

New Europe College Yearbook
2023-2024
Volume 1

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CĂTĂLIN CERNĂTESCU
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MARIYA HORYACHA
SZABOLCS LÁSZLÓ
MARKENC LORENCI
RĂZVAN NICOLESCU
NICOLETA ROMAN

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FOREWORD FROM THE EDITOR

The *New Europe College Yearbook* is an annual publication by the New Europe College – Institute for Advanced Study. It features original research by the institute’s fellows, completed during their fellowship programs. What makes the *Yearbook* stand out is its commitment to bringing together work from a wide range of academic fields, methodologies, and styles. This diversity gives the publication a unique, open character that reflects the varied interests of its contributors.

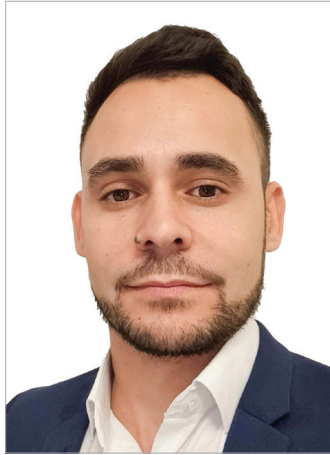
The present volume brings together nine contributions from different academic fields, spanning from medieval and religious studies, to history, anthropology, linguistics, and musicology.

Jorge Luis Borges’s idea of infinite knowledge in *The Library of Babel* offers a fitting metaphor for the *Yearbook*’s vision. Knowledge accumulation is specialized, intricate, but also endlessly diverse, reflecting the complexity of human understanding. The *Yearbook* embraces this diversity. Yet, unlike a static library, the *Yearbook* is dynamic—it keeps pace with the flow of new ideas, offering a snapshot of ongoing academic conversations.

Even with its diversity, the *Yearbook* upholds high standards of academic excellence. Every contribution is reviewed by experts in the relevant field—whether they’re part of New Europe College’s academic staff, Editorial Advisory Board, alumni network, or broader circle of collaborators. The reviewers assess each piece for its quality, relevance, and impact, ensuring that the work meets the expectations of both its specific field and the academic community at large.

At the same time, the *Yearbook* serves a broader academic audience. While it is not explicitly interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary, its format encourages dialogue across fields and disciplines, much like the fellowship programs themselves. Each contribution speaks not only to specialists but also to readers from other areas of study, fostering a spirit of openness and intellectual exchange.

In this sense, the *Yearbook* is also a reflection of the community of researchers that is New Europe College.



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Biographical note

Cătălin Cernătescu is interested in research on sacred chant, having expertise in Byzantine musical paleography and alternative systems for the notation of Orthodox music. As a scholar dedicated to the restoration and promotion of early church music, he has successfully secured multiple grants allowing him advanced studies in this field. He has authored, edited, and was coeditor of 15 volumes on Byzantine music and musicology. His work has been presented at numerous international conferences and symposia in Greece, the UK, and Romania.

CENSORSHIP, CONTROL, AND COMPLIANCE IN BYZANTINE MUSICOLOGY IN COMMUNIST ROMANIA*

Cătălin Cernătescu

Abstract

My paper examines censorship and control in Byzantine musicology during the communist regime in Romania. The investigation draws upon archive materials from the Romanian Composers and Musicologists Union which reveal a previously unknown narrative. Within these records, covering the years 1950 to 1989, I unearthed unpublished accounts on Byzantine musicology and on scholars writing on church chant. In addition to identifying explicit instances of censorship, I have sought evidence for the compliance with the policies that heavily restricted the use of theological vocabulary. Furthermore, I have examined how musicologists outside such expert groups engaged with the research conducted by their peers. Through this pursuit, I aim to enhance the understanding of how specialists in sacred chant navigated the intricate landscape of cultural dynamics during a tumultuous historical period.

Keywords: Byzantine musicology, sacred chant, censorship, ideology

* I am indebted to Professor Nicolae Gheorghiiță, NEC alumnus, for his invaluable support. Due to his knowledge of the subject, the bibliographical and methodological recommendations that he provided me with were particularly useful, as were our discussions, following which I significantly adjusted my perspective on the topic. I am grateful to Professor Dan Dediu, President of the Romanian Composers and Musicologists Union (UCMR) for granting me access to its archives. Professor Dediu initiated the digitization of this collection, a project to which I contributed during the documentation process. I am also grateful to Professors Valentina Sandu-Dediu and Anca Oroveanu as well as to all NEC staff for all the interactions from which I have benefited in one way or another. Finally, I greatly appreciate the help of Professor Maria Alexandru from “Aristotle” University Thessaloniki in facilitating the exceptional conditions of my research mobility in June 2024. To all who have supported me in this endeavor, my heartfelt appreciation and sincere thanks.

1. Introduction

My interest in the censorship and control which Romanian Byzantine musicology was subjected to during the communist regime is relatively recent. New research horizons opened via the participation in two international conferences on politically controlled music, organized between 2021 and 2022 by Professor Nicolae Gheorghîță at the National University of Music Bucharest (UNMB).¹ I realized at the time that it would be a fruitful endeavor to go deeper into a less explored theme. Four experts had previously written about how ideological control regulated, conditioned and shaped the discourse of Byzantine musicology. Franz Metz (2000), Elena Chircev (2012, 2020), Nicolae Gheorghîță (2015) and Costin Moisil (2019) have highlighted various sides of the phenomenon, constructing a very well-documented overview. In their turn, musicologists Valentina Sandu-Dediu (2002), Octavian Lazăr Cosma (2020), Florinela Popa (2022) and Monica Lup (2023) wrote about the limits which the narrative of religious music had to fit. It seemed that these investigations had thoroughly covered the matter. It was only after I started working with documents from the Romanian Composers and Musicologists Union archives, currently accommodated by the UNMB, that I was able to appreciate the potential of unpublished documentary sources to enrich some chapters in the history of Byzantine musicology between 1950 and 1989, the period on which I focused my attention for the present study. Everything I knew about the massive censorship of the domain came exclusively from papers and from the anecdotes of Byzantine musicologists who had survived the regime, so immersing myself in the UCMR archives was a profoundly revealing cognitive experience. These documents revealed unknown and sometimes astonishing situations involving the few specialists on sacred music who were members of the Union. Careful analysis of several hundreds of files confirmed that political interference in institutional processes was a powerful coercive factor for cultural producers. The evidence exposes multiple contexts in which sacred music specialists, were, like their peers, compelled to produce cultural-semantic distortions of scientific discourse in order to support the symbolic representations imagined and idealized by the Power.

2. Methodological approach

This investigation is based mostly on unpublished documents from the Romanian Composers and Musicologists Union archives. Since they cannot currently be organized according to library standards, the selection of the files I studied has been carried out in a rather random, but controlled manner. I tried to select the material according to its importance in institutional processes and the likelihood of identifying significant information. Thus, I was more interested in the files of the musicology section than in those of the symphonic or choral music sections, as well as in the secretarial records, in internal and external correspondence, transcripts, purchasing plans and materials, notes and information records. In addition, I paid attention to those files with press clippings, which contain a considerable amount of information about Romanian musicology and the Union's activity.

Of the more than 1000 records I studied, approximately 250 are related to Byzantine musicology. A few dozen of those illustrate situations or contexts in which the authors of writings on religious music faced censorship or control, imposed either from outside the institution or from within it. As the documents are abundant in information, I selected only the most relevant ones for this paper, those likely to contribute to outlining the unknown history of the field during the communist regime.

At the same time, I limited my research, both temporally and methodology-wise. As I was not interested in Byzantine music and musicology during the two dictatorships that preceded the official installation of communism in Romania (the Carlist and Antonescian regimes), I focused on the period 1950-89, the outer limits determined by the documentary materials discovered in the UCMR archives. Even if Byzantine musicology was of interest to other specialists able to publish in the few periodicals issued by the Orthodox Church (especially in *Studii Teologice* [Theological Studies] and *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* [Romanian Orthodox Church]) without being heavily censored, I focused exclusively on those who were active in the Composers Union, whose discourse was carefully controlled and directed towards politically and ideologically relevant themes. Simultaneously, I sought evidence of their compliance with the policies that severely restricted the possibility of employing a theological vocabulary, perceived as an emanation from a competitive ideological field, religion (Vasile, 2010, p. 226). I was also

interested to see how other musicologists, outside the group of experts, related to the research of their fellows or to sacred music in general.

In order to understand how the field evolved within a politically controlled institution as well as the actions taken by those who studied church chant, I had to look for answers outside the boundaries of my familiar field. Particularly helpful were my readings in anthropology, sociology, history and linguistics. Writings by Katherine Verdery, Dennis Deletant, Vladimir Tismăneanu and Cornelia Ilie were illuminating, helping me to understand the mechanisms behind the relations between cultural workers, institutions and the Power during the communist period. For instance, Katherine Verdery's sociological investigations (1994) contain the "key" to explaining the behaviors of Byzantine musicologists and those with whom they interacted in various contexts within the Composers' Union. Following the models described by Verdery, who explains the causes of the compliance of cultural producers under totalitarian rule, I was able to interpret several situations whose meanings had initially evaded my grasp. Reading Tismăneanu (2003) and Deletant (2010) facilitated my understanding of the political dynamics of the reference era. Cornelia Ilie's papers on the semantic roles in totalitarian discourse in Romania (1998, 2005) also convinced me that it might be profitable to follow some linguistic markers that indicate the existence of ideological control and censorship.

3. General outlines of the political context

After the official assumption of power by the Communist regime in Romania on December 30, 1947, the apparent symphony between Church and State became increasingly dissonant. Drawing inspiration from the Soviet model, the totalitarian regime implemented a range of strategies to curb the influence of the Church on society. In the fundamental handbook of communism, rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideology, religion was perceived as a significant impediment to socialist advancement and was targeted for complete eradication. The Directorate of Propaganda and Agitation recommended in 1949 that the Ministry of Arts and Information make films to combat superstitions, especially persistent in rural areas, and, through cinema caravans, screen Soviet documentary which, on the one hand, would reflect the harmful character of religious prejudices, and on the other hand, would advocate atheistic scientific theories (Vasile,

2010, p. 227). In the following years, the ideological machinery was put to work with the goal of reeducating the working people. In the 1950s and 1960s, powerful propaganda tools such as the printed press were engaged in the process. The efforts of reputable State publishers such as the official scientific and political publishers (Editura politică and Editura Științifică) were directed towards translating anti-ecclesiastical writings to promote an atheistic-scientific education. *The Origin of Religion* (1956), *The Bible for Believers and Non-Believers* (1961), *The Atheist's Guide* (1961 edition), *The Essence of Christianity* (1961), and *The Funny Bible* (1962), soon became the preferred textbooks for lecturers, propagandists, and agitators engaged in combating religious superstition. The newspapers also allocated extensive coverage to fighting religious mysticism. In the emerging ideological landscape, religion-themed works had difficulties in getting published. Anything remotely associated with mystical beliefs was met with strong rejection and marginalization. To prevent drawing unwanted attention, research on religious music had to disguise its content by incorporating it in the broader context of celebrating the autochthonous musical heritage (Gheorghiță, 2015, pp. 42-43).

4. A brief overview of Byzantine musicology in communist Romania

Byzantine musicology is a rather young discipline, dealing with the study of orthodox music of Byzantine tradition and also known by the generic, slightly ambiguous name of Byzantinology. In Romania, the first research on sacred chant was carried out towards the end of the 19th century. Due to the lack of a coherent methodology and the use of predominantly ecclesiastical terminology, these early explorations could not be assimilated to the domain of musicology.

The foundations of the first Romanian school of Byzantine musicology were laid only in 1932, by Reverend Ioan D. Petrescu (1884-1970), an intellectual with a solid musical education acquired at Schola Cantorum in Paris and whose research and working methods caught the eye of scholars, from the West in particular. After 1950, several of Petrescu's disciples developed a strong fascination for this field, by then gradually evolving. Assembled around him were such researchers as Gheorghe Ciobanu (1909-97), also an ethnomusicologist, Marin Ionescu (1909-92), Titus Moisescu (1922-2002), director of Editura Muzicală (the official music

publisher), and clergy members such as Grigore Panțiru (1905-81) and Sebastian Barbu-Bucur (1930-2015). They were among the few researchers of religious music who were members of the Romanian Composers and Musicologists Union, restructured in 1949 and subsequently placed under the authority of the Committee of Art and Culture of the Ideological Directorate of the Romanian Communist Party.

Aware of the potential opportunities that historiography could offer, Byzantine musicologists gave special attention to this aspect of their research. Adopting such a strategy inevitably made them targets of rigorous ideological scrutiny. Maneuvering musicological discourse between the two dominant languages of the communist regime, Marxist-Leninist and nationalist, could not be achieved without compromises. Following the reestablishment of nationalism as a cultural strategy in 1964, Byzantine music scholars were tasked with meeting the regime's anticipations and creating sustainable representations of Romanian historical continuity. Their firm stances and investigations from angles inaccessible to other musicologists brought them substantial accumulations of symbolic capital as well as various benefits: documentary visits in the country and abroad, short-term mobility and, occasionally, scholarships abroad. By thoroughly rejecting adversarial theories, such as the influence of cultural Slavism,² their studies indirectly contributed to strengthening the legitimizing narrative of the governing elite and underscored the distinct *national* character in music. Traditional musicology had been unable to document the existence of a Romanian musical culture before the 17th century, but Byzantine musicologists — most of whom had solid theological studies and were Greek, Slavonic, and ancient musical notations experts — managed to overcome this temporal “handicap”. They have done so by meticulously researching one century at a time, ultimately arguing, based on written documents, for the existence of Romanian music in the 11th century and even earlier. As a result of their research, works on the history of music presented an autochthonous musical art that was at least 1000 years old and thus a unifying element of Romanians in terms of ethnicity and language. Attuned to the set of values of cultural nationalism, the Byzantine musicologists succeeded in ensuring their representativeness within Romanian musicology, to which they also conferred the status of a key discipline for tracing a deeply Romanianized history. It was only through the study of church chant that the antiquity of local music could be satisfactorily demonstrated.

One explanation for Byzantine musicologists embracing a nationalist cultural rhetoric relates to the impossibility of adopting a position of ideological neutrality, given that the regime operated with absolute binary labels, which also applied to the guilt of being passive towards an ideological phenomenon or aspect: non-adherence to Protochronism³ automatically translated as opposing it, neutral views automatically mean anti-nationalist views, etc. Thus, once Protochronist theories had monopolized all fields of culture, musicologists as well as other categories of specialists such as writers or archaeologists became engaged in a vigorous competition to feed this regime-instrumented trend, competing for resources such as important positions, institutional and private privileges, funding for scientific publications, less intense ideological control, etc. The model used by the Power to allocate resources favored those capable of constructing historical and cultural models that could substantiate the idealized past of the country (Verdery, 1994, pp. 70-71). This may explain why, at the turn of 1980s, UCMR was interested in reinforcing its ranks of musicologists with a fresh intake of Byzantine musicologists. They counted on their ability to interpret various sources and to investigate the evolution of the ancient Romanian musical culture. The origins of this heritage were being pushed further and further back, almost to the moment of ethnogenesis in the first centuries of our era.

Byzantine musicologists, a particularly valuable human resource, could therefore contribute to the consolidation of a politically engaged musicology as relevant as archaeology, history or literature studies. Sacred music specialists have decisively contributed to filling the gaps in the history of music through their attempts to prove the existence of original ancient musical practices, uniformly spread throughout the country, indirectly feeding ideological fixations focused on authenticity and genealogy (Tismăneanu, 2014, p. 48). Thus, they had to become carriers of indigenist cultural policies, ostentatiously trumpeting the originality and exceptionalism of local religious music culture, fruits of Romanian creativity.

