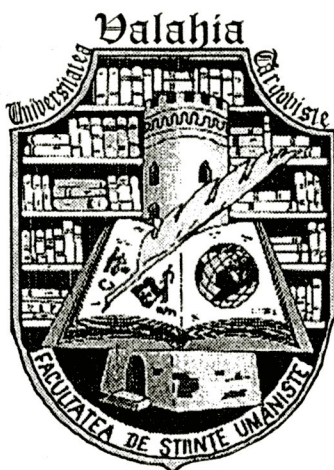


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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE AND THE APPEARANCE OF THE URBAN LIFE IN THE EXTRA-CARPATHIAN TERRITORIES

*Denis Capraroiiu**

The European historiography of the last decades, frame where the Romanian historiography is included, is more and more concerned of the relations which can be identified between the local political structures and the process of the urban centers foundation, more precisely of the concordance which can be found between "the town phenomenon" and the feudal structures of a given society. Although the correlation trials of these two phenomena had an early beginning, only today these got the proper importance. The situation is not another in Romanian historiography, too, where the relation between the political factor and the economic factor concerning to the creation problem of the medieval town gets a more and more obvious actuality, becoming even one of priority for the future researches themes (Matei 1995: 49). Unfortunately, till now, dominantly in this study direction are either the opinions shyness, generated by the documentary poverty, or the conservatism of some convenient convictions, taken uncritically and unilaterally, or, more frequently, an unhappy combination of both attitudes. The framing in the narrow, often hermetic, perimeter of the written springs is today definitively compromised by the more and more consistent contribution of the medieval urban archeology, which succeeded a profound and argued renewal of the previous dominant vision concerning the relations between the political structure, the economic structure and the social changes involved in the creation of the Romanian medieval towns.

Therefore, the revaluation of the relations between the political structures and the creation of the medieval urban phenomenon became not for a long time ago a preoccupation in the European historiography and respectively in the Romanian historiography. This late recognition of the necessity as the structural relation between the political factor and the providing of the premises related to the medieval urban appearance to be underlined, could seem a surprising one, even a non-accountable one, if the results, which the profound and tenacious establishment of the economic direction (Matei 1997:31), had along decades on the historical thinking concerning the decisive factors for the European mediaeval towns creation, will not be taken into consideration.

If the wording of some criteria in order that the urban feature of the Romanian medieval settlements to can be fixed, it was a permanently one in the historiography of the period between the two wars, the discussion concerning the content of the Romanian medieval town notion was early inaugurated. In this direction, the specter of the opinions advanced by the Romanian historians are limited of two totally opposite positions: the total denying of the Romanians capacity in order to create for them the own towns and

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respectively, the interpretation of the Romanian urban centers as the expression of the high level of Romanian society development on the feudalization line. But the substratum of this diversity is dominated of a single conviction: the town is an economic phenomenon and indifferent of the connection made by some historians between the feudalization process of the Romanian society and the mediaeval towns forming, the evidence of the economic role is always a constant (Matei 1997:15). But there is an important difference between the historiography previous to the wars period - where the authors prefer the understanding the urban settlements preponderantly like change centers - and that historiography after the wars period, where the towns function as goods producing centers is especially attempted to be highlighted, on the background of the delimitation process between handicrafts and agriculture.

The economic theory influence, of which promoter the Belgium historian H. Pirenne is recognized, is firstly explained through the discussions common framing, provided by the fundamental unity of the mediaeval towns forming process for the European historiography. Although the regional situations and the typical zonal factors involve an indisputable variety, this relative homogeneity, often cheated, allowing the applying of some very general models, therefore the improper ones, on the different special circumstances. In this sense, it is totally the specific feature, the taking-over of the pirennean model by the Romanian historiography of the period between the two wars.

