for art, the concept of civilization and the value that civilization has, but also the attraction for classical languages, adding: "the entire work of Dimitrie Cantemir is permeated by a humanistic spirit".¹⁷ George Călinescu, for his part, compared Dimitrie Cantemir to the people of the Renaissance: "An enlightened, ambitious voievod, a man of the world and a library ascetic, intriguing and solidary, manipulative and misanthropic, a lover of his Moldavia, which he yearns for, and an adventurer, drum singer from Tsarigrad, academician recognized by Berlin, Russian prince, Romanian chronicler, connoisseur of all the pleasures the world can give, Dimitrie Cantemir is our Lorenzo de' Medici".¹⁸

Historian and politician animated by advanced ideas, often surprisingly new for his time, literate and prestigious encyclopedist, Cantemir was and remains a benchmark for universal and national cultural history.

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¹⁷ Panaitescu, P.P. *Dimitrie Cantemir. Viața și opera* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1958), 638, apud Vaida, Petru. *Dimitrie Cantemir și umanismul* (București: Editura Minerva, 1972), 21.

¹⁸ Călinescu, G. *Istoria literaturii române* (București, 1941), 41, apud Vaida, Petru. *Dimitrie Cantemir și umanismul* (București: Editura Minerva, 1972), 47.