5. Discussing church music in the early 1950s

Despite the atheistic climate enforced by the regime at the end of the 1940s, discussions about Byzantine chant persisted within the university environment, albeit sporadically and often containing the necessary

ideological clichés. For instance, in his class on the history of Romanian music from 1951, UCMR secretary and State Conservatory professor Zeno Vancea ensured that sacred chant received adequate attention. Although his lectures contained numerous references to Marxist-Leninist doctrine, Vancea boldly explored some themes related to Byzantine music. While completely avoiding ecclesiastical terminology, he employed it carefully, aligning with prevailing political discourse. Talking about Anton Pann (1796/7-1854), Byzantine music composer and performer, Vancea portrayed him as a “church chanter”, but also highlighted his role as a “propagator of folk music” who developed a political program for “the struggle against the feudal order” (Vancea, 1951, p. 40). Pann’s comprehensive efforts were acknowledged as an exceptionally valuable contribution to shaping the culture of the nation.

In 1954, Vancea, now vice president of the Composers Union, along with several other members of the Musicology Bureau, proposed topics on sacred chant for the 1955 work plan of the Romanian Academy. The Musicology Bureau argued for the compilation of a catalog of musical sources that would also include Byzantine music manuscripts, as representing the oldest evidence of indigenous musical culture. The catalog would have served as a reply to the invitation extended by the International Association of Libraries, which aimed to create a repertoire of medieval music sources. However, as the project initiators soon lost interest in Byzantine music, concerns arose regarding the perceived lack of recognition for the antiquity of our country’s musical culture (Proces-verbal nr. 5 [Minute no. 5], 1954, p. 5). From this moment onward, considerable efforts were made to involve sacred chant specialists in cataloging manuscripts found across the country and from abroad. It is likely that this key moment underpins Reverend I.D. Petrescu’s inclusion in the Union starting November 1955 (Dumitrescu, 1998, p. 127). But, despite his remarkable academic qualifications, he was at a disadvantage because of his profession, and he soon had to face hostile reactions.

6. I.D. Petrescu, the priest with a call for musicology

Active participation in the cultural life of the creative unions seemed to be the compulsory professional route both for those recognized as outstanding personalities in a particular field and for those who sought to accumulate personal capital and career advancement. As an exception to these general

trends, reverend I.D. Petrescu, who enjoyed prestige more internationally than locally, had to be persuaded, and insistingly, to join the Composers Union. His admission occurred at the end of 1955, although it was not recorded in any internal document. Musicologist Octavian Lazăr Cosma (b. 1933) recalls that Petrescu was insistently courted by the Union's leaders. In their attempts to convince him, they presented a distorted reality regarding the Party's attitude towards the Church:

How difficult it was to bring among us, at the Union, this scholar who knew ancient notations, who had frequented the ancient libraries of Europe [...] We won him over by telling him that the regime was lenient, whereas it was in fact intransigent and an sworn enemy of the Church. (Cosma, 2021, p. 150)

After the closure of the Academy of Sacred Music in 1948 following the implementation of the education reform of the same year, Petrescu retired into self-imposed isolation (Moisescu, 1999, p. 10; Cosma, 2021, p. 132). Viewing his institutional affiliation as an entry into a system controlled by a regime to which he showed neither admiration nor attachment, Petrescu avoided getting too involved in the work of the Union, although two years before his death he had been appointed honorary president of the Musicology Bureau (Cosma, 2019, p. 477). At any rate, in the first years with the Union, Petrescu was the subject of controversial discussions, fueled by the anti-ecclesiastic attitudes of the representatives of the Power.

In September 1959, during the committee meeting of the Musicology Bureau, the case of Reverend Petrescu — acclaimed as the most prominent Byzantine musicologists in the world at the time and enjoying the recognition of many foreign scholars — was discussed (Stenograma ședinței de comitet [Transcript of the Board Meeting], 1959, p. 28). Union's leader Ion Dumitrescu (1913-96) revealed that he had personally encouraged Reverend Petrescu to undertake the monumental work *Études de paléographie musicale byzantine*, which would to be published only in 1967. This scholarly endeavor aimed to shed light on the relationship between Byzantine music and Romanian folk modes. According to Dumitrescu, the challenges of Byzantine chant were captivating the attention of intellectuals worldwide and fueling debate and exploration. Byzantinology issues also held an important position on the UNESCO agenda for science and art. During the Archaeological Congress held in the Netherlands that same year, the representative of the Romanian

People's Republic was approached by attending scholars regarding Reverend Petrescu's groundbreaking work. They suggested gathering a substantial amount in US dollars and Belgian francs to support Petrescu's ongoing research, insisting that the book be officially commissioned and published by UNESCO.

Reverend Petrescu's positive reception in the West stood in stark contrast to the distorted image propagated by "malicious sources within the Union" (Stenograma ședinței de comitet [Transcript of the Board Meeting], p. 29). Dumitrescu himself had faced denunciation from "less esteemed members of the Unions which, because of the emptiness inside their heads and in a destructive spirit" accused him of financially supporting priests, referring to the compensation granted to the musicologists for the submitted studies, which was also granted to reverend Petrescu for his work (Stenograma ședinței de comitet [Transcript of the Board Meeting], pp. 29-30). After receiving complaints, the competent state authorities conducted an inspection of the Union's financial records but found no irregularities. The consequence of this specific event and other similar incidents was the termination of state funding for publishing musicology books. The situation escalated to the point where an official in the state administration exclaimed, "Give me a break with musicology!" and suggested that "in order to get rid of musicologists, only translations should be printed" (Stenograma ședinței de comitet [Transcript of the Board Meeting], 1959, p. 30).

Nevertheless, on November 1, 1960, the Composers Union sent a list containing information about Romanian musicologists to its Russian counterpart in Moscow. Alongside concise biographical information, Petrescu was described as a "reputable Byzantine musicologist" (Către Uniunea Compozitorilor Sovietici [To the Union of Soviet Composers], 1960, p. 191). While the educational backgrounds of other scholars were mentioned, the intentional omission of his theological studies was likely deliberate, as was that of the fact that he was a member of the clergy.

Reverend Petrescu was repeatedly invited to contribute to the Union's editorial projects. His only other work apart from his monumental work on Byzantine musical paleography (1967) was an article in the first 1965 issue of *Studii de muzicologie* [Musicology Studies]. In his works, Petrescu avoided the use of ideological jargon, which had also infiltrated musicology and he consistently approached research in a quasi-academic manner, without mimicking the language of the regime.

7. A Trojan horses and other myths story

While I.D. Petrescu, with his widely recognized erudition, stood out by being insistently courted by the Composers Union, other Byzantine musicologists had to explore alternative paths to join the organization. Until near the end of Gheorghe Gheorghiu Dej's regime of Stalinist imprint (1948-1965), with a few exceptions, it was almost impossible to discuss the possibility of exploring themes related to sacred music.

Reflecting on the development and spread of Byzantine musicology within the Composers Union, I found the analogy of the Trojan horse from Greek mythology to be particularly fitting, as it aptly describes how specialists were able to penetrate this politically controlled structure. Initially, musicologists such as Gheorghe Ciobanu and Titus Moisescu engaged in research on other topics, including folklore and classical music. As central policies began to increasingly emphasize ancient Romanian cultural assets, musicologists underwent a spectacular metamorphosis, becoming dedicated researchers of the sacred music phenomenon. Concurrently, other specialists, like Sebastian Barbu-Bucur, cleverly disguised their research on church chant as investigations into early music, gradually expanding the religious vocabulary while still within the limits of ideological tolerance. To ensure their relevance in such a hostile environment, I.D. Petrescu's successors had to fuel the founding myth of Dacian lineage and other historical imaginaries produced by the Power, emphasizing in particular what historian Lucian Boia calls the "antiquity – unity – continuity triad" (Boia, 2018, p. 9).

Passionate researchers didn't waste the opportunity to write about sacred chant, even within the confines of an ideologically controlled discourse. By the middle of 1963, the new generation of musicologists began to address certain aspects of Byzantine music, articulating them in an appropriate language. At the first meeting of the Union's Bureau of Musicology in June 1963, one such young musicologist-researcher was Stelian Bucur or Sebastian Barbu-Bucur,⁴ with his paper "Early Romanian Music in Oriental Notation" (Procesul-verbal al şedinţei de lucru [Minutes of the Working Meeting], 1963, June 6, p. 112). Although Bucur was not yet officially a member of the Composers Union, he was, judging by the formidable disguise of the contents under the cover of a catchy title, surprisingly familiar with the ideological jargon used in the organization. Despite his substantial contributions to the development of the field and perhaps because he was ordained by the Church as deacon, Sebastian

Barbu-Bucur was accepted as a candidate member only in November 1970.

Equipped with appropriate resources to uphold the official narrative of uniqueness and continuity, Byzantine musicology started to make headway within the Union. Its significance was perceived in the context of the increasing necessity to write a history of Romanian music that would satisfy the Party's ideological expectations. This issue was raised for discussion in multiple sessions of the Musicology Bureau throughout 1963. Considering that the earliest written documents attesting to the existence of musical practice on Romanian land appeared only in the 17th century, Byzantine musicology was tasked with bridging the historical voids through music manuscripts, whether Romanian or Greek, found in various libraries and monasteries.

Mainly concerned until then with ethnomusicology, Gheorghe Ciobanu, graduate of theological studies and disciple of I.D. Petrescu (Moisescu, 1999, p. 110), took advantage of the favorable conjuncture and turned his attention to sacred chant. A skilled connoisseur of Byzantine music and leveraging the advantage provided by the respectable status he already enjoyed as an ethnomusicologist, at the June 20, 1963 meeting he requested approval for travel expenses for a research trip to the study in the libraries of monasteries in northern Moldavia. The Bureau regarded this initiative as praiseworthy, maintaining that "the materials in these libraries are of particular importance for *The History of Romanian Music*" (Procesul-verbal al şedinţei de lucru [Minutes of the Working Meeting], 1963, June 20, p. 118). Five months later, the Bureau took note of Ciobanu's work report and concluded that the amount allocated "was properly spent" (Procesul-verbal al şedinţei de lucru [Minutes of the Working Meeting], 1963, November 21, p. 154). Motivated by the positive reception of his undertaking, in 1964 Ciobanu started invoking at the Bureau's meetings the importance of studying Byzantine music manuscripts, arguing that in order to support musicology "we must give broad support and help to all" (Procesul-verbal al şedinţei de organizare [Minutes of the Working Meeting], 1964, February 29, p. 3). Drawing upon his recent research experience in the field, he attempted to persuade the Bureau about the existence of a large quantity of "ancient manuscripts, written on Romanian land, that remain undeciphered and unexplored" (Procesul-verbal al şedinţei de organizare [Minutes of the Working Meeting], 1964, February 29, p. 3). Boldly, Ciobanu also offered

to organize a course in Byzantine notation at the Union in the autumn of the same year, with the aim of researching old manuscripts.

Acknowledging the existence of some lacunae in the history of Romanian music, the work plan of 1964 included a seminar on musical culture until the end of the 18th century. As Ciobanu intended to address the issue of Byzantine music, he emphasized, albeit with caution, that the material should be reviewed in advance. His prudent attitude was due to the increased political control over the Union. In April, a surprising announcement came. The State Committee for Culture and Art appointed an observer, granting him permanent participation in the Union's meetings. In the presence of this observer, perceived as a man of the regime, defensive actions were swift to emerge. The ever-cautious Gheorghe Ciobanu wisely requested that the meeting agenda be shared in advance to facilitate active participation in analyzing and resolving various issues (Procesul-verbal al şedinţei Biroului [Minutes of the Meeting], 1964, April 13, p. 5).

8. Shaping the narrative and purpose of Byzantine musicology

Starting from the end of 1964, a series of events would propel Byzantine musicology as one of the most significant cultural fields, validating its practitioners as key researchers in the eyes of the regime. On the agenda of the last meeting of December 1964 was the discussion regarding the invitation addressed to Romanian musicologists to participate in the Bydgoszcz Early Music Festival (Poland) in 1966. Members of the Musicology Bureau emphasized that the Romanian delegation had to consist of well-trained individuals with historical expertise, as a symposium on Byzantine music was scheduled after the festival. During this event it was crucial to demonstrate that Byzantine music had influenced not only Slavic but also Romanian music, countering any potential innuendos about the country's cultural or historical desynchronization or inferiority. Gheorghe Ciobanu, one of the three musicologists selected to participate, presented a paper on "Byzantine Musical Culture in Romania from the 15th to the 18th Century", whose analysis by the Musicology Bureau in June 1965 is the only one recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Discussions indicate a strong sharing of ideological alignment within the Union. The way scientific discourse was recalibrated illustrates the musicologists' zeal and experience in such practices. One of the members was resolute

in emphasizing the uniqueness of Byzantine musical culture. In his opinion, since some monasteries in northern Moldavia distinguished by their universally recognized unique architecture, the existence of an equally unique musical culture was self-evident. At such an event as the Bydgoszcz Early Music Festival, promoting the country was crucial, hence it was advisable that it be introduced as “Romania”, and not “Romanian People’s Republic”. In case of lacking documents to support certain claims, “their absence should be downplayed, not emphasized” (Procesul-verbal al şedinţei de lucru [Minutes of the Working Meeting], 1965, June 11, p. 97). Addressing another member’s opinion that the paper would reveal how inefficient Romanian musical culture was, the Secretary of the Union recommended that Ciobanu’s report show greater optimism and proposing that “instead of using negations, affirmative statements should prevail in describing phenomena” (Procesul-verbal al şedinţei de lucru [Minutes of the Working Meeting], 1965, June 11, p. 98). A few days later, the reports for the festival in Bydgoszcz had been corrected, and the Musicology Bureau convened once again to acknowledge the modifications.

Gheorghe Ciobanu’s focus on the study of sacred music was particularly timely, given the Union’s lack of specialists in this area. The strict political control during the Dej regime had deterred all possible substantial contributions to this field. It was only during Nicolae Ceauşescu’s dictatorship (1965-89), with its apparent ideological relaxation, the opening towards the West and the need to combat the tendencies of neighboring socialist states to appropriate national assets, that a new generation of Byzantine musicologists was activated, with Ciobanu as its uncontested leader. In a report on musicological activity and the problems it faces, dated April 1966, in which it was stated that “the musicologist is a responsible militant, essential on the front of our socialist ideals-based music” (Probleme actuale ale activităţii muzicologice [Musicological Activity Today and the Problems it Faces], 1966, f. 119), such Byzantinology researchers as I.D. Petrescu and Nicolae Lungu (1900-1993) were recognized as active members of the Musicology Bureau. The work of the Bureau was praised, emphasizing the efforts made to apply Marxist-Leninist principles to the study of music. In spite of the efficiency of the methods, there was a major problem: too little was known about Romanian music up to the end of the 18th century, which could leave the undesirable impression that there had been no professional musical production before that time. For this reason, the Union initiated a nationwide exploration of monastery archives and libraries, a venture that

promised significant contributions to the annals of Romanian music. The scarcity of experts in sacred music documents was a pressing concern, as their disappearance would permanently hinder the development of a comprehensive history of indigenous music.

One of the important sectors of Romanian musical reality from the past - Byzantine music - is about to be almost impossible to investigate. Several Romanian personalities of the older generation showed interest in Byzantinology. Today, however, there is no such connoisseur or specialist among the younger generation. The lack of a musicology section in education that, among other things, would include Byzantinology as a basic discipline or as a specialization has led to this dire situation, which, if not urgently corrected, may cause irreversible damage to the elaboration of the history of Romanian music. We must therefore take advantage of those few Byzantinology scholars who can still pass on their knowledge to the younger generations. Otherwise we will have to learn Byzantinology from foreigners (Germans, French) or to import Byzantine musicologists. (Probleme actuale ale activității muzicologice [Musicological Activity Today and the Problems it Faces], 1966, f. 120)

Byzantine musicologists strengthened their position by advocating the safeguarding of active specialists, fostering knowledge transfer across generations and an emphasis of how failure thereof would inevitably lead to the undesirable influx of foreign expertise. These arguments would soon yield the intended outcomes.