Without considering here as necessary to enter into details about the Belgian expert theses, it is important to be memorized the founding of his theory on the conviction in the prominent role of the merchantry and the commercial activities in the creation and the development of the European mediaeval towns: "In none civilization the urban life development was not independently of trade and industry. The diversity of the climates, the peoples or the religions is just same non-important in this process like that of the epochs. [...] His universality is explained through necessity. Indeed, an urban agglomeration can survive only if foods are imported from exterior. But to this import, on the other hand, an export of manufactured products must to correspond, this being the counter-parcel or the equivalent value for import. [...] Without the import which provides the foods supply, without the export which compensates for it with barter items, the town would disappear. [...] The towns of the Middle Ages show us a very different picture [compared with antiquity]. The trade and the industry made them that they were. [...] The fact that the origin of the Middle Ages towns is directly connected, like an effect of its cause, to the commercial revival ... is absolutely an undeniable one. Its proof results from the striking concordance which is found between the trade expansion and the expansion of the urban motion." (Pirenne 2000: 87-88).

How, for H. Pirenne, the oldest urban centers of the Middle Ages are the direct and unmediated opera of the international trade (2000: 88), the popularity of his opinion, among the Romanian historians from the period between the two wars, can be easy explained (Ciurea 1970: 23). The pirennean ideas dominate the thinking, in this problem, of those more important names in Romanian historiography: N. Iorga, Gh. Brătianu and, with some accents, P. P. Panaitescu.

By opening, in our historiography, the discussions of ideas about the origin and the significance of the Romanian mediaeval urban phenomenon, N. Iorga is remarked through oscillatory opinions, sometimes even the contradictory ones (Matei 1997: 16), as regards the decisive factors of the urban creation. In the spirit of the pirennean judgement and by the extrapolation of his convictions regarding the role of the commercial roads in the state

creation, Iorga put under a big question mark the Romanian origin of the our first mediaeval towns, in this direction his wordings being, sometimes, the categorical ones (Iorga 1920: 12; 1924: 93-94; 1927: 30).

In his row, the Gh. Brătianu 's outlook, as regards the role of the external factors in the creation of the Romanian mediaeval towns, appears very close to the Iorga's theses. In his vision, the appearance of the Romanian mediaeval urban phenomenon, as also the feudal states, was the result of some non-Romanian economic and political interests (Brătianu 1984: 87). For Brătianu, the commercial road, that traversed Moldavia, attended to economic interests of European level and consequently, required a high step of safety (Brătianu 1984: 99). This could be provided only by a firm state structure and so the appearance of the feudal state Moldavia - which takes over this historical role - become an objective necessity (Brătianu 1935: 123).

It is remarked the following fact, although the validity of his appreciation is extended on the causes and the conditions of Walachia forming (Brătianu 1945:144), the author shown a justified prudence - unlike the open attitude of his mentor, N. Iorga - avoiding any reference regarding the foreign origin of the extra-carpathian Romanian mediaeval towns founders.

The position of the historian P. P. Panaitescu is a distant one, through the accents, which he proposes - and despite of his inconsistent consistency (Căprăroiu 1999) - of the previous opinions. Among the historians of the period between the two wars, P. P. Panaitescu was firmly placed on the position of the local nature and origin affirmation for the extra-carpathian mediaeval towns. In his opinion, "the forming process of these towns is inseparably tied to that of the Romanian society feudalization"(Matei 1997:17). This conviction of the named historian was not an obstacle for him to underline, for many times, the importance of the change between the economic functions of the urban settlements, on forming or on a phase further to their constituting (Panaitescu 1969: 286). From this point of view, even P. P. Panaitescu is not distant of European current that attributed to the commerce the role of motor in the urban civilization development.

For this, the firmest proof results in the role attributed by P.Panaitescu, in the frame of the urban centers in forming, to the so-called "boroughs of valley" : "... in an old epoch , the valleys were separated economic units , with their villages , in their middle being the center of change and that of guard, the headquarters of the voivode. There, the foreign merchants were coming and also there the first towns were risen." (Panaitescu 1969: 232) "These centers, of course, before to the state foundation, were the place where the bargain of change for the valley goods was made, this place being guarded by a local court, which later become provincial princely court. Therefore, the old boroughs of valley are the origin for many boroughs from our country"(a.s.o.) (Costăchel, Panaitescu, Cazacu 1957: 414).

