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Adrian IGNAT

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The Romanians between the Orient and the Occident

Adrian IGNAT[1]

Abstract

Christianity has forever marked the lives of the peoples who have embraced it. Through it, people have understood that this life is not the sole purpose of their existence, that preparing for the encounter of the living God, the One who sacrifices himself on the cross, then to overcome death by the resurrection, is the destination to which we are heading. That is why our entire existence must be placed in the service of God and others, so that we may be placed at the right of the Fair Judge (Matthew 25).

This study aims to present some aspects regarding our Latinity and Orthodoxy - as a true bridge between East and West. Also, the influence of the Byzantines in the life of the Romanian people will be analysed as well as the adoption of the Byzantine-Slavonian rite in our medieval culture. Thus, a complex image of our Romanian culture and spirituality specific to the 9th-14th centuries can be drawn.

Keywords: *Christianity; Orthodoxy; Latinity; Byzantine-Slavonian rite; Orient; Occident.*

1. Introduction

The Romanian people, through their Latinity and Orthodox faith, was a true bridge between the East and the West [1]. It has greatly supported the link between the two parts of Europe. Romanian spirituality can give the West the power of communion, and the Orient the clarity of a real humanism [2]. "*Our Latinity, left in the middle of the East and the West, and receiving Oriental Christianity, strengthened the synthesis of the spirituality of the Romanian people*." [3:17]

The Romanian land was in the midst of political winds from all directions. Romanians, established in independent mediaeval states, will be a real defence shield against Ottoman expansion in Europe. They will defend

[1] Valahia University from Târgovişte, Romania, adrianignat1974@yahoo.com.

Corresponding Author: Adrian IGNAT

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and protect European culture and values for a good period of time. "*Overwhelmed for almost a millennium by the migratory peoples who monopolized the attention of the time historiography, the Dacian-Roman descendants transformed during the invasions of the Romanians will reappear on the stage of historiography after the first feudal states were established, Basarab I, Mircea the Elder, Iancu of Hunedoara, Stephen the Great as political and military forces of unquestionable importance, especially after the appearance of the Turks in the South-Eastern Europe.*"[4]

2. The Byzantine influence exerted in the Romanian people's life

The influence of the Byzantine Empire in the lives of the peoples who were in the borders or under its direct influence was spoken and it still continues to be spoken of. This aspect is underlined by the Serbian researcher, Dimitri Obolensky, who believes that these peoples who were under the influence of Byzantium formed a true Byzantine Commonwealth [5]. On the same line will be the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga, who supports the idea of continuity of the Byzantine heritage in Russia and the Romanian Lands, the so-called *Byzantium after Byzantium* [6], all the more so, since these countries did not form part of the Ottoman Empire.

Unfortunately, with regard to the canonical subordination of the ecclesiastical institutions on the territory inhabited by the Romanians to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, there are not enough sources. Instead, we find out from various western sources who visited these places, about the existence of *Greek* bishops or monasteries belonging to the Romanians. However, there are many documents and even an intense controversy over the canonical subordination of the territory situated in the southern part of the Danube and inhabited by the Bulgarians (9th century). Given that there were no well-formed state formations in the North of the Danube, but only organisations like village communities, by extension, we believe that this dispute included the North-Danube territory inhabited by Romanians.

On the other hand, this attitude of the Byzantine Empire and, implicitly, of the Eastern Church to the North-Danubian territory is justified by the fact that the Byzantine ideology considered the Byzantine Empire to be the only existing empire, and the emperor the only conductor recognized throughout the earth. *Basel* did not know frontiers [7][2]. In the same way, the patriarch of Constantinople extended his jurisdiction over all imperial subjects and those at the border of the empire [8][3].

[2] „Cette idée impériale, traduite dans les faits, veut que les frontières romaines-byzantines englobent la totalité du monde civilisé, l'oecuméné"

[3] For Byzantines „the Church's task was intimately linked to that of the State."