A musicological debate was planned for the end of 1966 at the Composers Union Committee. One of the key topics was Byzantinology, which had started to pique the curiosity of musicologists and scholars through the exploration and dissemination of anonymous works and those of notable composers from the past. The religious origins and purposes of the discovered manuscripts and chants were often overlooked, incorporated instead into the national cultural heritage. The analysis of these hymns was part of a strategy to showcase the richness of ancient Romanian music to the world. Seizing this advantageous moment, Ciobanu proposed, in the meeting of November, 3, three research areas in old Romanian music: folklore, Byzantine and Gregorian music, and secular music creation. He also offered once again to give an introductory course in Byzantine music for Union members, an unprecedented move in the political climate of the time, and required the Union management's approval.⁵ Management representative Vasile Tomescu appreciated the

initiative “to reinforce the pool of musicologists and to specialize in fields that are no longer viable.” (Procesul-verbal al şedinţei de lucru [Minutes of the Working Meeting], 1966, November 3, p. 143).

That Byzantine musicology could constitute a formidable and profitable research route into the country’s musical past was also demonstrated by the success of the Romanian specialists at the Early Music Festival in Poland. After the event, the state-controlled Romanian press lavishly praised the three musicologists who proved the existence of a musical culture “of high compositional level in eras considered ‘blank’ in our music history” (Cosma, 1966, p. 5). The Bydgoszcz festival had thus become one of the international stages where Romanians could showcase the splendors of their ancient musical heritage, especially the one ecclesiastical.

Following that remarkable triumph, efforts to promote the involvement of Byzantine musicologists in international conferences were significantly amplified as the West was generously opening itself to these pioneers who promised to unearth a fabulous history of ancient Romanian music. In the fall of 1967, the International Congress on Byzantine and Eastern Liturgical Music was to be held in Rome. As early as February, the members of the Musicology Bureau were proposing the country’s participation in the scientific event, suggesting Gheorghe Ciobanu as the most suitable representative. His attendance was also encouraged for other reasons. After a long time, I.D. Petrescu’s work *Etudes de paléographie musicale byzantine* had been published that very year by Editura Muzicală and had already been sent abroad. As Petrescu’s perspective sometimes conflicted with the Western Byzantine musicologists’ approach, in the eventuality of a debate Ciobanu had to promptly intervene with a patriotic position. The Bureau considered it “absolutely necessary” for musicology to assert itself in an international session in the field of Byzantine musicology, “in which our country has a rich artistic and scientific tradition” (Extras din procesul-verbal [Extract from the Minutes], 1967, February 2, p. 122). Interestingly, in the records of this meeting, as in most other cases, the parties involved are depersonalized, merely playing the appointed ideological role. Proposals and decisions are taken unanimously by the entire Bureau, thus by the institution, not by a particular member, and the emphasis in this instance is placed on the country’s participation, while the specialist is only a minor character. Placing Ciobanu behind the nation-state emphasized the latter’s preeminence in the system, the former being nothing but an element of the socialist machine. Presumably, an appeal to the state and to UCMR as an organization, the most sacred

political structures of the regime, together with the collective assumption of ideas or decisions, were the ingredients for success in delicate matters, as well as safety precautions in case of backlash from censors.

9. Adjusting to the increased political control

The Union unanimously appreciated Ciobanu's diligent efforts in documenting the existence of a Romanian music during periods devoid of other evidence. However, during the General Assembly of Composers and Musicologists in December 1968, at which General Secretary of the Communist Party Nicolae Ceaușescu also participated, Ciobanu focused his speech solely on accomplishments in the field of ethnomusicology, omitting the significant findings in Byzantine musicology ("Adunarea generală a compozitorilor și muzicologilor" [General Assembly of Composers and Musicologists], 1969, pp. 2-3). The presence of the "supreme leader" among Romanian musicologists was a confirmation of the regime's strict control of the creative unions.

Starting from the second half of 1971, Romanian culture had to submit to an increasingly firm political control. Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches of July 6 and 9, 1971, known as the "July Theses", redefined the expectations of the regime towards cultural producers, including musicologists. In the spirit of a neo-Stalinism based on a symbolic-ideological mode of control, book censorship resumed, and intellectual production was required to support the cultural vision promoted from the top (Verdery, 1994, p. 81).

In his July speeches, Ceaușescu emphasized the role of the Party in coordinating all levels of social life:

When we speak of the role of the Party as the leading force in all social activity, we must not neglect education, literature, art, music, science, or any other sector, because, as we have already pointed out, we are looking at the problem of building socialist society not only from the point of view of its material basis, but in its general context, encompassing all aspects of social, material and spiritual life; therefore, the Party's strength, its leaders, must be felt in all spheres of activity. It is necessary that this question be well clarified, theoretically and ideologically, so that there can be no more ambiguity. It is equally necessary that there should be full understanding of the role of the state, because the working-class state has the right to interfere in literature, in the plastic arts, in music, and to admit only what it considers to be in keeping with socialism, with the interests of our socialist

fatherland. This is the role of the state in society, and it will be so until the state disappears! (Ceaușescu, 1971, p. 51)

As for the Composers Union, resistance to the new cultural directions imposed by the regime was minimal, in contrast to the Writers Union, which, realizing the absurdity of such measures as taken following the July theses, engaged in protest actions by various means, becoming an “oppositionist barricade” and attracting significant repercussions (Deletant, 2010, p. 185).

Indeed, ideological pressure was making itself increasingly felt within the Union. In March 1972, for example, the Romanian presence at the Bydgoszcz Festival fell under discussion. To obtain approval for the concert program, which also included sacred music, the members of the Bureau proposed that the ensembles prepare an audition to be attended by a representative of the Council of Socialist Culture and Education⁶ (Proces-verbal [Minute], 1972, March 29, p. 76).

However, in May 1972, the proposals for the first issue of the volume *Izvoare ale muzicii românești* [Sources of Romanian Music] grouped several titles under the topic *Church Chant*, which meant that Byzantine musicology was to play an equally important role in the new cultural climate. A particularly interesting episode that took place during the meeting of the Musicology Bureau on June 7, 1972 is worth mentioning. The minute of the meeting records a plea for exploiting religious music resources through audio recording. This daring initiative enjoyed the support of the Bureau members, who strove to construct an argumentative discourse in the purest ideological jargon. The attempt to record sacred chant, even if only for documentary purposes, was indeed bold, and only explicable by the role that Byzantine musicology played in consolidating cultural symbols. Arguments were of the most diverse kind: Byzantine music, inherited from an exceptional ancient culture, contributed significantly to understanding the evolution of Romanian music; the scarcity of specialists in the theory and interpretation of this music was a cause for deep concern, and it was therefore necessary to record pieces for posterity, to be used exclusively for documentation.

To achieve a decisive win, the initiators of the project had dressed up sacred music as ideological music:

Considering the importance of the Byzantine music heritage for the study of the overall evolution of Romanian folk music, as well as of art music, the

need for scientific knowledge of the appropriate interpretation in terms of musical structure, as well as the aesthetic function and ideological content, specific to this field of our music in the past, appears imperative, fully justified. [...] the recorded material will be used exclusively by specialists, with the approval of the management of the Composers Union, based on the recommendations of the Musicology Bureau (Proces-verbal [Minute], 1972, June 7, pp. 112-113).

Reviewing the proposal through the lens of Cornelia Ilie's observations (1998), it becomes clear that the strategic use of key words such as "imperative", "fully justified", "necessary" or "absolutely mandatory", noted in the meeting records (pp. 112-113), confirms the existence of a restrictive, coercive factor which required firm justifications for any action that could be interpreted as undermining the regime's prescriptions or as subversive activities. The frequent use of ideologically charged language suggests that the proposed theme was sensitive and demanded careful linguistic framing. The voluntary transfer of control from the project proponents to the management structure, by restricting and regulating access to records, are further indicators of active censorship, which called for absolute control over cultural resources and productions.

10. The problem of the three shortcomings

Despite such tightening grip, in early 1974 Ciobanu proposed raising the number of volumes on Byzantine music in the collection *Izvoare ale muzicii românești* to seven. He was nominated by the Bureau to edit the collection as the coordinator of the editorial team. Ciobanu's strategy to gain complete control over the series was based on portraying the editorial plan as a complex problem. The plan would only work if the solution was adopted to address several interrelated shortcomings. The first was the expectation that the first volume in the collection once launched, the others would have to follow periodically, something which was deemed "of particular importance" (Ciobanu, 1974, f. 92). The second shortcoming highlighted the need to put in a substantial amount of energy in the production of the volumes, especially those on Byzantine music, something which demanded "great effort" (f. 92). Lastly, there was a recurring problem: human resources. These resources were not only

insufficient and aging, but also impossible to expand. It mostly consisted of specialists “whose days were numbered”:

Currently, there are - as it is known - only four specialists in this field in the country: myself, Gr[igore] Panțiru, Marin Ionescu and Sebastian Barbu Bucur. Of these, three are retired, so people whose days are somewhat numbered. For the time being, I do not foresee the involvement of other people in this work, all the more so since - within the current analytical program - our specialized education cannot train medieval musicologists, nor can this profession be tempting as long as no suitable jobs are provided. This could have been done by the Institute of Art History, where I tried to train a few professionals, but they refused - for reasons difficult to understand - to set up a team of two people to devote themselves to the study of medieval Romanian musical culture (Ciobanu, 1974, f. 92).

Ciobanu’s solution to satisfactorily solve the three shortcomings was to unite under his coordination “experience and skills” (f. 92). The reason behind the representation of the four scholars as the only and last connoisseurs of the methods of analyzing medieval music manuscripts was likely the need to overemphasize their importance and relevance for Romanian musicology in order to regain symbolic capital. Ciobanu lastly played the nationalism card, reminding in passing that Hungarian musicologists had already published a volume on 12th-century sacred music from Romania. The mention of this foreign achievement was probably meant as a way to exploit the anti-Magyar sentiments and attitudes fueled by the constant tensions and dissensions between the two states (Verdery, 1994, p. 210). The concluding sentence was intended to secure the desired result by appealing to the sensitive mechanisms of pride, a nation’s and that of his fellow musicologists: “It would be a pity to give credence to the unjust opinion that Romanian musicology is as good as non-existent” (Ciobanu, 1974, f. 95). While consulting the extracts of the meetings containing Ciobanu’s proposals, Union leader Ion Dumitrescu noted on the margin of a document: “I must have an in-person discussion with the enthusiasts!” (Extras din procesele-verbale [Extract from the minutes], 1974, f. 90). The note could mean one of two things: either that the enormous amount of work would have been a major impediment to the successful achievement of the rather optimistic editorial plan, or, more likely, that the enthusiasm over the possibility of publishing a large number of volumes of church music pushed the proponents to exceed the limits tolerated by the regime.

11. New horizons

In December 1974, a new Byzantine musicologist “in disguise” was welcomed into the Union: Titus Moisescu, director of Editura Muzicală (1957-85), also a Theology graduate, acquainted with Byzantine musicology following the three years he had spent working on Reverend Petrescu’s book (between 1964 and 1967), his prolonged interaction with the author having contributed decisively to his knowledge of the intricacies of old church music (Catrina, 2003, p. 110). Moisescu had edited several volumes of musicology, but had not yet published anything on sacred music, which is why his reorientation towards Byzantine musicology was somehow surprising. Only five days after he had applied for admission as a probationary member, Moisescu was greeted with praise into the Union, his work described as “increasingly laborious and diverse” (Proces-verbal [Minute], 1974, December 18, p. 70). Previously working as an editor, Moisescu had risen above his professional status to the point of being recognized as a competent, passionate and conscientious researcher, thus reflecting the idealized image of the “multilaterally developed” working man. Through his key position at Editura Muzicală, Moisescu was able to support the publication of volumes on Byzantine music and musicology, becoming himself a remarkable Byzantine musicologist and joining what he later called the “group of five” (Moisescu, 1999, p. 8).

The following year, at the first meeting of the Musicology Bureau in March 1975, Sebastian Bucur was unanimously accepted as a full member of the Union, strengthening the position of Byzantine musicologists within the institution (Proces-verbal [Minute], 1975, March 5, p. 92). This inclusion of specialists was significant, especially in light of the measures dictated by the communist regime towards the end of the year to emphasize the importance of the indigenous musical past.

An important discussion on the future of Byzantine musicology took place during the meeting of the Musicology Bureau on May 30, 1975. On the agenda was the approval of a document by musicologist Octavian Lazăr Cosma on the exploitation of the resources of medieval music, of Byzantine chant in particular. The actions to be initiated by the Bureau were part of the measures approved by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party. The first measure seemed to be in response to Ciobanu’s proposal for the content of the series *Izvoare ale muzicii românești*. The collection, which was to be called *Fontes musicae daco-romanae*, imitating the nominal model used by fellow

archaeologists about a decade earlier⁷, would have comprised as many as 11 volumes on Byzantine music, organized into two categories, *Documenta* and *Transcripta*. In addition to the publication of the books by Editura Muzicală and Editura Academiei, the collaboration was recommended with prestigious western publishers such as Bärenreiter Verlag, in order to achieve “propagandistic and economic” advantages (Proces-verbal [Minute], 1975, May 30, p. 126). Secondly, record label Electrecord was to support efforts to publish “masterpieces of medieval Romanian music” by producing 14 audio recordings, ten of which had religious content (Proces-verbal [Minutes], 1975, May 30, p. 126). Other measures included organizing public events to promote ancient music, compiling a catalogue of musical manuscripts, facilitating the travel of musicologists for research in Romania and abroad, organizing musicology symposia or encouraging the participation of Romanian specialists in dedicated events abroad. Of major importance was the proposal to train future specialists in Byzantine and Gregorian sacred music at the Conservatory, as well as to offer young researchers with grants to such leading student cities London, Copenhagen or Paris. Equally significant was the idea of making documentary films on medieval religious music, which would feature Byzantine musical manuscripts from the time of Stephen the Great (ruler of Moldavia between 1457 and 1504) or Constantin Brâncoveanu (ruler of Wallachia between 1688 and 1714). The last proposed measures completed what turned out to be an unexpectedly favorable plan for the field of sacred chant, suggesting the publication of studies and articles in various Party-controlled periodicals, to emphasize “the original Romanian contribution to the creation and development of the medieval and classical musical heritage in our fatherland” (Proces-verbal [Minutes], 1975, May 30, p. 129). It was also intended to produce reviews of a Bulgarian musicology book, which were to demonstrate “scientifically the abusive nature of the appropriation of our manuscripts” (Proces-verbal [Minutes], 1975, May 30, p. 129). Additionally, it was recommended that foreign researchers should be prohibited from photographing or studying medieval manuscripts and documents in libraries and other cultural institutions. Exemptions required “very special approvals from the authorities” (Proces-verbal [Minutes], 1975, May 30, p. 129). The prohibition also impacted monasteries and churches, which meant that the subordination of Church bodies to the state was self-evident.

Although the importance of their field was growing, Byzantine musicologists were not allowed to overstep certain limits, especially

when sensitive political matters were at stake. For example, the Institute of Art History in Moscow had invited Sebastian Barbu-Bucur to publish his research on a Byzantine hymn dedicated to Tsar Peter the Great (1672-1725). In reviewing the study for approval, members of the Musicology Bureau noted that Barbu-Bucur's praise of the Russian ruler was exaggerated, criticizing the author for a non-scientifically grounded investigation and his concessions to "praiseful conceptions, inconsistent with historical truth" (Proces-verbal [Minutes], 1975, July 2, p. 139). Barbu-Bucur was consequently asked to leave out the historical part of the study altogether and to discuss only music.