The understanding of the P.P. Panaitescu position regarding the economic foundation of the Romanian mediaeval urban phenomenon can not be made without the underlining his intention of limiting a real Romanian feature (Matei 1989: 1169-1191) in the more general frame of the Europe mediaeval towns forming. According to the named historian, this feature could be defined by the appearance of the Romanian mediaeval urban centers "through the passage on economic way from the peasant community to a free town community"(Panaitescu 1969: 284). A such "Romanian mediaeval social creation", which stands out of the usual development of the European towns - reduced by Panaitescu to "the colonization of the free people belonging to different origins around of a

seniority or princely court" - therefore is based on the trust that "the peasant community is differentiated from inside, its turning into town being made based on the handicrafts development and the princely privilege getting" (Panaitescu 1969: 284).

Without a more advanced discussion about this P. P. Panaitescu conception, for all that we are forced to point out some sore parts in his judgement. These can have too much important implications - when a correct size of the Romanian urban phenomenon in the European context is attempted - in order that to can cut them. On a hand, like it was pointed out, the type of mediaeval town, which has its origin in a rural settlement, is not by any manner of means exclusively a typical feature for Romanian territory (Matei 1997:19). On the other hand, the passage from the peasant organization, the community, to a free community, a town one, can not be accepted as a pure economic phenomenon. And last but not least, the reference made by P. P. Panaitescu regarding "the princely privilege"- that, as juridical fact, would represent a confirmation of the transformations, by means of the handicrafts development, suffered by a rural settlement on the direction of its metamorphosis in a urban center - has no support in the Romanian mediaeval diplomacy where such privileges are totally absent. In these conditions, we are forced to ascertain the Panaitescu tendency to "the solution of this «Romanian feature» through law practices widely spread in the West World" (Matei 1997:19).

Despite of the inconsistencies and the mistaken convictions which were pointed out, is not truthlessness that they must not to guide to the minimization of the P. P. Panaitescu essential contribution for the understanding of the Romanian urban phenomenon creation, evidently, especially through his trial in the definition of the structural relation between the general development of the extra-carpathian Romanian society and the process of the towns foundation in this area.

In this direction, the vision of N. Grigoraş, historian from Iaşi, has incontestable merits. His consistent opinion is that, at least for the area from East of Carpathians - but this conviction of the author can be extended to the whole extra-carpathian space -, the Romanian oldness and origin of the towns can not be disputed: "The Moldavian borough from the XIIth or the XIIIth century, term which shows that the first city centers were the Romanian ones, was probably consisted of agriculturists, handicraftsmen and goods colporteurs, visited by foreign merchants"(Grigoraş 1942:13-14). Although, a certain inconsistency could be reproached as regards the determinant factors in the foundation of the settlement with urban nature and some improper analogies related to the West mediaeval realities (such as, the feudal "anarchy" of the Moldavian "barons", supposed to be stopped by reign) (Matei 1997:20), it is indubitable that the author from Iaşi accepts a direct relation between the existence of some political, military and administrative centers of some local political authorities- previous to the XIVth and the places where some of the later mediaeval towns were founded (Grigoras, 1960: 90).

C. C. Giurescu adopts a much better defined position, in the problem of the extra-carpathian mediaeval towns' creation, his points of view being decisively for the organic relation between the Romanian society evolution and the urban creation. The mentioned historian is not limited only in the support of the local origin of the foundation process for the mediaeval towns, but in his papers, he tries to place this phenomenon long before the chronological moment generally accepted by his fellows. Although, Giurescu is belonging to the economic current and shows the same favorable option for the prevalence of the economic factor, he gives to the political factor, too, in a near equal measure, a determinant role in the urban creation: "Between the political factor and the economic factor was

therefore a close relation: The one was influenced by the other and both together - but prevailing being the economic factor - determined the boroughs foundation and development" (Giurescu 1967: 78).

Although the mentioned historian opinion about the essential role of the economy in the appearance of the mediaeval urban life is the same with that supported by the other historians, too, for all that, it is an unique one, his opinion about the chronological time where the foundation process of the urban centers is placed. So, if the Romanian historiography assembly -- indifferent of the pre-eminence which is conferred on the various foundation factors - places the process of the urban creation in the first centuries of the IInd millenium, especially in the period of the centuries XII-XIV, the C. C. Giurescu attitude will be a total different one because he places the beginnings of the future mediaeval settlements in the period of the Slavic-Romanian life together (Giurescu 1967: 72).

