Political Decay and Cultural Achievements: The Politics of Cultural Patronage During the Phanariot Administration of the Romanian Principalities

Elisabeta Negrău*

*Universitatea Naţională de Arte din Bucureşti, Facultatea de Istoria şi Teoria Artei, str. General Budişteanu nr. 19, sector 1, Bucureşti, cod 010773; e-mail: e_negrau@yahoo.com

Abstract: Political Decay and Cultural Achievements: The Politics of Cultural Patronage During the Phanariot Administration of the Romanian Principalities. The study presents some observations regarding the diligent cultural activity of the Phanariot governors in the Romanian Principalities (1711/1716-1821), in response to the necessity to gradate with notes and details the general negative overview of the scholars regarding the cultural achievements of the Southeastern Europe and particularly of the Romanian Principalities in this late period of political decay, *i.e.* of accentuation of the Greek political dominance against the Romanian people in the times of Ottoman economics' and ideas' decadence.

Key-words: cultural patronage, cultural recession, national conscience, Phanariots, post-Byzantine culture.

By the end of the 18th century the Graecization of the Romanian society was much advanced, owing to the presence of the Phanariot bourgeoisie at many levels in the government, administration and culture. In reaction, Romanian people began to manifest profoundly the conscience of alienation towards the imperial Ottomans who had been taken the place of the former Byzantine Empire, as well as towards the Greeks who showed the intention to patronize the Romanians culturally, prospecting, in fact, to bring the Principalities into their influence sphere and make them to provide economic and political support for the Greek provinces. By the beginning of 19th century, the negative effects of this domination were already profoundly felt, especially by the population from the lower classes. A Romanian contemporary chronicler, *protosynkellos* Naum of Râmnic, describes the situation this way: „... until the coming of the Phanariot rulers, we lived much better in our country (*Simbatriotismos)*. But when the Phanariot rulers came, by their political determents, by their diabolical actions, they made us obey them more and more. They brought nothing but trouble, they weakened our power to fight and they cooled us the love for our country. In a word, they made us poorer even than the populations in Africa and America.... And if this tyranny will be further, alas the woefulness of our country! Even now, during six years, the tyrant Karadja showed himself off in the mankind... like those tyrants of Sicily. His tyranny made the peasantry decay so much…" (C. Erbiceanu, 2003). There is to remark also the interesting knowledge about world's history at this churchman, about whom is known he have studied only in the country.

The Romanian role in the financial sustainment of the eastern Orthodox culture is at maximum during the 17th-18th centuries, by the donations, the book printings and the renderings of monasteries, mainly actions of the voevods' cultural politics. Though, these affiliations of Romanian monasteries to Balkan and near eastern foundations increased so much until the end of the 18th century, that the phenomenon worked in the detriment of the Romanian churches and countries and this was possible because of a lack in the ecclesiastical censure

inside the Romanian law of church founding regarding the establishment which the founder built and financially supported (A. Elian, 2003; V. A. Georgescu, 1980). In the case of the numerous affiliations of the monasteries practiced by the voevods and boyars, the Metropolitan didn't have any rights to interfere, the law not specifying the necessity of his censure or approval. The founders had more prerogatives than the clergy upon churches and monasteries and, practically, their administration and legal status was yet very tied to the feudal law of Byzantine tradition. But to the end of the 18th century the Divan proceeds to stave off the numerous renderings, the Metropolitans acceding, as the former person in the hierarchy of the Divan, to the chrysobulls and the anaphora of the voevod (A. Elian, 2003). The 18th century reveals, thus, unexpected contributions in the matter of protecting the establishments from the interference of the foreign hierarchs and from their pretensions to use the Romanian church's resources. It is an epoch in which the effects of the Austrian Josephinism are felt also by the Phanariots in Wallachia and Moldavia, in the direction of an increasing control of the laical power upon the monastic institutions, in purpose to protect the country's interests. In this process, to the voevod is associated the Metropolitan too, whoever Greek or Romanian (A. Elian, 2003). The voevod Gregory Alexander Ghyka intervenes in Moldavia (N. Iorga, 1929), Constantine Hangerli and Alexander Moruzi in Wallachia, together with the Wallachian Greek Metropolitan Dositheos Filliti in the same cause, of staving off the foreign interference in the administration of Romanian monasteries (A. Elian, 2003). These initiatives are noticeable, considering that they come from rulers of Greek origin.