Still, when the cultural heritage of the fatherland had to be defended abroad, Byzantine musicologists were expected to be experts on history and skilled in debate. In October 1975, the Bureau discussed the Bydgoszcz Early Music Festival, noting with satisfaction that the three Romanian presentations on Byzantine chant, which supported the idea of the "personality and originality of Romanian music", had been "of real interest" (Proces-verbal [Minutes], 1975, October 9, p. 144). The Polish festival had become an arena for clashes of ideas and nationalist claims:

The confrontations of ideas prove that musicologists from neighboring states are always using musical documents from our country, which they present as documents specific to their country, trying to discredit Romanian music. (Proces-verbal [Minutes], 1975, October 9, p. 144)

The "neighboring countries" were probably Bulgaria and Hungary, communist states whose cultural agenda also sought to produce symbolic values, even if this meant resorting to appropriating the heritage of other nations. To counteract the effects of such behaviors that would diminish the symbolic capital carefully managed by the regime, the Bureau proposed an increase of Romanian participation in international scientific events and the elaboration of studies, "the Romanian reply to the very tendentious theses of some foreign musicologists" (Proces-verbal [Minutes], 1975, October, 9, p. 144). The need was also emphasized to publish Gheorghe Ciobanu's review of a musicology book by Bulgarian musicologists who had presented Romanian manuscripts as part of their own culture. For maximum visibility, bilingual publication in Romanian and French was recommended. Once again, Byzantine musicology was called to defend national heritage and honor. The regime's aversion to such foreign attempts

as mentioned strengthened the position of Byzantine musicologists as indispensable pawns in the Power's cultural games.

12. Controlling the discourse in the dialogue with the third-party partners

As a comprehensive national strategy was developed for managing cultural assets, multiple institutions were called upon to actively support the Party's. To extensively document Romanian musical manuscripts, both within the country and abroad, an entire apparatus had to be set in motion. One of the intended partners was the Church. To establish a successful dialogue, Union management chose a temporarily moderate tone. This unconventional approach meant changing the direction of censorship via the suppression of ideological language and the amplification of church terminology. The opening phrase of Union president Petre Brâncuși's February 1978 letter to the Patriarch, a mention of how the Union's "concerns [were] aligned with the ideological program of the Party" (Brâncuși, 1978, f. 64), was suppressed. Brâncuși likely realized that suggesting any political involvement when communicating with the head of the Romanian Orthodox Church might have been imprudent, as it could be insulting. Extra precaution was taken to remove the term "secular", as it contrasted with the overall tone of the letter. The goal was to utilize the resources and network of the Church to send Sebastian Barbu-Bucur to abroad to Paris, London, Rome, and especially Mount Athos, to recover the estranged manuscripts in the form of microfilms, photocopies, or xerographs and restore them to the Romanian cultural heritage. It was necessary to properly acknowledge and promote all musical collections created in the country, „taking into account the efforts made to incorporate such values into foreign cultural contexts" (Brâncuși, 1978, f. 64).

Union members, including Byzantine musicologists, had become experienced in managing the discourse on sacred chant and in making various content fit the ideological frame, which proved to be very useful in shaping the outcome of the official meeting on May 1981 with Bydgoszcz Festival director Andrej Szwalbe (1923-2002). On his way back from Bulgaria, Szwalbe stopped in Bucharest to present to Union representatives the next festival's themes related to Byzantine music. The proposed topics however emphasized the Slavic cultural dimension of European music, a perspective likely favored by Bulgarian musicologists but one that

Romanians wanted to distance themselves from. Following discussions with the Union's management and several musicologists, Szwalbe accepted the following changes: instead of "Byzantine Music within the Culture of Slavic Peoples", the title for the festival's first section would be "Byzantine Music within the Culture of Southeastern European Peoples." Similarly, the title of second section was changed from "The Influence of Slavic Folk Music on the West through Byzantine Culture" to "East-West Interaction in the Field of Byzantine Culture." Union representatives managed to avoid the unwanted idea of a possible emanation of Romanian culture from the Slavic, especially since Romanian Byzantine musicologists "had the opportunity to present to musicians from all over the world the results of the work of putting forward our cultural heritage in this field, highlighting the continuity and originality of the musical culture in our homeland" (Tomescu, 1981, pp. 1-2).

13. Censorship and control, between ideological tools and professional duty

Despite the intensification of ideological control, Romanian works on church chant began to gain more support for publication. Moreover, Byzantine musicologists were included starting in 1977 as part of the group appointed to write a treatise on the history of Romanian music, meant to be a propaganda work destined to foreign audiences. By 1978, the first volume had already been drafted in collaboration with the Academy of Social and Political Sciences, and was ready for print in 1985. Seeing that in September 1980 many of the contributors had either not yet turned in their work or had opted out, the layout of the treatise underwent a transformation, incorporating further studies on sacred chant.

The foreword contained substantial passages from Nicolae Ceaușescu, whose reflections on various topics had become aphorisms adorning any scientific publication. Byzantine musicologists' contribution, cleansed of any potentially subversive elements, were fully justified by the unprecedented editorial initiative, as their authors were assimilated to "a large group of specialists" who had dedicated themselves "with exemplary patriotism to the work of bringing to light the eloquent testimonies on the musicality of the Romanian people, on the continuity and originality of their forms of expression" (Prefață [Foreword], 1985, p. 3). Indeed, patriotism and nationalism had been displayed almost ostentatiously in

the studies on sacred music, which followed a standard narrative path, often preceded by the invocation of the historical and linguistic theses endorsed by the Power.

From the papers on sacred music, those by Sebastian Barbu-Bucur and Gheorghe Ciobanu provide valuable insight into ideological control, as they have been preserved in two versions, pre- and post-censorship.

In Sebastian Barbu-Bucur's paper, the word "church" was typically removed, although this measure was inconsistently applied. Thus, the expression "Romanian church music", amputated of its primary feature, became "Romanian music" (Barbu-Bucur, n.d. p. 392). Phrases like "the Orthodox Church" or "the Holy Spirit" (p. 395) did not fare well with the approved discourse and were therefore canceled. Even the term "pravoslavnic" (p. 397) (Orthodox), was forbidden. The phrase "New Testament" was also underlined as a precaution. Hymns such as the Trisagion, „As Many as Have been Baptized into Christ", and „Of Thy Mystical Supper" were conveniently grouped under „and other hymns" (p. 398). Occasionally, the reviewer expressed regret over excluding certain passages that touched on "religious and moral precepts", writing on the margin of the paper: "Sorry!" (p. 410). On the topic of the translation of sacred chants, the more suitable term "Romanianization" rather than "nationalization" (pp. 388, 389) was used. When an attempt was made to reconcile the two terms, the meaning of the concerned phrase changed: the "Romanianization of the chants", initially defined as "the action of translating or adapting the Greek church melodies to the Romanian text, adjusting them to the nature and taste of our people so as to make them easier to understand and accept, that is, *their appropriation*" [italics mine], became "*their integration* [italics mine] into the national culture" (p. 391). By this approach, the reader was assured that the translated church chants, thus "Romanianized," did not harbor subversive elements, as they were integrated into the much-praised national culture.

Ciobanu's studies had gone through a fairly serious revision, too. The nationalist language flourished after each correction, producing doubtful assertions. The reviewer had decided that the term "proto-Romanians" could be replaced with "Romanians" or even with "our people." "Former Dacia" became "old Dacia" to emphasize the age of the Romanian people (Ciobanu, n.d.-a, pp. 305-309). "Christian products" were still "products", but a quote containing references to a "Christ-loving" ruler had been completely removed and its replacement with a facsimile from the manuscript was recommended (Ciobanu, n.d.-b, p. 334). As a

punishment for their audacity of claiming Romanian manuscripts as part of their own culture, references to the works of Bulgarian musicologists were excised. In obeying their colleague's suggestions, Byzantine musicologists had to adapt their papers accordingly. From titles to contents, they were reconfigured to align with the agreed-upon discourse. Sebastian Barbu-Bucur's paper, initially titled „The Process of Romanianization of Chants”, in 1985 version was reformulated with a commendable title: “The Action of ‘Romanianization’ of Worship Chants and its Social-Patriotic Determinations”, while, Gheorghe Ciobanu's study of “The Adoption of Byzantine Music as Worship Music,” became “Byzantine Worship Music, a Way of Expressing National Cultural Values” (Sumar [Summary], 1985, p. 6).

Their articles already heavily censored, the two Byzantine musicologists were also requested to evaluate various works on sacred music by musicologists with no expertise in the field. The respect that Byzantine musicology gained in a few decades had led to an interesting publishing practice which meant that there was hardly any writing on music history that did not at least mention sacred music. To comply with the ideological guidelines of the Party, such outside musicologists showed little regard for scientific facts, sometimes making statements impossible to prove, even ridiculous. As the most suitable experts to recommend research for publication or not, Ciobanu and Barbu-Bucur took their roles very seriously: should distortions and speculations be extreme and therefore likely to discredit their discipline, they would advise against their publishing.

For instance, probably due to the friendship between the Socialist Republic of Romania and the Asian dictatorships, one researcher attempted to establish connections between Byzantine and Chinese music. His work was dismissed as unscientific by Ciobanu (Extras din procesul-verbal [Extract from the Minutes], 1970, p. 89). Another musicologist compiled around 1989 a paper on *Muzică Sacră* [Sacred Music] and translated it into Italian, probably with the aim to make it accessible to foreign readers. The author's statements rigorously met the ideological expectations of the Party. Sacred music “claimed its origins in the Thracian ethos, Thracian-Greek, Thracian-Roman and Thracian-Greek-Roman symbioses, with deep roots extended into the common background of older origins in the Persian-Arabic world up to the Babylonian musical culture and Hebrew psalmody” (Barbu-Bucur, 1990, p. 16). The researcher was also keen to look at the name of a prominent composer of Byzantine music through

a nationalistic lens. Thus, he maintained that late 13th-early 14th century composer and reformer St. John Koukouzeles (Ιωάννης Κουκουζέλης in Greek) lived sometime between the 4th and the 8th century. In his attempt to build him a Romanian identity, he insisted that Koukouzeles' name was a Wallachian one, descended from the ancient lineage of the autochthonous Thracian-Romans, arguing that the etymon *κουκου* corresponds to "a smaller cuckoo bird" in Romanian (Barbu-Bucur, 1990, p. 18). After reviewing the paper, Sebastian Barbu-Bucur advised against its publication. However, the trends of genealogical appropriation of prominent church musicians continued until 1989.

Equally persistent was the censorship, which restricted and shaped the scientific discourse for nearly four decades, promoting surrogates more ideologically suitable. Although times changed, the destiny of Byzantine musicology at the beginning of the third millennium seemed even grimmer for those researchers who survived the regime. A decade after the fall of communism, Titus Moisesescu, while highlighting the field's achievements up to 1989, identified new constraints:

In that time of ideological restrictions, while I was working with Editura Muzicală, we printed more works on religion than in the post-communist period, when spiritual and cultural freedom became a reality. If in the first stage we were constrained by a harmful, disgusting ideology, in this second one the oppression has to do with material constraints, in a world where money dominates and determines cultural acts. It is a painful paradox for anyone wanting to do something good in the field of Romanian spirituality. (Catrina, 2003, p. 114)

14. Conclusion

The newly-discovered documents from the archives of the Composers and Musicologists Union reveal how Byzantine musicology-related issues were handled during totalitarianism. Experts joining Reverend I.D. Petrescu in his work were able to continue their research, as brief periods of ideological relaxation after 1964 allowed them greater freedom of action. However, authors of studies on sacred chant were constantly told how to shape their discourse within the boundaries imposed by the communist regime, their writings able to fuel the cultural ideas as endorsed by the authorities. Ideological compliance provided researchers with institutional support, access to hard-to-reach sources, and a respectable

professional status. The quantity of literature by Romanian Byzantine musicologists during communism is extraordinary, with thousands of pages of musicological analyses, musical transcriptions, and facsimile reproductions. In spite of the many documents analysed, I found that, in most cases, one can merely observe the effects of censorship and control on the field, without being able to identify the person actually responsible for the process. Under the protection of institutional anonymity and mandatory unanimous consent, the censors of religious discourse as used by Byzantine musicologists can only very rarely, if ever, be established. Within the Union, censorship appears as a general practice while self-censorship, dictated by the circumstances, cultivated across generations, and extremely difficult to detect, is often equally, if not more effective, in avoiding unwanted attention.

Contemporary readers of works on Byzantine chant elaborated during communism must be aware that behind the excessive patriotic enthusiasm and the obsession over Romanian specificity and originality lies the need to conform to a Procrustean doctrinal template from which it was almost impossible for cultural productions to escape. Only after disregarding the fabricated and politically influenced layers of the discourse will they recognize the actual value of the contributions of sacred music scholars. Leaving aside the ideological distortion of the narrative, and taking into account their effective research methods, extensive critical apparatus, and interdisciplinary approaches, the investigations of these specialists remain unquestionably decisive for the development of Byzantine musicology.

Endnotes

- ¹ See <https://www.unmb.ro/cercetare/proiecte/constructii-muzicale-ale-nationalismului-efecte-ale-ideologiei-nationaliste-asupra-educatiei-si-culturii-muzicale-in-romania-comunista/> and <https://www.unmb.ro/cercetare/proiecte/controlul-muzicii-efecte-si-consecinte-ale-institutiei-cenzurii-asupra-educatiei-si-culturii-muzicale-in-romania-celor-trei-dictaturi-din-secolul-xx-carlista-antonesciana-si-comunista/>.
- ² For almost two decades (1966-1980), Romanian Byzantine musicologists tried to refute the claims of their Bulgarian counterparts, who were constantly appropriating autochthonous composers and locally produced manuscripts.
- ³ Intensely debated in the 1980s and 1990s, protochronism asserted that the most important events in Western Europe and beyond had been anticipated by Romanian achievements (Verdery, 1994).
- ⁴ At the time, Sebastian Barbu-Bucur was a former monk, expelled from the monastery in 1959 under decree 410. His application for admission to the Union had been discussed twice before, at the meeting of January 17, 1968, and again on June 17, 1970. Gheorghe Ciobanu was in charge of drafting the first admission report. This was supposed to be a simple bureaucratic act, but the report was late in coming. Barbu-Bucur was accepted as a candidate member only two years later, and not during a Bureau meeting, but on the occasion of the meeting of the Union's board in the presence of all the members in Bucharest (Procesul-verbal al ședinței comitetului de conducere [Board Meeting Minutes], 1970).
- ⁵ Florinela Popa mentions Ciobanu's proposal in her *Muzică și ideologii în secolul 20* [Music and Ideologies in the 20th Century] (Popa, 2022). The plan of the course in Byzantine notation was presented at the meeting of the Musicology Bureau on December 8, 1966.
- ⁶ The Council of Socialist Culture and Education was a state body established on September 21, 1971 which replaced the State Committee for Culture and Art with the purpose of ensuring the implementation of the "July Theses."
- ⁷ In 1964, the Institute of Archaeology of the Academy of the Romanian People's Republic had published the first of the four volumes of the series *Fontes ad historiam Dacoromaniae Pertinentes*. The book appeared *In Aedibus Academiae Republicae Popularis Dacoromanae*, thus equating "Dacian-Romanian" with "Romanian."

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WHAT REMAINS OF OUR FUTURE? DISABLED CHILDREN AND THE DYNAMICS OF HOPE IN MEDIEVAL BYZANTINE FAMILY CRISES (9TH-11TH CENTURIES)

Oana-Maria Cojocaru

Abstract

The article explores the emotional and practical responses of Byzantine parents to their children's illnesses and disabilities during a period marked by high childhood mortality rates. Focusing on three miracle accounts from the ninth to eleventh centuries, which feature mobility-impaired children, the study examines both the lived experiences of disabled children and the hope-based strategies that parents developed to cope with their disabilities. The research positions hope as an emotional and social practice, crucial in alleviating negative emotions and driving persistent efforts to find solutions. Using the religion-as-lived framework, I suggest that hope was a key factor in how Byzantine people navigated the emotional traumas associated with disability. By exploring the interplay between emotions, disability and religious practices, the article aims to offer a nuanced understanding of the emotional dynamics of hope and the familial and societal responses to disability in Byzantine society. Hope, deeply embedded in their cultural and religious practices, served as a fundamental emotional script for confronting and enduring difficult circumstances.

