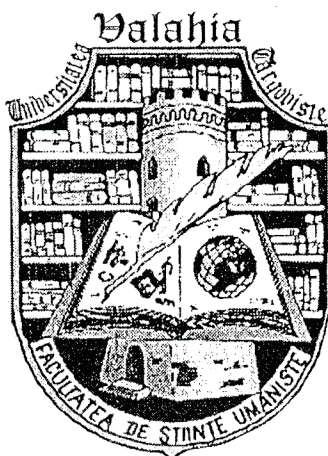


Le Ministère d'Education et de la Recherche
L'Université „Valahia“ Târgoviște
Faculté de Sciences Humaines

ANNALES
D'UNIVERSITÉ „VALAHIA“
TARGOVISTE



SECTION
d'Archéologie et d'Histoire

Tome VI-VII

Târgoviște
2004/2005

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THE PROBLEM OF THE ROMANIAN MEDIEVAL TOWN'S GENESIS IN HISTORIAN P. P. PANAITESCU'S CONCEPTIONS

Ștefan Șchiopu*

Everywhere, the medieval town's formation represented not only the wreathing of an evolution of centuries during which the older accumulations have reached their natural fulfillment, but first of all it denoted the beginning of a period characterized by a major qualitative leap in the humanity's development. That is why we can assert that among the fundamental processes which took place at the beginning of the Romanian feudalism, a well determined place is taken by the phenomenon of the urban civilization's emergence.

Romanian historians' concern, more or less close to the medieval town's field, didn't rise, from the manifested interest's point of view, to the height of the problem, and for a long time the valuable conclusions have put us to wait. This is one of the reasons why today, maybe more than ever, it is necessary to redefine and to reconsider the role that the medieval town's emergence had in the problems ensemble of the Romanian feudalism's beginning.

Among the problem's historical writings P.P. Panaitescu's studies represented an attempt, one of the most authorized, to enlighten this vast field. The author tried to reveal the importance of the urban phenomenon both from the point of view of the multiple transformations which it involved, and of the outcrops it generated. With the analyzing of the aspects bound to the administrative, juridical and economical organization, a constant concern of the historian, we could even say a central one, was the problem of the Romanian medieval town's origin.

In the inter-war period, the debated problems were influenced by the high authority position of Nicolae Iorga. In various works (Iorga 1899: 5; 1920: 11; 1928: 11-15; 1937: 221) of a higher or lower ampleness, the great historian ascribes a peculiar importance to the German descent chapmen and to the commercial transit roads, if not an exclusive one, concerning Romanian medieval town civilization. The one who amplified N. Iorga's thesis, was Gh. I. Brătianu who several times, (Brătianu 1988: 211; 1988: 146; 1991: 190) concerning the same problem, accentuated the international, political and economical interests. Similar points of view as gist, but different as from the enouncement's form's point of view have been present in the work of historians like C. Racoviță (Racoviță 1941: 87) and D. Ciurea (Ciurea 1970: 23).

An important role in the Romanian history is taken by P.P. Panaitescu, who squared up to the problems of the Romanian medieval towns. Several times, especially at the beginning of his research, the author proved his membership to that European current which had ascribed the trade a major role in the birth of some urban centers: „*The towns in the Romanian countries were, first of all, exchange centers, not centers of artisan production...*” (Costăchel, Panaitescu, Cazacu 1957: 52; Panaitescu 1994: 83). But to consider P.P. Panaitescu a partisan and a continuer of “*Iorga-Brătianu school*” would be a fundamental mistake. The proximities and the similarities in opinions stop at the affirmation of the importance of the international trade. Beyond this common point there are bigger and bigger nuances and differentiations, concerning the gist of the debated problem.

Related to the general context in which the transitory trade could influence the evolution of some local historical processes, P.P. Panaitescu invokes two aspects. On the one hand it is about the German colonization phenomenon which asserted beginning from the XII-th century, and on the other hand, the author attributes a central place to the Genovese Italian chapmen and the ones from Venice who had founded colonies at the Black Sea. (Panaitescu 1969: 273).

There are named three ways of trade which transited the territory between the Carpathians and river Nistru: the Tartar way, the Moldavian way as well as the courses that were assuring the bound with Transylvania. During his studies, related to the influence these ways of trade would have had from the perspective of the looming of some urban kernels, the historian oscillated between definite wording and more tinted sentences. We have to specify that most of the times when he speaks about the above mentioned aspects, the author limits himself to simple observations without indicating the concrete data which to plead for the assertion of the international trade's contribution at the medieval towns' genesis. The frame of the problem

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changes radically concerning the historical evolution and the development of the urban centers because in this case, P.P. Panaitescu's argumentation is more generous.