Taking into account the Christian influence exercised by some Danubian episcopal churches on the territory to the left of the Danube, the historian Nicolae Iorga said: "*These bishops kept, moreover, their sphere of rulers in the cities, and in the seventeenth century, when under the Emperor Mauritius, the Romans of Constantinople, and the barbarians of the Danube were in eternal fight, the bishop of Novae had the same situation as St. Severin or the Serbian bishops at the time of the hunting invasions*." [9]

Undertaking an analysis of the Byzantine influence exerted on the Romanian people in literature, Dumitru Stăniloae said: "*The Romanian people received an education in Byzantine literature; it received education for a balanced humanity, control of the unilateral, passionate, uncontrollable manoeuvre without which man can not capitalize on all the potentials of his nature, that is to say, his entire humanity. Maybe this capacity of the unconscious mind to capitalize on all the potencies of human nature is called in Byzantine spirituality, and then in the Romanian one «whole mind». It has been able to maintain the balanced humanism of the Romanian people as an integral mechanism*." [3:44]

3. Slavonic language in Christian-Orthodox cult and Romanian culture

There are more opinions about the penetration of the Slavonic cult among Romanians in our historiography. Thus, the authors of the *Romanian Orthodox Church History* handbook of 1957 consider that the Romanians borrowed the Slavonic rite in the tenth century. These authors, based on the historical background of the time, the political supremacy of the Bulgarian Empire under the rule of Tsar Simeon, and under the influence of the missionary work carried out by Saints Cyril and Methodius, consider that the Romanians will borrow the Slavonic language of the Medio-Bulgarian language, in worship and administration. As a result, the 10th century is defining for this cultural change in the Romanians. "*The organization of the Bulgarian Church, with the dioceses of Silistra and Vidin, and the close ties with the Christians in the north of the Danube, at a time when we were not yet well established, contributed perhaps to the kneading of our religious life with the South Danubian Slavs. Indeed, there we believe that our candidates were heading to the priesthood, ordained, and filled with the books necessary for the holy service. Therefore, in the sphere of influence of this Church, of the only Orthodox Church organized in our neighbourhood, we, the Romanians also started*" [10:112].

Despite the fact that they borrowed Slavonic from their southern Danubian neighbours, the Romanians were not even a Bulgarian suffrage at that time. "*Therefore, the problem of the Slavonic origin in the Romanian Church can not be fully elucidated by the admission of the Bulgarian rule to the northern Danube in*

the 9th-10th centuries. Historians who deny the existence of this dominion, reducing altogether the Slavonic grasp upon us, try to explain the Slavonic language's penetration into our church service by the establishment and influence of the Bulgarian bishops of the Danube, especially that of Vidin, pushing the adoption of the Slavonian liturgy in the 13th century" [10:113].

Another opinion is expressed by Dan Gh. Teodor, who considers that the Slavonian rite was introduced to the Romanians during the X-XII centuries. In his opinion, this is evidenced by the discoveries of inscriptions in Greek, Glagolitic and Cyrillic characters, without any reliable testimony to the East of the Carpathians, Dobrogea or Wallachia that some of the disciples of Saints Cyril and Methodius. The adoption of the rite was due to "*the broad possibilities that adherence to this rite offered to the Romanian people in order to preserve the old Orthodox order when it was strongly and long confronted with the actions of Catholic proselytism carried out by the Papacy and the Arpadian kingdom, especially in the eastern regions of the Carpathians*" [11].

Professor Mircea Păcurariu makes a synthesis of the opinions expressed on the penetration and generalization of the Slavonic rite to the Romanians, considering that there were several reasons - the lack of cult books to the Romanians, the mission of the disciples of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the existence of a strong Bulgarian state, etc. - what favoured this. What is important, in his view, is that "*by introducing the Byzantine rite of Slavonic language to us, we remained further under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, being the only people of Romance language and origin of Orthodox rite.*" [12]. At the same time, by adopting the Byzantine-Slavonian rite, the Romanians had at their disposal a means of resisting the Catholic proselytism that could come through the intercession of Catholic peoples and Catholic states around us (Hungarian, Moravian, Polish) [13],[14].