Keywords: children, disability, hope, emotions, miracles, lived religion.

1. Fragile Beginnings: Child Health in Byzantine Society

A substantial proportion of the population of the Byzantine Empire was made up of children, one of the most vulnerable social groups throughout history (Cojocaru 2021). Like any medieval society, Byzantium experienced wars, natural calamities, famine, and epidemics that influenced the mortality rate, as well as the prevalence of people with various mobility, sensory and cognitive impairments. Environmental factors such as poor

sanitation and nutrition, and low living standards determined by economic deprivation made life expectancy very low, on average around thirty years. The inhabitants of various regions of the Byzantine Empire – from the mountainous mainland Greece to the fertile lands of Asia Minor with hot summers and snowy cold winters – lived in a physical environment which shaped their everyday lives, and their capacity to survive or to adapt to deteriorating living conditions and changing environments. Historians of the Byzantine Empire have suggested that perhaps 10% of the population survived the hazards of childhood, reproduction, accidents and war and made it to old age (Rautman 1995, 9; Talbot 2015, 267-268).

Various infirmities marked the Byzantine (and more generally, medieval) everyday experience. Physical traumas and metabolic disorders could easily lead to permanent physical damage, as did war, famine, or other calamities. Being in the early stages of human physiological development, children were naturally more vulnerable than adults and some injuries or illnesses could make it impossible for them to develop adult faculties such as the abilities to walk or to procreate.

Evidence of high infant and childhood mortality is often attested in the Byzantine sources and has been confirmed by the archaeological findings. Osteological data of the Middle Byzantine period indicates that scurvy and iron-deficiency anaemia (*cribia orbitalia*) as well as malnutrition (*enamel hypoplasia*) were the most frequent pathological conditions found in the skeletal remains of infants and children. Archaeologists have observed differences in living conditions between urban and rural settlements, explaining that the higher densities of habitation and poorer sanitation and hygiene in cities resulted in high levels of infectious diseases and intestinal parasitism, especially among children, determining in turn iron deficiency anaemia and porotic hyperostosis (Rife 2012). These pathologies have been also closely associated with the weaning stress and the quality of supplementary food (Bourbou 2010, 99-126). In Byzantium, weaning was an especially perilous time in children's lives because of the adjustments to the new foods and the possibility of contamination. Usually, solid foods were introduced around the age of six months, probably in the form of porridge, or breadcrumbs softened with milk and honey. The shift from breast milk to a diet that was cereal-based and included goat's milk and honey, as recommended by Greco-Roman physicians and kept being in practice during the Byzantine period, often led to nutritional deficiencies in iron and folic acid, which might cause anaemia. Honey is known to cause botulism in infants, its symptoms including fatigue, blurred vision,

and paralysis (Cagan et al. 2010), which also feature in the Byzantine texts about sick children. Archaeologists have observed that metabolic diseases arising from vitamin deficiency are present only in remains from semi-urban and urban contexts of the Byzantine period. It seems that in rural settlements the higher consumption of relevant nutrients contributed to a lower frequency of scurvy and rickets as well as of iron deficiency (Rife 2012, 447).

In addition to ecological factors that put children's well-being and their survival chances at risk, physical trauma as the consequence of accidents was part and parcel of daily life. Then as now, children were at risk of suffering severe injuries that could result in lifelong handicaps. However, unlike today when children can quickly receive professional help in case of a physical trauma, in antiquity and the Middle Ages such medical opportunities were virtually non-existent or mostly ineffective. Consequently, bone fractures, joint dislocations, or other similar injuries in children often caused permanent physical deformities, impaired function, and life-long handicaps.

By and large, children's illnesses – whether acute or chronic – and disabilities represented more than mere medical challenges; they constituted serious family crises that illuminated the precariousness of life and the intense hopes parents invested in their offspring. Various afflictions, often unpredictable and devastating, not only tested the emotional resilience of families but also served as poignant reminders of the fragility of childhood and the uncertainties surrounding survival in an era characterized by high childhood mortality rates. How did Byzantine parents emotionally and practically respond to their children's illnesses and disabilities? What strategies did they develop to cope with and plan for a future when faced with a child's sudden severe illness or disability? What actions did they take in such instances? Ultimately, what hopes were left for children themselves, and how did their projected future align with societal expectations?

The article aims to answer these questions by analysing three miracle accounts from the ninth to eleventh centuries that capture some of the experiences of disabled children, as well as the experiences of their families caring for them and hoping for a miracle. Hope is conceived as an emotional and social practice (Scheer 2012), serving a dual purpose: as a means to alleviate negative emotions emerging in such moments of crisis (Lazarus 1999) and as a potent motivator, galvanizing individuals to persist in seeking solutions, planning for the future, and striving to lead

lives filled with meaning and purpose despite the adversities they face. Hope in this case is not a momentary wish, but persists for a longer period of time and has a strong motivational component that make people take actions to support that hope.

The analysis of these sources will be done against the backdrop of religion-as-lived, a perspective which considers how religion was practised and experienced in daily life, by focusing on the personal and communal aspects of religious expressions, and how this shaped individuals' lives and societal interactions (Katajala-Peltomaa and Toivo 2017, 2). For the Byzantines, the veneration of saints provided a crucial platform for individuals to navigate and interpret their life circumstances. It allowed them to express their hopes and anxieties, seek divine assistance, and voice their emotions within the accepted cultural frameworks of their society. This practice enabled people to connect personal experiences with broader communal beliefs, creating a shared language for expressing both personal and collective concerns. In this way, religion functioned as a performative space where individual and communal identities were constructed and reinforced, offering a means for people to cope with the challenges of life and find solace and meaning amidst adversity (Katajala-Peltomaa 2022, 39).

Thus, an interdisciplinary approach that considers aspects of medieval childhood, emotions, and disability provides a more nuanced understanding of these crises. By exploring how these elements intersect, we can better understand their impact on family dynamics and the role of hope in coping with dire circumstances.

2. Medieval Childhood Revisited

As a separate field of study within social history, the history of medieval children and youth has witnessed a renaissance after the publication of the very influential but much-criticized book by Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (1962). His controversial claim according to which the idea of childhood did not exist in medieval people's mentality and that parents in pre-modern societies did not develop emotional bonds with their children until they passed the perilous phase of infancy, prompted historians to amass extensive evidence from a wide range of sources, which proved that Ariès' notion of "indifferent" parents is less than nuanced if not mistaken. Questions of whether high child mortality really made the

parents emotionally immune to becoming attached to their children and whether pre-modern societies had a culture of nurturing the young have guided many studies of medieval childhood¹. Consequently, themes such as parent-child relationships, child rearing practices and children's socialization have been repeatedly explored. Now, the view that children in the past were neglected, abused and abandoned has considerably changed in light of the new findings. While acknowledging instances of dark childhoods marked by violence and maltreatment, scholars caution against anachronistic interpretations of medieval mentalities. For instance, practices considered today as child labour, corporal punishment, or abandonment were contextualized differently in pre-modern societies. Child labour was never seen to be an issue, since children were gradually introduced into the adult world and part of this process was precisely the initiation into the labour process, a necessary step for children to learn their future responsibilities as adults. Child beating was not perceived within the same pedagogical and psychological parameters as today. Child abandonment was not dictated by the lack of parental affection, but on the contrary, was often a strategy to increase children's survival and well-being in other places where they could be better taken care of (Vuolanto 2011).

Despite burgeoning interest in historical childhood, scant attention has been directed towards understanding the treatment of sick and particularly disabled children in the past. The debate over whether past societies practised infanticide of the disabled children is yet to finish. The idea that people in antiquity would kill or abandon their deformed and disabled children immediately after birth still prevails in academic conversations. As Christian Laes (2008, 97) has convincingly argued, there are many nuances when it comes to the attitudes towards disabled babies in antiquity: "while the destitute might perhaps get rid of their disabled children since they were simply not in the possibility of raising them, the well-to-do could have resorted to other solutions ... yet, also malformed children of the less well-to-do are known to have lived."

Although some historians have incorporated disability into their studies of medieval childhood, these inquiries frequently conflate physical impairments with other conditions and rarely delve into the lived experiences of disabled children and how their families coped practically and emotionally with this situation (Finucane 1997; Lett 1997; Kuuliala 2016). Notably, scholars of Byzantine social history are still barely playing catch-up to these research trends (Efthymiadis, 2016; Laes, 2017;

Lampadaridi 2021; Cojocaru, forthcoming) and virtually no work has yet been undertaken on the experiences of disabled children, what it meant for a family to have a disabled child, and the strategies they envisioned for their future. This article endeavours to fill this gap by examining a series of miracle accounts featuring such children, aiming at shedding some light on their lived realities and the dynamics of hope within their families. As I will show later in this chapter, these narratives illustrate the role of hope in mitigating the life crises generated by the ill-health of children by highlight various actions families could take to improve the prospects of a meaningful future.

3. Theoretical Approaches to Byzantine Disability

In order to understand who the disabled were in Byzantine society it is necessary to take a brief look at what we understand nowadays by disability and in what ways medieval scholars can make use of this concept. The United Nations specify that “the term persons with disability is used to apply to *all* persons with disabilities, *including* those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”² Yet, as scholars studying disability in the Middle Ages have pointed out, the concept of disability cannot be applied to past societies, given that the impaired persons in the past might not share much of the ‘special needs’ status of their modern counterparts (Metzler 2017, 60).

For many decades, ‘disability’ has been employed by medical and medieval historians as a synonym of ‘impairment’. This is largely due to the fact that for many years research on disability was dominated by the so-called medical model that viewed disability as an illness or a problem that needed to be cured or eliminated. This model has been widely criticized because it reduces people with disability to objects of study, who are seen through lenses that only focus on their inabilities, failing to take into account the particularities of an individual life and the sociological and psychological aspects of disability (Brisenden 1987). Over the last two decades, however, historians have changed their perspective and started to use the social model of disability, which makes a clear distinction between impairment as a medically defined condition of a person’s body or mind, and disability as a culturally and historically

specific phenomenon, whereby disability is a socially generated system of discrimination. As Metzler (2017, 60) has repeatedly emphasized, this model allows the medieval historian “to treat the physical impairment as a separate category from disease or illness in general, so that medieval concepts of impairment will no longer be confused with those relating to temporary conditions such as infectious disease, as many medical historians have done.” While the social model of disability has been widely used, it has been recently criticized for excluding the body from historical analysis, rendering it meaningless and devoid of agency. To address this limitation, a new perspective has been proposed, which integrates both bodily differences and social perceptions, treating the body as an essential analytical category.

This alternative model challenges the strict separation between impairment and disability, arguing that such distinctions are not applicable to the medieval context since even the term ‘impairment’ is a culturally constructed concept without a direct historical counterpart (Eyler 2010, 8). The cultural approach to disability allows historians to explore a wide range of experiences for people with disabilities, analysing the impaired body both as a physical experience and as a product of cultural discourse. This approach, which I follow in this article, provides a more nuanced understanding of Byzantine disability, acknowledging the interplay between physical conditions and societal attitudes.

As in other pre-modern societies, the Byzantines did not have a conceptual category designating ‘the disabled’. The presence of various perspectives and discourses on health and illness, as evidenced in a variety of texts, testifies to the coexistence of multiple views on what we might today label as disability. For instance, while infertility is not considered a disabling condition in modern times, it prevented Byzantine women from fulfilling their expected social roles. Conversely, eunuchs, despite their inability to procreate, were fully integrated into Byzantine society and were highly esteemed, particularly in political and ecclesiastical contexts.

Similar to the Latin term *infirmitas*, the term νόσος (nosos – disease, sickness) was applied broadly without differentiating between various types of illnesses or infirmities. Its use extended beyond just diseases, encompassing a wide range of medical conditions, including impairments and disabilities. Other terms like ἀσθένεια (asthénéia – weakness or lack of strength) or ἀρρώστια (arrhōstía – sickness or ill-health) could more generally denote an infirmity.

As we can see, the vocabulary of disability inherited from Greco-Roman antiquity was fluid and often vague, unless it specifically mentioned a particular physical or sensory impairment. A useful summary of the ancient Greek terms denoting incapacity is provided by Samama (2016), who shows that the ancient Greek concept of disability covered a broad range of conditions, from eye, speech, or walking impairments to mental illnesses, some of which are nevertheless hard to interpret.

By and large, the Byzantines would call the mobility-impaired people κυλλος, (crippled), λελωβημένος (maimed, a term used to describe someone who had been injured or mutilated, resulting in impairment), χωλος (lame, either in hands or feet; was used more broadly to describe limping or difficulty in movement), ακίνητος (unable to move), πηρός (disabled in a limb, invalid) or ανάπηρος (deformed or mutilated; was used to describe individuals with significant physical deformities or impairments). One example of how ambiguous were the terms used by the Byzantines in expressing disability is provided by the use of the term αδυνατος. In the ninth-century *Life of David, Symeon and George of Lesbos*, the hagiographer mentions that George used “to get up at night and go to the mountain to chop wood that he would carry back and place it secretly at the doors of those who were infirm” (αδυνατος).³ The translator of the *vita* has chosen to use the term “infirm” for αδυνατος, which according to Liddell-Scott-Jones lexicon (*LSJ*) denotes impossibility and it refers to someone who is unable to do a thing, who is weak and without strength. The term is nevertheless general and does not necessarily imply a physical impairment, and in this context, it can refer to either physically disabled people, to old age persons, or to poor people who cannot provide for themselves. Such a confusing terminology warns the historian that one needs a deep context, which is usually absent, to determine what the matter with a person really was.

Τυφλός was the most common Greek term for ‘blind’ but one can find in hagiographies other expressions to indicate blindness. For instance, a nursing infant who was blind in the right eye (τὸν ὀφθαλμὸν τὸν δεξιὸν ἐσβεσμένον) was miraculously healed by the saint Athanasia of Aegina (*Life of Athanasia of Aegina*, ch. 30). The expression in Greek is translated as ‘extinguished eye’. Such an array of terms used in Byzantine texts illustrates the complexity of metaphors that could indicate an eye disease. Deafness was signalled by the term κωφός, which was consistently used in hagiographies: a deaf and mute child could be designated either as κωφον

τε και αλαλον παιδιον (*Life of Peter of Atroa*, ch.67) or βουβος και κωφός (*Translation and miracles of Theodora of Thessalonike*, ch.2).

4. Narrating the Miracle: Rhetorical Strategies and Cultural Discourses of Miraculous Cures

The veneration of saints, a fundamental part of Byzantine Christianity, prompted a rich literary tradition detailing the life, deeds and miracles performed by the saints, both during their lifetime and posthumously. Within this hagiographical tradition, miracle narratives have played an extremely important role in the promotion of a saint's cult. The discourse employed by hagiographers typically portrayed impairment as a deficiency requiring correction, a perspective that can be seen in numerous miracle accounts, which often served as literary and theological tools to emphasize the sanctity of holy figures and how important was to put one's hope in divinity. These miracle stories were frequently modelled on Gospel accounts of Jesus performing various cures. Just as Jesus healed the blind, the paralytic, the lepers, and the lame, the Byzantine saints were depicted as agents of divine intervention who could restore physical wholeness to those afflicted by various ailments.

Whether compiled in stand-alone compilations, or included into the texts of the saints' *vitae*, miracle accounts open up a window into how ill-health and disability have been perceived, interpreted and lived out in Byzantine society. Yet, the experiences of sick individuals described in these texts should not be seen as mere factual records, but as mediated through a narrative, whose function, according to White (1980, 87), is to produce notions of "continuity, wholeness, closure, and individuality that every 'civilized' society wishes to see itself as incarnating". As such, narrative is especially disposed to serve as the carrier of Eastern Christianity ideology, Byzantine society and culture, and the function of saints and miracles ascribed to them therein (Clarck 1998, 20). The small glimpses from the lives of the disabled children and their families which pepper the sources I discuss serve to enhance the narrative's credibility and realism. However, for these details to be effective, the audience needed to perceive them as familiar and relatable to their own everyday experiences. If the descriptions of disability had been entirely fantastical or unrealistic, it would have undermined the narrative's authenticity (Barthes 1986, 141-142). Thus, despite their narrative constraints, these texts can

be safely used to discern social realities recognized as such by Byzantine audiences, offering valuable insights into the hopes and aspirations of Byzantine families, the actions they take particularly in relation to sick and disabled children, and the strategies to maintain the sense of hope amidst adversities.