On the other hand, the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate confers Wallachian Metropolitan, by the second half of the 18th century, the Archbishopric titular see of Caesarea in Cappadocia –hardly to be supported these times by the ecumenical Patriarchate- and, also, a higher status beside other old dioceses lasting from the Byzantine times, but which declined and were not representing anymore but a bygone reality: Soteriopolis, Sevastia, Cerven, Pogoniana. The Constantinopolitan Patriarchate decides that the hierarchs of those ancient Balkan and near eastern dioceses should be elected within the Wallachian Metropolis, fact which has multiple procedural implications (A. Elian, 2003). Firstly, an array of rituals takes place between the Constantinopolitan

Patriarchate and the Wallachian voevods, who had to plight for receiving and supporting these hierarchs; it is established, thus, a tight relation between the Patriarchate, the Wallachian Metropolis and the voevods during the Phanariot domination. Then, these hierarchs are often present at the Wallachian court, fact which will also determine them to compete to the Wallachian Metropolitan chair, too. The Wallachian tradition of electing the Metropolitans prescribed that for this chair should be designated the bishop of Râmnic. This tradition, however, will be consequently disestablished during the 18th century, due to the close relations between the Phanariot princes, the Patriarchate and the oriental clergy. Seven of the twelve Metropolitans of Wallachia who activated during the Phanariot leadership were Greeks. It is significant that in Moldavia, where the society was somewhat anti-Greek for it was more Slavophil, in the 18th century was only one Greek bishop, designated by the insistences of the Phanariot Gregory Ghyka the Third, if we disregard the case of Gabriel Kallimaki, a Graecized Romanian, ex Metropolitan of Thessalonica who, helped by his brother John, dragoman at sultan's court, became Metropolitan of Moldavia (A. Ciurea, 1974).

The favorable economic conditions and the more liberal atmosphere in Wallachia attract the tradesmen, intellectuals and diverse functionaries from the Balkans and Constantinople. There was firstly, a pre-Phanariot period, which prepared the administrative and political monopole from the 18th century (A. Pippidi, 1975; E. Stănescu, 1974; L. Vranoussis, 1977). The effective instauration of the Phanariot governance in the Romanian principalities brought forth a new stage in the cultural development, accentuating the Balkan unity, and meanwhile, building the bases for the modern revolutions of national liberation from 1821 (A. Daskalakis, 1974). Mainly, the baroque-orthodox cultural legacy of the former Romanian voevods - the Cantacuzens and voevod Constantine Brancovan are continued, but in a more eclectic spirit, very tributary to the Constantinopolitan one: the Mavrocordatos' family, the first Phanariot rulers of the Principalities, found there an atmosphere of cultural familiarity in which they integrated themselves quickly and without any trouble, continuing as well the cultural patronage on the directions of Romanian antecessors. The domination of the Mavrocordatos' dynasty lasted over a half of century in the two Principalities, giving to the Romanian society an interesting evolution,

especially by their reforms concerning human rights – the abrogation of villainy (1746 in Wallachia and 1749 in Moldavia), the first act of this kind in the Eastern Europe which generated transformations between the traditional social structures (F. Constantiniu, 1974). Their and successors' actions intended to create new social classes, more mobile and agreeable to changes, which shall form an urban civilization, indispensable in the process of modernity. The general vision of these Illuminated despots (D. Ciurea, 1974) relates to modern ideas, to a productive society which shall approach the manufactory industrial models and products of urban character, averting progressively from the old feudal model. The *Constitution* of Constantine Mavrocordatos (1741, published in *Mercure de France*, July, 1742) is an attempt to modernize the structures of society (Ş. Papacostea, 1974). An important criterion in conferring boyar titles will be the public service and not the large land properties; thus, boyar will be only the person in an official job, a dignitary. The juridical literature mixed in this period the Byzantine law with occidental sources. Alexandru Valentin Georgescu outlines the byzantine peculiarities of the Phanariots, formalists in what concerns the tradition, but starting by now to become full of non-byzantine significations: „non-Byzantium through and over Byzantium" (A. V. Georgescu, 1980, p.13).

Being these conditions of relaxation in the society, a certain liberalization of culture between the limits imposed by the Ottoman censure occurred: commerce, crafts, founding are sustained by a favorable law; many chrysobuls from the 18th century refer to accommodation and regulation of crafts (D. Limona, 1974).