The acceptance of such oldness for the beginning of the foundation process for the urban centers can not remained without results. This involves, with necessity - although Giurescu does not explicitly say about the territorial constancy of the human settlements which is rather settled on the proper selection of the habitats (Giurescu 1967: 73) -, the idea of the embryonal urban life continuity at the north of Danube.

The existence of some thriving urban centers and a prosperous town population is also early placed by C. C. Giurescu, this is made in a period when the historiography assembly slowly accepted only the timid beginnings of the Romanian urban civilization (Giurescu 1972:17). Although the historical solidity of the existence of such townspeople before the middle of the XIIIth century was later on estimated anew (Matei 1973: 63-76), it is properly, for all that, to be underlined the Giurescu consistency in his opinion about the oldness of the Romanian mediaeval urban life.

It is essential for the clarity of our step, the specifying of the position which the mentioned historian adopts related to the strong relation between the Romanian extra-carpathian society development and the urban phenomenon appearance. So, C. C. Giurescu places this process evolution in the social political context provided by the existence of the principalities from the feudal system foundation, "cneazate" called, and the voivodeships, stimuli and guarantors of the urban centers development beginning (Giurescu 1967: 78). Consequently, "in the moment when the Moldavia state is founded, a complete network of boroughs there was on the whole territory included from Carpathians to Black Sea" (Giurescu 1967: 72).

The thesis of the Romanian extra-carpathian urban centers pre-eminence related to the appearance of the autonomous feudal states, is unanimously accepted by the historiography of the last decades, and is not disputed by any category of sources.

For example, H. H. Stahl definitely said: "Even in the case when we have no information and indifferently of the theory which could explain their creation (...) surely is that a network of towns, documentary ascertained as early as our first state documents, must has a long past" (Stahl 1972:192). If the above mentioned author does not offer details about the foundation modalities for these town centers, much more clear is the C. Cihodaru position. This author is firmly convinced not only of the local feature and the economical basis of the process for the east-carpathian mediaeval towns, but of the beginnings chronology for this process, too- firmly attributed to the XIIIth century (Cihodaru: 1971: 31-45).

A more wary opinion about the chronological placing of the beginnings for the urban life from the east-carpathian habitat is advanced by Al. Andronic, who is inclined to frame later this beginning, namely to the first half of the XIVth century (Andronic 1970: 837-853).

In his row, P. I. Panait upholds - on the line which already become a traditional one in our historiography - the economical content of the mediaeval urban creation process: "the jump of the urban transformations must be discerned in that stage where the rural handicraftsman can perform goods which exceed the possibility of local absorption, so he being forced to put his products into a circuit by means of a zonal exchange" (Panait: 9). But, in the same author opinion, the action of these economical factors is limited, in the towns being in foundation process, by the beginning economic relations restriction to the surrounding habitat and the neighboring villages (Panait, Stefanescu 1981:110). On the other hand, even with such restricted action, the economical factor does not independently advance, but more - it is a paradox in the mentioned author conception assembly -, this has a subsidiary position: "... in the Romanian realities, the urbanization is a process with a long length of time, which is not conditioned by the capacity or the incapacity of the local economy structure, but is conditioned by the political events which was occurred on this territory" (Panait, Stefanescu 1981:111).

The list of the contributions, summed to the overbidding of the economical foundation in the extra-carpathian urban phenomenon creation, can not exclude the studies made by Ștefan Olteanu. This author technical orientation is based, related to this problem, on the importance conferred on the separation between handicrafts and agriculture. If the definition of the traversed stages in this process is variably made (Olteanu 1963: 1250-1282; 1972:953; 1983), it is not truthless that the mentioned author, like C. C. Giurescu also, places in a very early period the Romanian urban life beginnings, namely in the IX-XI centuries period, although the identifying of some economic and social structures able to generate this process is still expected.