Additionally, these texts must have recounted the emotions, behaviour and actions of all people described in the story – from those in search for a cure, whether adults or children, to their families, the saints or the clergy administering their relics, as well the community at large. Successful healings were disseminated in various ways: they were read aloud or discussed in the context of liturgical services, particularly on saints' feast days, and were prominently featured at shrines that housed the saints' relics. Hearing about someone who was cured in a particular holy place would inspire other people in search for a cure to visit the saints or their relics. In this way, the miracle narratives played a dual role: they educated the faithful about the power and efficacy of saints in healing, while also providing hope and encouragement to those in need of divine intervention.

Almost every holy biography of the Middle Byzantine period contains some miracles (although not necessarily related to healing) that would prove the χάρισμα (gift of grace) and ultimately the holiness of the saints. An analysis of 83 *vitae* from the eighth to tenth centuries by Talbot (2002), which includes healing miracles performed by relics of both female and male saints, concludes that the Byzantine world saw a remarkable growth in healing shrines in the ninth century. This phenomenon is related to the end of the iconoclastic crisis that shook the Byzantine Empire for more than a century (from 726 to 842 with an intermission of 28 years)⁴, which resulted in the expansion of the cults of relics, as well as in the revival of the hagiographical literature, and the emergence of new saints in the ninth century.

What becomes apparent from Talbot's analysis is the wealth of information the historian can extract from these sources, especially in what concerns the types of afflictions cured by the saints, the methods of healing and the distribution by gender of the sick people in search for healing. In addition to this data, miracle narratives provide details about the name, age, place of origin, profession and the social condition of the recipients of healing and people close to them.

In terms of narrative structure, the large majority of miracles have the same pattern: first, a brief biographical description of the sick person – such as, “a child quite young in age and still at the breast, whose name

was Manouel" (*Life of Nikon ho Metanoieite*, ch.68), or "a young woman from the town of Verroia" (*Translation and miracles of St. Theodora of Thessalonike*, ch.12) – followed by a description of the health problems and the "treatment" provided by the saints or their relics. In the case of the living saints, the usual methods of healing consisted in the invocation of the divine powers through a prayer recited by the saint and the blessing of the sick. If the healing miracles were posthumous, the treatment would consist in touching the relics or the coffin that contained them, spending some time near the holy shrine, anointing the sick body with the holy oil from the lamp that would hang above a saint's coffin, or sometimes touching the clothing or a personal possession of the saint (Talbot 2002, 159-161).⁵

According to the data gathered by Talbot, the total number of men mentioned in the miracle accounts of the eighth to the tenth centuries and healed by the saints was over twice that of the women (332 for men, respectively 156 for women). Talbot's breakdown of miracle stories by gender becomes problematic when it comes to children. She includes boys in the category of men, and girls in the category of women, and when the person's gender is not mentioned by the sources, Talbot marks them under the category 'indeterminate sex'. A separate statistics discerning men, women, and children (boys/girls/unspecified) would be more useful and productive and in any case would provide different conclusions. For instance, Talbot states that demonic possessions are the most frequent afflictions mentioned in the sources she has analysed, followed by paralysis. Other diseases mentioned in hagiographies are dropsy, hernia, leprosy, cancer, dysentery, fever and chills, sterility, and hemorrhage.

However, a close look at the healing accounts included in the hagiographical literature of the Middle Byzantine period reveals that mobility impairments feature as the most frequent conditions of children cured by the saints, followed by eye inflammation and blindness, demonic possession, deaf-muteness, and finally skin diseases. Evidently, different ways to categorize these cases yields significantly different conclusions. Given the prevalence of mobility impairments in the Byzantine sources, I shall focus more on several cases of mobility-impaired children. My concern here is how the impairment may have affected childhood experiences, the prospects of children's future, as well as the discourses of hope.

Three miracles featuring mobility-impaired children are included in the *Life of Peter of Atroa* (ninth century), the *Life of Symeon the New*

Theologian (eleventh century) and the *Life of Luke the Stylite* (tenth century) respectively. All three stories present boys, and the miracles are performed during the saints' lifetime. The choice to discuss their cases stems from the need to understand in what ways their lives would have differed given that the boys come from families of different social standing. In the first case we are dealing with a child belonging to aristocracy, the second one comes from a poor family, while the social status of the third child's family is not mentioned. Moreover, all three cases provide us with details about their medical condition and the families' actions. First, I will briefly present the three stories and will analyse them with an eye to how social status and disability operate together in shaping the life experiences of children of same gender but of slightly different ages and who suffer from crippling impairments, as well as to how hope is expressed and performed in each case.

The first miracle story presents the case of five-year-old boy who suffered since infancy from a bone disease, most likely rickets. The child was the son of lady of senatorial rank, who possessed an estate nearby Peter of Atroa's monastery. Having found no remedy in medical doctors and learning about the healing powers of Peter, she visits the saint and implores him to cure her child who had been supported only by his bones and sinews, being deprived of flesh since birth. The mother confesses that her child had been born like this because of the multitude of her sins, begging the saint: "Like a merciful physician and friend of souls, for the Lord's sake, heal him, for in the end I can no longer, unfortunate that I am, bear more the sight of this living corpse."⁶ Moved with compassion, Peter laid hands on the crippled boy, restored his health, and gave him back to his mother. The lady, upon receiving in good health her little son, who just before was weak (ἄσθενής) and almost dead (νεκρωμένος), rejoiced with all her family and returned home, in the city of Nicaea in the province of Bithynia.

The second miracle presents the story of a destitute woman (γύναιον τι πενόμενον) who arrives at the monastery where the saint Symeon the New Theologian resided, carrying in her arms her four-year-old child. The boy, we are told, was paralysed, unable to move, terribly wasted by disease, and believed to have little time left (παιδίον ὥσει χρόνων τεσσάρων παράλυτον ὁμοῦ καὶ ἀκίνητον). Torn by the two evils of poverty and the serious illness of her child, the mother left the boy in front of the chapel of St. Marina and hurried away without being seen by anyone. The monks discovered the child lying there and told Symeon about him "as though

it were some strange and horrible spectacle (φοβερόν τι πρᾶγμα καὶ ξένον ἰδεῖν ὀφθαλμοῖς)". Symeon went to the chapel, saw the child and asked the monks what they want to do with the little one. When the monks replied that the boy should be buried, as he is almost dead and barely breathing, the saint took the child in his hands, placed him on his seat and anointed him with holy oil. After praying and making the sign of the cross upon the boy with his hand, the child miraculously "became himself again and was revived and received robust health" (ἀναζωπυρηθὲν τε καὶ ἰσχύον εὐρωστίας λαβὼν). The boy, who had been bedridden and immobile for his whole life, could now stand up on his legs, walk and jump about from one to another, looking for something to eat. After he had eaten, he enjoyed complete health, and was given back to his mother, being able from now on to work and help her out of poverty and misfortune (*Life of Symeon the New Theologian*, ch.118).

Finally, the third miracle describes Sysinios and his wife, a couple living in the city of Chrysopolis, who went to saint Luke the Stylite, famous for his miracles. Their child had been bedridden for three years, being completely paralysed in his body (ἐν παρεσει σώματος ὀλοτελεῖ καὶ παντελεῖ μελῶν ἀκίνησίᾳ). Instead of asking the saint for a miraculous cure, the parents supplicated the saint to offer fervent prayer to the Lord so that the child might soon be relieved from his painful life (παράκλησιν ἐκτενῇ ποιήσεται πρὸς Κύριον, ὡς ἂν ταχέως ἀπαλλαγείη τῆς παρούσης ἐπώδυνης ζωῆς), as it was both a burden and a shame for them to see the child in such accumulated misery, being unable to either cure or care for him. To their supplication the saint, foretelling the future very clearly, replied that next day God will take the child to him, freeing him from a life of misery (τὸν μέντοι παῖδα προσλαμβάνόμενος καὶ τῆς βιαίας ἀπαλλάττων ζωῆς), while the parents will be released from the grief and laborious service concerning him (τῆς ἐπ' αὐτῷ λύπης καὶ δυσχεροῦς ὑπηρεσίας) (*Life of Luke the Stylite*, ch.75).

5. Lived Experiences and Emotional Dynamics: Insights from Miracle Stories

These three anecdotes hold significant value for the history of disability during the Byzantine period, particularly regarding childhood experiences and the impact of disability on families facing the challenges of raising a disabled child, irrespective of their social and economic status. Even

though in the first miracle we are dealing with quite an affluent family, who could afford medical treatment and who indeed resorted to physicians in order to improve the child's condition, the ultimate hope was in the saint's powers to help the boy. The criticism towards doctors' inability to cure various ailments is a well-known *topos* frequently employed in hagiographical literature in order to stress the healing powers of the saints. The message conveyed by hagiographers was that true hope can only be placed in divine assistance. Hope played a significant role in Byzantine culture, not only influencing people's decision-making and actions but also contributing to their emotional resilience when facing with life adversities. The hope for a miraculous cure was a fundamental aspect of their world-view, affecting decisions, rituals, and the ways they sought help during times of distress. When confronted with serious health problems, the Byzantines typically employed three strategies: first, they would consult doctors, if financially feasible, and subsequently seek the assistance of saints or their relics. Second, they might visit a saint or a holy shrine directly, without prior medical intervention. Third, they would combine both approaches in the hope of increasing their chances of being cured.

In the stories summarized above, only the senatorial lady is described to have resorted first to the doctors, whose knowledge about skeletal malformations may have been rather limited.⁷ Her child, born with rickets, was the recipient of the saint's intercession, one of the rare cases of a birth defect cured by a saint. Another similar case is described in the same *Life of Peter of Atroa* and concerns the nephew of a monk, a seven-year-old child with another congenital malformation: from the waist down it is said to have had no bones at all, only flesh and skin. Because of this, he could not even crawl on the ground. Healed by the saint, the child started to walk.⁸ As other scholars have already noticed, hagiographers rarely indicate whether the disability of the people healed by the saints was from birth or inflicted during their lifetime. This was an idea deeply embedded in Byzantine thinking that reflects an implicit care not to overstep the boundaries of something that only God could do, as the saints themselves had limited powers in the face of such afflictions (Eftymiadis 2016, 396).

Another important point to be made is the way in which the Byzantines reflected upon disability in children: this was sometimes seen as the result of the parents' sins, like in the case of the first miracle, but not always, at least in what concerns the Middle Byzantine period. In fact, there are relatively few instances in Byzantine hagiography of this period in which parents claim that their children were born or became disabled because

of their sinful life.⁹ More often than not, this connection between disability and sin is emphasized in the case of disabled adults. When a child was disabled, his/her disability might be inflicted by the evil forces, or carries a subtle theological message concerning parents' individual salvation rather than their own, as the innocence of children was believed to assure their entry into Paradise.

In the context of family and social support, the experiences of these children were shaped by their economic circumstances and the availability of care networks. A mobility-impaired child would require constant physical assistance, and in Byzantium, as in every medieval society, the family was the first source of support. Yet, the ways families may have provided assistance for their disabled children depended much on the type of impairment, how big the families were, the physical setting in which these children lived, as well as on their financial means. A disabled child born into a rich family may have benefited from the daily assistance of numerous servants who might have been in charge with feeding the child, moving him around, and other such basic needs. Servants played an active role in children's lives, being mentioned in other sources as supervising and taking care of sick children of aristocratic families.¹⁰

On the other hand, children from poor families might have received some assistance from their relatives—like siblings, grandparents, or aunts. However, the second miracle suggests that poverty doubled by sickness or disability was the worst combination for a family who could not afford to properly take care of such children. Describing her case, the hagiographer paints a painful image of a mother who struggles along and is exhausted with the illness of her child that adds a great burden to her poverty. Being unable to cope with the harsh circumstances of life, she ultimately decides to expose the child in front of the chapel of St. Marina, "so that she might experience some minor and temporary relief by having rid herself of one of the two evils with which she was burdened," as the author put it. Here it should be noted that the hagiographer does not criticize her decision, but rather understands the circumstances that compelled her to make this decision. Given that the social inequality even at the level of peasantry and the heavy system of taxation made the poor peasants even more impoverished (Kazhdan 1997, 63), the depiction of the woman's decision in the narrative should not be understood as a *topos*, but as a reflection of a socio-economic reality.

Leaving aside the rhetorical strategies of religious authors to stress the extraordinary powers of the saints to cure conditions that were considered

incurable by medicine, the third case may be seen as a reflection of reality in which a more extreme case of disability lowered the life quality of a child to such an extent that his own parents wished he would be released from a life of misery. The boy is described as a source of both shame and burden for the parents, highlighting the significant challenges they faced, not just in terms of the everyday difficulties and the lack of an additional pair of hands (an important economical asset for most Byzantine families), but also in terms of societal prejudices, equating disability with shame. In a potentially surprising turn of events (for a modern audience at least), the saint does not condemn the parents for desiring their child's death. Instead, he acknowledges their worries, anxieties, and sorrows, as well as the extensive care and services they would have had to provide, expressing empathy and asking God to liberate the child from what is repeatedly described as 'a life of miseries.' The saintly intervention puts an end to the pain of being bedridden for his entire life and consequently, the emotional distress from the lack of prospects for a better or meaningful life.

Unusual as it may be to read a narrative in which parents would ask for their child's death, this anecdote offers us a small glimpse into how the Byzantine parents may have coped with such circumstances practically and emotionally. Why did the parents not ask for a healing miracle? The same hagiography contains several other cases of children who were cured by the saint, but all of them are performed because the parents asked for a healing. Are we dealing in this case with a situation closer to the reality of daily life with parents so overwhelmed by this situation that they could no longer envision hope for a cure? Or did they perceive paralysis as a condition impossible to be cured even by a saint? These are just rhetorical questions and it is difficult to answer them, but they provide us a window into the emotional burden children's disabilities laid on their parents' shoulders.

This narrative invites reflection on the relational nature of hope. Hope rarely acts alone; it coexists with and is shaped by other emotions, in our case, despair. The parents' request for their child's death reflects an emotional state where despair appears indeed dominant. Yet, far from being static or singular, hope functions relationally, evolving in response to shifting circumstances. The act of turning to the saint for intervention suggests that, even amidst their despair, the parents may have clung to some form of hope – not for a miraculous healing, to be sure, but perhaps for some relief from their overwhelming suffering. This paradoxical coexistence of hope and despair underscores the fragility of hope in such

situations, where the emotional toll of caregiving leaves little room for envisioning a meaningful future.

Another way of reading this narrative is that such severe disabilities prevented children to meet society's standards, thus revealing the socio-economic and emotional importance of children as central to the survival and social advancement strategies of the Byzantines. Their survival into adulthood was crucial for ensuring the continuation of family lineage, the transfer of inheritance, and the psychological and financial security of their parents in old age. Moreover, already from childhood they were expected to take part in the household economic activities, by helping their parents with different household chores. Children's inability to work, especially when they belonged to lower social strata, must have been a strong definer of their lived experience. As Byzantium was largely an agrarian world, mobility impairments were markedly disabling because they affected the capacity to work in physical roles, which was a very important feature, not only economically but also socially. This may not have been the case with children of craftsmen as some crafts would require more the use of hands to work as jewellers, silk spinners, silk weavers, leather cutters, some of the *métiers* in Byzantium.