The Greek-Romanian Academies in Bucharest and Iasi conquer prestige in all the Balkan area during this period, by their qualitative professors, mostly Greek, as also by the scholarships they provided for both Transylvanian Romanians and foreigners from the orthodox orient (A. Camariano-Cioran, 1974a-b). A special status had the Greek school from the monastery of Văcăreşti in Bucharest-great monastic foundation of the first Phanariot ruler in Wallachia, Nicholas Mavrocordatos (V. Drăguţ, 1974), which benefited of a large library and typography. Besides the Academies, there were also smaller schools near cathedrals, monasteries, even in smaller towns: at Galaţi, Craiova, Buzău, Argeş, etc. The Phanariot rulers supported also the schools from the Greek provinces in the Balkans, by donations, scholarships, periodical annuities in poorer zones of the Greek, Bulgarian, Albanian, Anatolian, Antioch communities (A. Camariano-Cioran, 1979, 1980).

The main Greek, Turkish and Romanian typographies in the Phanariot period remain mostly those from the Brancovan period: at Anthim monastery and the Metropolitan in Bucharest, at Râmnic, at Mavrogheni monastery also in Bucharest – the most important laical publication center from the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. Two important moments are the instauration of the ecclesial and the prince's censure (by the measures taken by Michael Racoviţă and in the chrysobull from 20 July 1742 "The New Law", which specified the obligations of controlling and approving by the Metropolitan of all the texts to publish; similar states the anaphora of Michael Soutsos from 29 February 1784.), which signifies the entering into a new stage regarding the rules of the published literature, especially laical. In the books' domain, the Phanariots distinguished by their special interest for book patronage and by their great libraries, the one from monastery Văcăreşti in Bucharest being one of the largest in the Southeastern Europe. The Greek publications and the Byzantine classical literature were predominant, but there were also numerous novelties from the entire Europe (C. Dima-Drăgan, 1974; A. Duţu, 1972, 1974a-b; N. Iorga, 1926).

It is remarked that this bookish culture of the Phanariots hasn't stimulate, however, also their artistic spirit (M. A. Musicescu, 1974). The church oriented its programs towards education and written literature, leaving behind the culture of image. The image became less important in the 18th century: its spirit decades or seems to be neglected. This situation may owe to the effects of the oriental civilization on the Byzantine iconic spirit or, more probably, to a more prosaic reality of a lack of systematic artistic education in the Southeastern Europe (E. Costescu, 1983). The artistic education in the Southeastern Europe has the knowledge of the superiority of Occidental arts and techniques. To the narrativisation of the iconography contributed as well the exercise of the reading (A. Duţu, 1979) as the influence of the western model. The main quality of the artistic expression in the 18th century remains the decorative spirit, which concentrates most of the artists' capacity of invention.

The most of the historiography written in the times of Phanariots, in both Principalities, is made by authors of Greek origin. However, they do not present distinct qualities from their anterior models, like the historiographies of Cigala, Dorotheos of Monembasia or Amiras from the 17ᵗʰ century; the Greek historiographies in the 18ᵗʰ century are important for the abundance of historical and social dates, although their contemporary Romanian chronicles like of Ion Neculce and Nicolae Costin are superior in the quality of style and ideas (D. Russo, 1939). The chronicle of Mitrofan Gregoras (1714-1716), the Moldavian chronicle of Nicolas Chiparissa (1716-1717) the one of Constantine Dapontes (*Ephemerides Daces*, 1736-1739), the biography of Constantine Mavrocordatos written by the physician Peter Depasta from Pelopones, and from the end of this period, *The general history of Dacia* (1812), work of Dionysios Photinos are the main historiographies from the times of Phanariots The Greek chronicles are characterized by a stylistic academism quite poor in resources of evolution, marking, thus, the end of the Byzantine and Greek classical cultural tradition. The Romanian historiographies: the rhymed chronicle of Hristache on the leadership of Nicolas Mavrogheni (1787), the chronographs from the beginning of the 19ᵗʰ century, written by Dionisie the Ecclesiarch, Naum of Râmnic, Ioan Dobrescu, by their spontaneity and naivety detached to academism, contribute more substantial to the evolution of historic literature to modern forms (N. Iorga, 1905).

The intellectual preoccupation of the Phanariots for history reaches also the Romanian countries' past: Nicolas Mavrocordatos, Constantine Mavrocordatos, Gregory Mathew Ghyka studied the old Romanian history and supported the idea of researching the daco-roman origins and the Romanian national unity. They contributed, by their governance in both principalities to their rapprochement and encouraged the conservation of the old traditions by studying and restoration of the old voevodal monuments; such campaigns had been done by Constantine Mavrocordat in Wallachia by delegation of Metropolitan Neophytos (a Cretan Greek) and in Moldavia by the Phanariot regnant Gregory Ghyka together with the boyars, mostly in the northern Moldavia (Bucovina).