A special merit has the introduction by Șt. Olteanu of a new factor that has impact on the urban creation. This factor is the demographic factor, which is seen not only in its quality of urban nature definition criterion, but as a constitutive element of the historical frame necessary to the urban nucleuses appearance (Olteanu 1983: 126-132). The elaborating of a new more complex scaffolding of genetic factors for the urban creation, which now included the new criterion, too, will lead the author to the affirmation of the existence necessity, in determined geographical spaces having an increased demographic density, of some beginning feudal political organization forms (principalities from the feudal system foundation, "cnezate" called, and voivodeships), responsible for the providing of the frame for the first towns appearance. Although such assumption was regarded with reservation (Matei 1997: 27), it is worthy of underlining the trial made by the mentioned historian in order that to exceed the narrow conceptual frames of the economic concept.

The previous concise excursus allows us the elaborating of some general findings having a preliminary status. For the first time, excepting the studies dedicated to the effort for the definition of the general historical conditions and the mediaeval urban phenomenon content (usually regarded as an essential economic one), the absolute majority of the Romanian researches are focused on the Moldavian towns, the problem of the urban nucleuses appearance in Walachia being incautiously considered as solved. Despite of the increased generosity related to the documentary evidences about this zone, comparatively

with the Moldavian habitat, the Romanian historiography did not succeed a satisfactory profound study of the historical frame typical to the towns appearance from Walachia, being content only with the affirmation of these towns settlements pre-eminence (Curtea de Argeş, Bucharest, Câmpulung), related to the autonomous mediaeval state appearance.

Excepting Bucharest town, which benefited, naturally and constantly, by a more attentive study (Ionescu-Gion 1899; Giurescu 1979) - despite of the obvious documentary poverty - and of the town-residence Curtea de Arges (Constantinescu 1983), the creation of the towns from Walachia still expected to be honored with the proper attention (Matei 1997: 29). In the poor and very general frame of the bibliography regarding the urban creation in the south-carpathian zone, remains as the dominant ones, the economic theses, particularly, those related to the role of the commercial exchanges in the towns development (Giurescu 1965; Panait: 8), and the inconsistencies are not absent (Matei 1997:29-30).

At the end of this historiographical prospect and in order that our step intentions to be justified, we consider the M. D. Matei opinions presentation as a necessity. Because of the opinion balance and the accents of his analytical approach, the author has a special place in the assembly of the Romanian mediaeval town historiography. In addition, the fruitfulness of his suggestions is a guarantee for us on the viability of a start point in the own trial of the discussed complex phenomenon analysis.

The consistency of the M. D. Matei contribution to the elucidation of some aspects wantonly studied in the structure literature is provided both by the efficacious development of the archeological researches results - compensating the unfortunate stunted quantity of the documentary evidences -, and by the succeeding of the Romanian mediaeval phenomenon integration in its natural frame, that of European realities, so, being allowed a new dimension of the meaning conferred till now to "the Romanian specific nature".

Profoundly examining a study direction insufficiently distinguished and by all means necessary, the author underlined that, although "the economic and social content of the Romanian urban centers foundation process (...) can not be contradicted, (...) the limiting of the discussion to the mentioned aspect can not lead, inevitably, only to partial finishing, without underlining the more much complex content of the mediaeval urban phenomenon" (Matei 1997: 30).

Advocate dedicated to the idea that our mediaeval towns are the expression of the Romanian society evolution to a development level which provided the premises of the urban civilization embryos appearance, M. D. Matei underlines that "it is impossible to be understand the role of a settlement which begins getting attributes of urban living if its history beginning are not placed in a more large context." (Matei 1997: 31) Therefore, being loyally to a methodological orientation too little affected by the passion for generalization and theses making, the author proposes, as a premise of a valid research, the setting of the analysis criterions necessary to a right understanding of the typical context for the creation of a mediaeval town: the population and its density, the geographical position, the extent and the development level of the habitat where it was founded, the political form of organization where it is appeared and, not the last, the international relations frame and assembly where the respective phenomenon is placed. Consequently, he declares as non-acceptable the excessive importance of the economic content in the urban creation process: "I appreciate as non-acceptable a point of view which presents that a town appears as a result of the economic necessities of a collectivity, indifferently of that territory extent where the needs are satisfied." (Ibid.) More, without the adequate

appreciation of the role, sometimes a preponderant one, provided by the social political structures, "the mediaeval town becomes a nonsense." (Ibid)

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