The author of the *Vita of Symeon the New Theologian* mentions that once returned to the mother, the child now healthy was able to work and help her out of poverty and misfortune. Hagiographical literature gives evidence that in rural families, boys worked as shepherds and assistants in agricultural labour as young as seven. A severe mobility impairment would have prevented them from earning a living by performing their usual tasks, in which situations they may have ended up as beggars or in the best case in a monastic community or other philanthropic institutions governed by the Church, such as hospitals, poor houses and orphanages (Constantelos 1991; Miller 2003). The Church made some efforts to integrate the disabled in the life of the community, as for example in the monastic community of Athanasios the Athonite who ruled that those who were in some way or another disabled were to help the community. Accordingly, the blind people with a healthy body were to help with operating the forge, while the crippled he ordered to help in the kitchen. By operating this integration of the disabled members who were most probably perceived at a more general level as useless, the community would ideally benefit from their work and in turn, the disabled would feel more valuable (*Life of Athanasios of Athos, vita A*, 138). However, as most of the mobility impaired children are presented in the Byzantine texts

as being raised and taken care of within the family, most probably such arrangements applied to disabled adults in specific communal contexts.

Another aspect that deserves attention is the way in which mobility-impaired children may have interacted with their surroundings and navigated their environment. We can infer the difficulty these children experienced in moving about even in the narrowest context of their every-day life and habitation, but all the more in the context of the journeys that families had to make when visiting a saint or making a pilgrimage to holy shrines. Normally, pilgrims would approach the monasteries where the living saints resided or the holy shrines by foot, as a symbol of humility towards the saint. In general, mobility-impaired people would be carried by family members or servants, or would use animals as a means of transportation, and when reaching the holy place would be carried on stretchers, or would use crutches if they were able to some extent to move their legs. For instance, two lame children described in the *Life of Luke of Steris* (70) are said to have ridden donkeys. A boy mentioned in the *Life of Makarios of Pelekete* (8) is said to have been able to only crawl on all fours, supporting his hands on blocks of wood. Travelling even short distances to holy places would require considerable effort also from those who accompanied the disabled. The boy in the second miracle was carried only by his mother in her arms, who had to climb the stairway leading to the chapel where the monks of the monastery of Symeon the New Theologian found the boy. For those people who were completely unable to move, their relatives might undertake the journey on their behalf, while the bedridden would hope to secure a cure from afar.

These stories also highlight the liminal status of these children – neither alive, yet not dead either, but somewhere in between. The paralysed child in the *Life of Symeon the New Theologian* is described as “almost dead already and just about to stop breathing”, whereas the boy from the senatorial family is described by his mother as a living corpse (νεκροζώϊον). Other narratives about disabled children described children as half-dead (ἡμιθανές), especially in connection with paralysis. For instance, a seven-year-old boy who was dumb and with a dry body is described by his father who took him to Peter of Atroa as an inert and insensitive object (ανενεργητον και αναισθητον κειμενον) (*Life of Peter of Atroa*, ch.20). According to Irina Metzler (2006, 155), during the Middle Ages, the status of disabled individuals was often characterized by their liminal position between the categories of ‘well’ and ‘sick,’ primarily due to the incurability of their conditions. If we judge by the description of

these children, in Byzantine thought, disability may have had a similar conceptualization; yet paralysis in particular was more than just a physical condition; it was closely linked with the broader social implications of fulfilling societal expectations. Paralysis was perceived as indicative of the inability to participate fully in the social and economic life of the community. Consequently, the small glimpses offered by miracle account reveal the harsh realities of living with a disability, both for children and their caregivers.

At the same time, the crises arising from children's illnesses and disabilities were alleviated by religious practices, particularly through seeking the assistance of saints. This recourse provided families with a culturally sanctioned avenue to express their emotional distress regarding their children's health, offering both spiritual solace and a structured way to navigate their grief and hope.

6. Conclusions

In Byzantine society, children were pivotal to the survival and prosperity of families, embodying both practical roles – continuing the family lineage and providing psychological and financial support in their parents' old age – and symbolic ones, as carriers of the family's name, honour, and social standing within the community. These expectations placed children at the centre of familial hopes, which operated on two distinct yet interconnected levels: a forward-looking hope tied to long-term familial aspirations and a reactive hope that arose during moments of crisis.

The forward-looking hope was rooted in the assumption that children would grow into their roles as contributors to household stability, inheritors of family wealth, and perpetuators of familial legacy. This hope framed children as essential to the family's future, motivating parental investment in their upbringing and well-being. However, these expectations could be suddenly disrupted by severe illness, disability, or other adversities, prompting the emergence of crisis-driven hope. Unlike the steady, aspirational nature of forward-looking hope, this form of hope was immediate and urgent, focused on securing relief from the imminent threat to a child's life.

Miracle accounts illustrate how families expressed crisis-driven hope by turning to saints and engaging in religious practices, particularly when conventional remedies failed. Seeking divine intervention was not merely

an act of faith but also a way to sustain broader aspirations for the family's future. These accounts reveal how the two forms of hope were deeply intertwined. A miraculous healing, for instance, could not only resolve a present crisis but also restore the child's ability to fulfil their expected societal and familial roles, reinforcing the family's forward-looking hopes. At the same time, the hope for healing provided families with emotional resilience to endure immediate hardships, bridging the gap between despair and renewed aspirations.

The disruption caused by a child's severe illness or disability had important implications for Byzantine families. These crises jeopardized not only the child's prospects for survival and societal participation but also the family's socio-economic stability and future lineage. Religious practices played a crucial role in helping families negotiate these challenges, providing structured pathways to navigate uncertainty and sustain hope in both its forms.

What these miracle accounts show us is that everyday practices of lived religion provided several pathways for Byzantine individuals and families to negotiate emotionally such crises and to sustain both types of hope. For grieving parents, the future of a dead child is an assured place in heaven as an innocent sufferer of a terrible affliction. But most children in the texts are healed, yet the road to healing is not always a straight one. Often parents and children undertook long journeys to saints' shrines, performed prayers, or slept near relics, waiting for divine intervention. What is common to all these attempts at miraculous healing is the expression of hope and faith that the saint can intercede on their behalf. Even when cures did not occur, the belief in the saint's power allowed families to reframe their grief, often imagining spiritual consolation for a child who had passed away.

Ultimately, hope – whether forward-looking or crisis-driven – emerges as a central emotional practice in Byzantine society. While these forms of hope served different functions, they were deeply interconnected, reinforcing each other in times of adversity. Crisis-driven hope allowed families to persevere during moments of despair, sustaining their broader aspirations for a meaningful future. Though often stretched to its limits by obstacles or failed cures, it was nevertheless essential for Byzantine people, for whom it was one of the basic cultural emotional scripts they could appeal to when faced with such adverse circumstances.

Endnotes

- ¹ A comprehensive bibliography published online by Vuolanto, Aasgaard, and Cojocaru testifies to the tremendous number of studies dedicated to children and childhood from the 8th c. BC to the 8th c. AD; online at: https://www.academia.edu/36705877/CHILDREN_IN_THE_ANCIENT_WORLD_AND_THE_EARLY_MIDDLE_AGES._A_BIBLIOGRAPHY_EIGHT_CENTURY_BC_EIGHT_CENTURY_AD_VILLE_VUOLANTO_REIDAR_AASGAARD_and_OANA_MARIA_COJOCARU.
- ² <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/faqs.htm>.
- ³ *Life of David, Symeon and George*, ch.11: νύκτωρ γὰρ ἀνιστάμενος καὶ πρὸς τὸ ὄρος ἀφικόμενος ἡ θαυμασία καὶ ἐλεήμων ὄντως ψυχὴ ὁ Γεώργιος ζύλα κόπτων καὶ τοῖς ἐαυτοῦ ἐπιφορτιζόμενος ὤμοις, λαθραίως ταῖς θύραις ἀπετίθει τῶν ἀδυνάτων· English trans. by Domingo-Forasté (1998, 170).
- ⁴ The first iconoclastic period ended in 787 when the veneration of the icons was officially reintroduced in the Church, while the second iconoclastic period started in 815, when Leo V decided to reintroduce Iconoclasm, which was ratified by a council held in Hagia Sophia. There are many studies on Iconoclasm, but a very insightful study is provided by Brubacker and Haldon (2011).
- ⁵ Another kind of treatment falls in the category of healing dreams, which are more characteristic of early Byzantine hagiography and miracle collections. In this case, the healing dreams represent an answer to the sick person's prayers and occur very often when the patients are present in the saint's shrine, and sometimes when they sleep in their homes or on the way to the saint's shrine. On healing dreams and their categorization, see Constantinou (2014).
- ⁶ *Life of Peter of Atroa*, ch.51: Παιδίον μοί ἐστιν πενταετής, ὃ πανόσιε, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν μου νόσῳ βαρυτάτῃ περιπέπτωκεν ὁστέοις μόνοις καὶ νεύροις περικρατούμενον, σαρκὸς δὲ χωρὶς ὑπάρχον ἀπὸ γεννήσεως· ὄν, ὡς συμπαθὴς ἱατρὸς καὶ φίλοψυχος, διὰ τὸν Κύριον ἴασαι· οὐ φέρω γὰρ ἔτι ὄραν εἰς τέλος τὴν τοῦτου νεκροζωίαν ἢ οἰκτιστός.
- ⁷ One exception is the second-century physician Sorano of Ephesus, who alludes to infant rickets in his treatise *Gynaecology*: 'When the infant attempts to sit and to stand, one should help in its movements. For if it is eager to sit up too early and for too long a period it becomes hunchbacked (the spine bending because the little body has as yet no strength). If, moreover, it is too prone to stand up and desirous of walking, the legs may become distorted in the regions of the thighs.' Unfortunately, the seven-century Byzantine physician Paul of Aegina who devotes an entire chapter to fractures and spinal injuries, does not mention bone diseases and childhood malformations.

- ⁸ The saint cures the child but foresees he will die in two years (*Life of Peter of Atroa*, ch.29).
- ⁹ As with the half-paralyzed girl cured by Theodora of Thessalonike's relics, and whose mother argues that her condition is due to the multitude of her sins. *The Translation and Miracles of Theodora of Thessalonike*, ch.11
- ¹⁰ This is the case of Styliane, the daughter of Michael Psellos who died at the age of nine as a result of an infectious disease, most likely smallpox. The servants are described here as having swaddled, breast-fed, nourished and raised her until the time of death. Michael Psellos, *Funeral oration for his daughter Styliane* §37, 132.

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Daria Drozdova is an Associate Professor at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, specializing in the history of early modern science and philosophy. Her PhD dissertation explored Alexandre Koyré's conception of the Scientific Revolution. She has participated in editing of collective monographs on Koyré, including "Hypotheses and Perspectives in the History and Philosophy of Science: Homage to Alexandre Koyré 1892-1964" (2018) and "Crossroads of Cultures: A. Koyré, A. Kojève, I. Berlin" (in Russian, 2021). Her current research focuses on the formation of the canon of European philosophy and its reception in Russian philosophical literature of the 19th-20th centuries.

DISCUSSIONS OF THE CANON IN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES. A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CULTURAL, LITERARY AND DISCIPLINARY CANONS

Daria Drozdova

Abstract

In my paper I examine various conceptions of the canon across different fields of culture and intellectual tradition. I emphasize the importance of distinguishing between cultural or literary canons and disciplinary canons. Within the cultural or literary canon, I further differentiate between canons that relate to the general image of European civilization – such as the so-called Great Books or the canon of great Western literature – and those that pertain to national literary traditions. I contend that much of the criticism that arose during the ‘canon wars’ of 1980s and 90s was directed specifically at the ideological content of the national literary canon and was extended to other forms of canonicity largely by metonymy. In this regard, it is possible to move away from the critiques and focus more on the positive aspects of the canon as applied to various cultural fields and disciplines. I also argue that, in the case of philosophy, the philosophical canon should be primarily considered as a disciplinary canon, though it also shares certain features with the cultural canon.

Keywords: literary canon; canon of philosophy; Great Books; classics of social science; canon formation; ‘canon wars’

A well-known medieval metaphor, cherished and embraced by modernity, says that we are like dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants. Even if we ourselves are nothing remarkable, our ability to use the achievements of our predecessors allows us to see further and deeper than they did. This image seems to imply that the greatness of those who preceded us in culture or in our professional field is something given. Our task is to identify

the tallest giants and comfortably position ourselves on their broad, though now rigid and dead, shoulders. However, in recent decades, we have come to recognize that our view of the past is very selective, and that the recognition of the greatness of our predecessors – or, more precisely, the non-recognition of the greatness of certain others, who might not fulfill our expectations – often depends on various social circumstances, prejudices, the agency of cultural powers, and other such factors. In different areas of culture, as well as in humanities and social sciences, this discussion about our relationship to the greatness of the past has become known as the debates about canon.

The question of the canon has been the subject of active debate for over half a century, with discussions spanning a vast array of cultural and intellectual practices. In different fields, the question of the canon takes on various forms. In literary studies and art history, the discussion concerns the most outstanding works that represent ‘masterpieces’ or a ‘standard of excellence’ for cultural production¹. In cultural studies, museology, and archival science, the canon is regarded as the body of works that merit selection and preservation for posterity – whether these are films, paintings, musical works, computer games and programs, or other cultural artifacts (Glas & van Vught, 2019; Harth, 2008; Lappin, 2022; Staiger, 1985). In the history of science, we may call ‘canonical’ those examples which are frequently used to illustrate epistemic theses (Bolinska & Martin, 2021).

In my area of interest, the history of early modern philosophy and science, as well as in the broader field of the history of philosophy, the discussion about the canon continues to be a significant topic even today². Conferences, summer schools, and public lectures that explicitly address the problem of the canon in philosophy are held annually³. University curricula now include courses dedicated to non-canonical authors. Projects aimed at ‘expanding the canon’ receive institutional support. For example, the *Project Vox* at Duke University exists from 2015. The curators of the project seeking to give voice and visibility to “philosophical works from marginalized individuals traditionally excluded from the philosophical canon.”⁴ The *Center for Canon Expansion and Change* was founded at the University of Minnesota three years ago with the aim to transform the teaching and organization of philosophy by supporting instructors in broadening the canon. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada offered financial and institutional support to the *New Narratives in the History of Philosophy* project whose aim is to

develop new narratives of philosophical past and to reconfigure, enrich and reinvigorate the philosophical canon.

Philosophy is not the only discipline concerned with its canon, as we have seen above. When considering discussions about the canon in a broader context, it can be useful to consider the diverse theoretical positions and practical solutions that have been developed in other disciplines as a result of debates on the canon and canonicity over the past 50 years. However, before using the existing conceptual and theoretical richness developed in these disciplines and areas of culture, it makes sense to consider how the approach to the canon in philosophy is similar to, or different from, the approach to the canon in other fields. Should we take the canon to be a list of outstanding philosophical works that possess unique qualities? Or should we consider the canon as the classical and foundational form of philosophy as a discipline? Or should we see the canon as an ideologically charged outcome of the interaction of various social interests?

In order to identify the peculiarity and specificity of the canon in philosophy, it would be appropriate to understand first what the canon represents in other fields. This interest forms the main motivation behind this study. My modest research cannot undertake the ambitious task of fully describing the various approaches to the canon in different areas, so I will limit myself to some of the most significant concepts that will allow me to construct an initial interpretive framework for the canon within which I wish to place the question of canon in philosophy.