Resuming, the main characters of the Phanariot political and cultural program in Wallachia and Moldavia during the 18ᵗʰ century may, paradoxically, look to narrow the Byzantine culture's area of influence on the Romanian institutions. At the beginning of the 18ᵗʰ century, its memory was still strongly affirming in the voevodal ceremonial, being visible in the symbols of legitimacy at Constantine Brancovan: the divine investment, the symbolic association with emperor Constantine, a spectacular posture; however, the bureaucrat character of the Phanariot governance, supervised by the Ottoman empire, will gradually replace the Byzantine vision of the curial status. Is enough to look at the princes' votive representations which, despite their basic conventional character, are the area in which the mentalities, the symbols, the political ideas are most visible. Or, the ruler's portrait in the Phanariot times is very poor in Byzantine significations: the divine investment isn't represented anymore; to the end of the century they will abandon the conventional crown, too; the sumptuous voevodal vestments are simplified, being assimilated to common dignitaries' clothes. In compensation, the preoccupation for a more plastic representation of the portraits intensifies, gaining much in physiognomic observation and character.

Although, in the social structures, the feudal traditionalism begins to disappear; by the end of the 18ᵗʰ century, the mentality of the younger Romanian boyars was increasingly westernized; French was replacing the Greek, as diplomatic language. There was a general aspiration to an urban society, of which' effective structures will appear only in the 19ᵗʰ century. Different types of boyars' mansions, ones for work and official receptions, others as cottage houses, of retreatment, were already replacing the old monumental, feudal palaces, together with the redoubt, austere architecture (M. Ispir, 1996; V. Stancu, 1974; R. Theodorescu, 1987).

In the church foundry's activity, a significant fact occurred: because on its' vertiginous increase, especially in the milieu of mid social classes in the process of affirmation, the voevod would put the founding activities under the tutelage of the ecclesial hierarchy, which would give the accord to the acts of religious patronage. Is to be seen here the application of a modern principle, the separation of powers within the state. The phenomenon of church founding became civic: the boyars started to abandon their feudal symbols, of great cultural patrons, and to associate with other mid classes: tradesmen, functionaries, craftsmen, priests to establish churches. This fact had as an effect the enclosure of social

classes which were distant in their condition in the times of feudality, and from here the way for modern social mentalities was open.

Regarding the monasteries, it is observed that, to the end of the 18th century, the Phanariot governors and the hierarchs trend to restrain the conditions of the numerous rendering of the Romanian monasteries to Athos and near east. In general, all the energy of the governor and the church concentrated to organize more schools in towns and provinces and to increase the education level of the priests in the country, who were in charge with the education of the popular classes. The church is preoccupied with the systematic cultivation of peasant clergy. At the initiative of the rulers and the hierarchs, theological seminaries are been organized and books addressed to priests are printed (A. Duțu, 1974a-b, 1978).

In the 18th century the literary education of Greek classical orientation from schools and academies (C. Erbiceanu, 2003) offers, especially to younger generations, many European cultural references: the figures of the philosophers, scientists, literates and heroes of the Antiquity, all of them personalities of the Hellenic classicism. „The Greek Olympos – with its Gods and its Muses – have been welcomed for many centuries in the Romanian Academies from Bucharest and Iassy" remarked Constantin Erbiceanu on the state of the Romanian sciences from the second half of the 17th century to the 19th century. They start to replace, in a laical spirit, the medieval models of the Byzantine saints. These laical models enter significantly in the religious iconography, too, developing, in the same spirit of civic and popular cultivation, a less theologically savant iconography, but, thus, more accessible for the popular communities, by the references to a known scholarly literature (*e.g.* antique philosophers' and sibyls' figures), but also to a popular literature, like fables, *Sindipa the philosopher, Alexandria-* the epopee of Alexander the Great, *The Bestiary* (A. Paleolog, 1984). In the iconography of the churches' painting, the literary traditions are present in different forms starting from the official establishments, of the voevods and hierarchs to provincial ones, from villages and burgs. These seem to owe the systematization of the written culture in most the social stratums in Wallachia, starting to the 18th century, to which the Phanariots and the Greek hierarchs too, had the initiating role.

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