In a study entitled "*Russian and Polish influence on the old Romanian culture*" we find the assertion: „*The greatness and maybe even the foundation of Moldavia is due to the existence of a great trade road that passed over its territories*” (Panaitescu 1927: 5). On another occasion, talking about the same route, the author insists on its contribution at the medieval towns' genesis in the Moldavian space and in the study "*Medieval townships in the Romanian Princedoms*" we have another affirmation: "...*conditions which were demanding the town creation exist at the Lower Danube, videlicet trade routes of European interest in our countries, between XIV-th and XV-th centuries...*" (Panaitescu 1994: 120-121).

Simplifying the discussion we must emphasize the reality that P.P. Panaitescu, in the context defined by the origin of the oldest urban centers, didn't limit his judgments only to the assertion of the contribution of the international trade roads, but he also sued new elements, in fact almost non-existent in the solutions suggested by the majority of the pre-war historians. The author set off the main premise of the formation of some urban type centers, namely, the separation process of the draftsmanship from the agriculture: "*The town being the results of the internal differentiation, between the agriculture workers on the one hand and the artisans on the other, is being formed by the back-tracking of the latter from the villages and their settlement as a new community, come from different places and settled under the protection of a strengthened court*". (Panaitescu 1969:279). The chapmen, foreigners or natives, don't detain exclusiveness any more, when we try to define the contribution of same social classes at the urban life crystallization.

In the direction of the assertion of the above mentioned contribution of the local population at the process of the medieval towns' genesis, P.P. Panaitescu developed a concept, namely "*the valley bourg*": "...*in a remote epoch, the valleys used to organize separate economical units, with their villages, in the middle of which there was the exchange and security center, the waivode headquarters. That is where the foreign chapmen were coming and where the first towns were built, too*". (Panaitescu 1969:282). We can observe that the main value which the author attributes to the voivodal centers is that of an exchange place. But in the same time, in P.P. Panaitescu's opinion, the valley bourgs shouldn't be imagined only as simple economical units where the product exchange between the members of the rural communities used to take place. The author brings into discussion the internal goods implied by the existence of the local waivods who used to reside in these centers, and which were military, fiscal and administrative goods: "*We have to understand them as small military and administrative centers, local courts of the leaders of the valleys*" (Panaitescu 1994:146). Under the light of the above mentioned definitions, it becomes clear the link made by P.P. Panaitescu – and from this comes his great merit – with the process of Romanian society's feudalization through the curdling of the voivodships where the first bourgs emerged, that will grow to the medieval town status.

Besides the valley bourgs, the historian estimated that there was another way of forming of some medieval towns, preceding the trade routes, too. P.P. Panaitescu noticed the fact that several urban settings have names that appear under the form of some plural surnames, which he defines as "*parish-towns*". (Panaitescu 1969:283-284) It is interesting the fact that into the "*parish-towns*" crystallization process the historian observed a Romanian specific, this way limiting to the extra-Carpathians space the transformation of a local community into a habitation with primal features: "*So, we have an indication that some Romanian towns have been formed differently from the usual continental development of the towns [...] by passing by an economic way from the rural parish to a free urban community. This is another form of medieval Romanian social creation. The rural parish is differencing from the inside, transforming itself into towns on the lease of the draftsmanship development and of the attainment of the princely franchise.*" (Panaitescu 1969:283-284)

As a confirmation of the exclusive Romanian origin which P.P. Panaitescu assigns to the oldest kernels that teathed the foundation of the future urban centers we have references to the Romanian voivodships before the foundation: "*having a more developed political and economic life (mills, fisheries, cash income, army), what brings along the need for some merchandise markets*". (Panaitescu 1994:149) By invoking, even if only in passing, a new political and economic life that includes the quoted elements, it is obvious that the author asserted much more complex functions than simple military centers were the local feudals lived. They had an internal structure, an economic life of its own, specific for the recession of the feudalization process, and reflecting in the same time the progress level of the Romanian society. Foreign chapmen come here to market their merchandise, but they are not town founders any more. The insertion, in the studies bound to the genesis of the extra-Carpathians medieval towns, of the elements regarding the feudalization process of the Romanian society, represented, perhaps, the greatest merit for P.P. Panaitescu. It is, in the same time an important benefit brought to the ulterior research of the phenomenon. In this direction, we have to pay homage to P.P. Panaitescu for his contribution at the explaining on internal bases of the foundation of the oldest medieval urban centers. We can say that, beyond the existence of some inadvertences in the historian's judgment, the apparition of the

first studies in which he discoursed this topic enlightened, somewhat, the historical orientation of the time, generating a fundamental change of the research direction of the “*medieval town*” area.

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Although he consequently affirmed the major implications the transit trade routes have had in the crystallization of the medieval urban civilization, especially in the East of the Carpathians, the foreign chapmen don't appear as founders any more, but just as elements which concurred at the renascence of the economic life around the feudal residences. But in their evolution towards urbanization, the historian turned the scales for the assertion of the contribution considered essential of the allogene elements. Though their role was overplayed, the distinction in conception is as clear as possible. Not the international necessities created the urban civilization and the extra-Carpathians medieval states, but they were the results of the multiple transformations implied by the recession of the feudalization process.

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