We, personally, believe that the Slavonian rite penetrated and generalized to Romanians after our ethnogenesis and Christianization ended, beginning with the tenth century, marked by the reception of Eastern Christianity by the great Slavic peoples: Bulgarians (864), Moravians (863-867) and the Russians (988). On the other hand, the mission carried out by Saints Cyril and Methodius, *apostles of the Slavs*, who have succeeded in giving Slavonic language a special glow by creating an alphabet and translating the Holy Scripture, is not neglected.

The political importance of the Bulgarian state in the 10th century, at the end of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th century, by the founding of the Vlahos-Bulgarian Empire, will support the spread of this rite to the Romanians. As such, we believe that this process has been extended in the next century (XI century) and has become generalized throughout the territory inhabited by Romanians. This is the only reason why the

Romanians in Transylvania have preserved Eastern Christianity and Slavonic language in worship and after the conquest of Transylvania by the Hungarians.

Although the Christian Church of the Romanian Lands borrowed the Slavonic language in cult (Slavic rite), this language remained alien to the great mass of the Romanian people. The people did not understand it, but she felt it appropriate to be in a close relationship with the other Orthodox Christian brothers: Bulgarians, Serbs, Russians, Greeks. This is also explained by the appearance of some Romanian books, such as the Voroneţan manuscript and the Scheianic Psalter. "*The Slavonic language was for the priest and the Romanian peasant a closed garden and a covered fountain*", according to the Patriarch of Dositei of Jerusalem [15].

On the other hand, the acquisition of the Slavic language created the premises for a greater rapprochement between the Balkan peoples of Christian-Orthodox faith (Romanians, Bulgarians, Serbs and Russians). Its use in a fairly stretched space - from Mount Athos to Kiev and Moscow - has supported the creation of strong cultural and spiritual ties between the Romanian elite and "*a large number of cult monks and even experienced in theology. It was only that way that he could have avoided that provincialism he would certainly have done if he had relied only on himself in terms of the spiritual paradigm*." [16]

The idea that we did not benefit from the lights of culture until late, because of Slavonicity and our belonging to the Orthodox Church, is devoid of any foundation. Thus a Romanian emeritus showed that Slavonicism did not prevent the Polish people from giving us Copernicus, nor did Orthodoxy oppose the cultural reforms of Peter the Great. The Romanian Orthodoxy, daughter of Byzantine Orthodoxy, grew up with its sister, Slavic Orthodoxy, in a geographic, social and economic environment, distinct from that of Byzantine Orthodoxy and Western Catholicism. The domination of Romanians by the various peoples who have succeeded in these lands, the exploitation of incomes, the lack of advanced commercial ties with other peoples, and the eminently rural type of our social life, are powerful reasons that have kept us behind the culture of the West [17].

When the Romanians have favourable conditions for the development of the spiritual power, they become an adornment of human culture. Thus, the first and greatest humanist of the Hungarians in the 16th century is a Romanian: *Nicolae Olahul*, that is, Wallach-Romanian [18], along with the *Mihail Valachus* from Bihor, who, in the environment of intense Western culture, have achieved performances with which they can honour the highest cultures [19].

4. Conclusions

The love of the Romanians for the ancient Church was not diminished by the use of the Slavic language in worship. During this time, the oldest churches and monasteries were built: the monasteries of Tismana, Vodita, Cozia, Argeş, the Metropolitan Church of Târgovişte, the Princely Church in Câmpulung, etc. All these places of worship, these oasis of peace of mind, have been endowed with goods and properties, which will amount to a fifth of the Wallachia territory [20].

Undertaking an analysis of the Church and the State in the Romanian Lands during the medieval period, it is observed that: both were in relations of autonomy or independence with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, respectively with the Ottoman Empire; the events of the life of the Church and the State are closely related, by the Byzantine model; the two institutions have the most important role in the life of Romanians.

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