In my attempt to find a place for the philosophical canon among the many different types of canons, I will draw on the distinction between the cultural or literary canon and the disciplinary canon. This important distinction was introduced by historians and sociologists (Baehr, 2002; How, 2016; Savelieva & Poletaev, 2010). They indicate that the notion of 'canon' or 'classics' can be interpreted in two ways – either as an object of study, research, veneration, or as part of the corpus of knowledge, the original form of a discipline, a tool for studying and describing the object of study. The first type includes, for example, the literary canon, which is a selected set of works which are worth of consideration due to their intrinsic value, as special and outstanding elements of cultural inheritance. The second type includes the canon of different humanities or social disciplines. Scholars agree that in the case of social sciences (and some humanities), we're not talking about a canon as an object of study, analysis, or even veneration, but about the structural part of the existing

body of knowledge, the texts which are foundational to the discipline. In this sense, the canon or the classics are not the object of study, but rather a tool or lens for studying other objects – specifically, society. Peter Baehr also emphasizes that there is another important distinction between the literary and disciplinary canons, that is the audience to whom they are addressed and who can make judgments about their content. For works of literature, it is not only the professional experts who play an important role, but the reading public as well, which expresses its position through modes of consumption, whereas for the disciplinary canon, the main reception takes place within the circle of professionals (Baehr, 2002, pp. 139–140).

It seems to me that the canon of philosophy has both the features of a disciplinary canon and the features of a cultural or literary canon, though I would like to think that it is closer to the disciplinary canon. On the one hand, the classics of philosophy are studied not only by a narrow circle of professionals, but they are often read by specialists from other fields as well as by general readers. On the other hand, the classics of philosophy are not seen in the philosophical practice itself as something detached from contemporary philosophical discourses, but they remain models and examples of philosophical questioning and conceptual work for new generations of professionals.

To make this comparison between different understandings of canon more explicit, I will now turn to four examples, three of which illustrate the particularities and intrinsic differences in the realm of the cultural or literary canon, while the fourth example refers to the disciplinary canon, that is to the canon or classics of the social sciences. The first three cases were at the center of the ‘canon wars’ that took place in the US in the 1980s and 1990s. While the canon criticism equally views these canons as a relic of masculine Eurocentricity, the differences between them are worth pointing out and examining. The first is an educational program promoting the reading of the ‘Great Books of Western Civilization’. Here, in a certain way, we are talking about a cultural canon, because it is assumed that there is a certain corpus of texts that constitutes the heritage and the highest achievement of Western civilization, and familiarity with this corpus of texts allows readers to become part of a common cultural space. Similarly, in the second case we are also talking about the unified space of Western culture, but the focus is only on works of imaginative literature that constitute the Western literary canon, the representatives of which are supposed to be the greatest poets and artists of past centuries. But a special place in discussions of the canon is occupied by the national literary

canon, in our case, the American Literary Canon whose deconstruction becomes the prototype for all subsequent debates. The national literary canon is the place of condensed narratives where the clash of interests of different cultural agents and the ideological influence of nation-building policies are most prominently manifested. The last case, as mentioned above, considers the canon or classics of social sciences as an example of discussion regarding the disciplinary canon.

I have tried to unite all four cases under the single theme of 'the notion of canon' although in the first case the term 'canon' itself is not initially used from the beginning but it arises only on the account of later criticism. Furthermore, in the case of the social sciences, a separate problem of distinction between the canon and the classics arises. I will turn back to this aspect of the discussion later. For now, I will simply point out that in many cases, both terms are used in discussions, often interchangeably. Researchers may discuss the canon / classics of literature, or the canon / classics of social sciences. In philosophy, the term 'canon' is used more frequently than the term 'classics,' although the latter is also employed (Schliesser, 2017).

In this paper I won't be particularly interested in the criticisms of the canon which often has some common denominators. It is usually said that canons secure the hegemony of a dominant group or reflects ideological assumptions and a colonial worldview, or function as instruments of cultural power, or represent "the insidious privileging of the values of white, Western, middle-class males" (How, 2016, p. 21). While the rejection of the canon almost always is based on the same arguments, the appraisal of canons can be based on different reasons. My interest is mostly in the variety of forms the canon (or the discourse about the canon) can assume. Also, I do not delve into the distant past to elucidate the original meanings of the term 'canon.' Rather, I am interested in more recent uses of the term, primarily from the 1980s and 1990s. And I do not consider the meaning of 'canon' in theological disciplines, assuming that in those fields it has a well-defined and specific usage. My primary focus will be on ideas related to the canon as a cultural entity and educational tool.

1. Improving American education: the 'Great Books' and the literary canons

Since current discussions about the canon in various disciplines are inspired by the 'canon wars' that took place in American culture in the 1980s and 1990s, we will begin our exposition by examining the meanings attributed to the concept of 'canon' in those debates. It should be noted that the debates affected several similar but still different areas of American education. On the one hand, the criticism was directed at the practice of teaching based on the 'Great Books' canon. The expression 'Great Books' referred to key texts of Western civilization, from ancient classics to modern political texts. On the other hand, the focus was on texts related to the literary canon, primarily national American literature.

Although the general criticism directed at these two canons was largely similar, I see a certain difference between the two lines of discussion. The 'Great Books' canon includes literary or philosophical classics, but it is not limited to them. Its focus is not on aesthetic value or philosophical significance but on (1) the expression of values associated with Western civilization and culture, (2) the continuity of cultural tradition, and (3) the richness of content, the familiarity with which it brings the reader closer to an ideal of humanity. Its core idea is the image of the 'educated person,' who is expected to be familiar with a certain textual heritage of Western civilization to consider themselves a part of it. Therefore, the 'Great Books' canon is more oriented towards the past and aims to preserve tradition and continuity within the broad cultural framework known as the 'Western civilization.' Familiarity with this tradition can be described using the metaphor of a 'walk through a portrait gallery of ancestors.' However, for a heterogeneous society like America, these 'ancestors' were not given but were consciously chosen as such.

In contrast, the national literary canon is more related to the recent past and present. National literature does not necessarily have to be rooted in ancient history; on the contrary, older texts are less relevant for the modern reader. Except for certain 'pillars' of national literature (such as Shakespeare or Chaucer for English literature), the literary canon is usually formed from texts of the last two centuries. It is constantly supplemented with new texts that have gained recognition in recent times. This makes the question of the criteria for canon formation more significant and the role of contemporary actors more substantial.

It is important to note that both canons, which came under attack in the 1980s and 1990s, had not existed for centuries. In fact, they both were the result of reforms in the American education system that took place in the 1920s. It was during this time that the first courses aimed at familiarizing students with the 'Great Books' tradition of Western civilization emerged at Columbia University. At the same time special courses on American literature began to appear in university curricula, leading to an institutional selection of texts deemed most representative of the national tradition.

Between these two different educational practices, I will introduce another one that is related to the image of Western civilization and appeals to the aesthetic values inherent in the literary canon. This concerns the canon of great books of Western literature, defended by many literary critics, notably Harold Bloom. As we will see below, in this particular case, the connection of the canon with the immediate needs of the current historical moment comes to the forefront to a much lesser extent. The canon of masterpieces of world literature seems to exist in itself, reproducing itself not through readers but through the addition of new participants to the literary process. This elitism and separateness are striking, and therefore, it deserves to be mentioned as a peculiar tradition.

1.1. The Great Book tradition and Western civilization

The modern Great Books curriculum originated at Columbia College in 1919⁵. John Erskine, a professor of English at the College, introduced a two-year optional General Honors course for a select group of top students in their final two undergraduate years. This course focused on the reading and discussion of what was then referred to as the 'Great Books.' Students were expected to read one book per week and then engage in a two-hour class discussion. The books were read in translation, without the support of existing secondary literature. The goal was to provide students with a direct, first-time experience with the texts. Erskine emphasized that "there was a profound difference between a humane familiarity with great authors and an academic exploration of them" (cit. *apud*. Cross, 1995).

Almost immediately, young assistants joined the teaching of the 'Great Books' course, among them Mortimer Adler and Mark Van Doren. Adler quickly became instrumental in popularizing the educational approach through reading significant books. By the late 1920s, Adler moved to the University of Chicago, where he found a like-minded ally in the then-president, Robert Maynard Hutchins. Together, they launched joint

marketing efforts that helped spread the practice of reading ‘Great Books’ based on Erskine’s model, making it popular not only in colleges but also for adult education. Initially offered exclusively to the most distinguished students capable of reading one dense and challenging book per week, these courses later gained popularity as an educational tool for a broader audience. Adler’s influential text *How to Read a Book*, published in 1940, quickly became a bestseller⁶. In it, he argued for the significance of ‘Great Books’ for general culture and education and provided practical guidance for better understanding the content of the texts being read.

The content of these courses was never fixed, yet it was not extremely diverse either. It seems that in the minds of Erskine, Adler, and other participants in this project, there was a fairly extensive list of texts they considered classic and significant for contemporary educated persons. From this extensive list, they formed a narrower selection of texts they were ready to discuss with students. These lists of books offered to students for reading were usually approved by faculty councils and administration. Therefore, they cannot be considered the creation of a few educators but rather the result of collective agreement. Commentators point out that Erskine himself did not aim to create a canon. Katherine Ellis Chaddock, Erskine’s biographer, notes that “he had his own favorites, but there is no indication that he was ever attached to a precise canon,” and his initial proposal “eliminated both the authority of scholars sharing the conclusions of their specialized literary investigations and the authority of a chosen canon of must-read works” (Chaddock, 2012, p. 89). However, Chaddock named the chapter discussing Erskine’s ‘Great Books’ initiative *A Canon for the Rest of Us*, clearly implying that a canon was eventually established after all.

Chaddock meticulously reconstructs the process of creating Erskine’s course. The first attempt to offer such a course to the faculty dates back to 1916. At that time, Erskine proposed 133 works divided into three lists—literature, history, and philosophy—but members of the Committee of Instruction reduced the list to 80 texts. When the course was first implemented in 1919, the final list included works by 51 authors, and it was constantly revised throughout the course (Chaddock, 2012, p. 92). The following names can be found in Erskine’s papers as part of the original proposal:

Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius, Virgil, Horace, Plutarch, Marcus

Aurelius, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Galileo, Grotius, Montaigne, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Bacon, Descartes, Hobbes, Milton, Molière, Locke, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Gibbon, Smith, Kant, Goethe, American State Papers, Hugo, Hegel, Lyell, Balzac, Malthus, Bentham, Mill, Darwin, Pasteur, Marx, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Gardner, Nietzsche, and James ("Outline of Readings in Important Books," 1926 typescript cit. by Chaddock, 2012, p. 209).

But it wasn't the stable and final canon, the list was subject to continuous revision. For instance, during the course, a student suggested that a work of contemporary philosopher George Santayana should be included, and Erskine agreed with that (*ibid*).

While the list of books used in Erskine's course was constantly reviewed and adjusted, the changes were not radical. According to Mortimer Adler, a few years after the course began, an attempt was made to reach a consensus on which books should be offered to students. Adler, who was one of the course instructors and the faculty secretary at the time, compiled all the suggestions into a list of about 300 titles. Colleagues then voted on which books to exclude from the list. After several rounds of voting, about 80 texts remained that had achieved consensus. Most of these books were already on Erskine's list. It was an important experience for Adler: "From those two years of revision, I learned the extent to which there is unanimity of judgment about the great books. It became clear that it would be difficult to make a list much longer than a hundred authors about whom such universal agreement could be obtained" (Adler, 1966, p. 327).

Subsequently, Adler became convinced that the list of 'Great Books' was not a subjective construct of any individual, but rather a reflection of an established tradition over centuries, preserving the most outstanding examples of human (read: 'European') intellectual culture: "It is to be expected, of course, that their selection of 'best books' will change with the times. Yet there is a surprising uniformity in the lists that represent the best choices of any period. [...] The changes which each later age makes are mainly additions rather than substitutions. Naturally, the list of great books grows in the course of time, but its roots and outlines remain the same" (Adler, 1966, p. 325).

When Mortimer Adler took up the project at the University of Chicago, he elevated it to a new level, transforming the college course into a comprehensive educational program. By 1952, Hutchins and

Adler prepared the publication of the *Great Books of the Western World* series for *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, consisting of 54 volumes. This series included texts by numerous ancient authors, early modern scientists and philosophers, literary works, political manifestos and declarations. It was concluded with the works of William James and Freud. Based on the texts included in this multi-volume series, Adler created a recommended reading list, which was incorporated into later editions of his book. In 1966, he divided the recommended texts into four sections (Adler, 1966, pp. 374–378):

Imaginative literature: Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Virgil, Dante, *Chaucer*, *Rabelais*, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Milton, *Swift*, *Fielding*, *Sterne*, Goethe, *Melville*, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky⁷

History and Social Sciences: Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarch, *Tacitus*, *Machiavelli*, Montaigne, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Smith, Gibbon, The Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, The Constitution of the United States of America, *Boswell*, *The Federalist*, Mill, Marx (The Capital), *Marx and Engels* (The Manifesto)

Natural Sciences and Mathematics: *Hippocrates*, *Euclid*, *Archimedes*, *Apollonius of Perga*, *Nicomachus*, *Galen*, *Ptolemy*, *Copernic*, *Gilbert*, *Galileo*, *Kepler*, *Harvey*, *Huygens*, *Newton*, *Lavoisier*, *Fourier*, *Faraday*, Darwin, James, *Freud*

Philosophy and Theology: Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius, *Epictetus*, Marcus Aurelius, *Plotinus*, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Bacon, Descartes, *Pascal*, *Spinoza*, Locke, *Berkeley*, *Hume*, Kant, Hegel

A comparison of the two lists presented above shows that, despite minor variations, they largely coincide with each other. This is not surprising, considering that Adler began his work as Erskine's assistant, and Erskine served as a consultant in the creation of the *Great Books of the Western World* series. A notable difference is that Adler included several key authors and works from the history of natural sciences and mathematics whom Erskine did not mention. In Erskine's original project, the history of science was considered through key ideas rather than key texts, but this part was not implemented in his course (Chaddock, 2012, p. 89). Besides the matching names, the logic behind these lists is also similar: a large

portion of ancient classics, followed by a series of well-known writers, philosophers, political theorists, and scientists from the early modern period till the 19th century, and practically no one from the 20th century.

If we consider the goals Erskine set by introducing the reading of Great Books into college education, creating a canon was not his primary objective. He was concerned that students had few points of intersection outside the classroom, so he aimed to recreate the spirit of an intellectual community. For him, the joint reading and discussion of books was not only a tool to develop the student into a more complete human being but also an instrument for fostering a sense of community among students. Adler pointed out to a political dimension to this intention: "In such a community, Erskine said, democracy would be safe, for democracy requires intelligent communication about and common participation in the solution of human problems" (Adler, 1966, p. 357).

Adler later emphasized even more the importance of engaging with classical texts for cultivating not only an educated human being but also a citizen: "even reading the great books well is not an end in itself. It is a means toward living a decent human life, the life of a free man and a free citizen ... Only a trained intelligence can think freely. And where there is no freedom in thinking, there can be no freedom of thought. Without free minds, we cannot long remain free men" (Adler, 1966, p. 354).

Similarly, Hutchins, in an introductory article to the *Great Books of the Western World* series, insisted that the knowledge of ideas expressed in Great Books helps to preserve democratic society and values:

"Democracy will fall a prey to the loudest and most persistent propagandists unless the people save themselves from this fate by so strengthening their minds that they can appraise the issues for themselves. [...] we believe that these books are a help to that grasp of history, politics, morals and economics, and to that habit of mind necessary to form valid judgments" (Hutchins, 1952, p. xiii).

What motivated the authors of the project to select particular texts included initially in the course and then in the published series? Firstly, they believed these were genuinely outstanding works. This was evidenced by their enduring presence over the centuries. As Adler noted, it is essentially the same list that only grows over time (Adler, 1966, p. 325). Secondly, these texts, especially the philosophical and literary ones, addressed questions that Erskine, Adler, and Hutchins considered the

most important and fundamental, never losing their relevance. Therefore, reading these texts was not an archival curiosity but an introduction to the eternal problems of humanity. Thirdly, these texts existed within a unified communicative space, expressing different positions on the same set of issues. This allowed to call them ‘the Great Conversation.’ This final characteristic – the internal dialogue among these texts – enabled them to somewhat counter the accusation that the Great Books canon was limited to Western civilization. Hutchins pointed out that Great Books of the Eastern world could exist as well, but the project’s authors were interested only in texts that belonged to a unified intellectual space and, by doing so, constituted the essence of Western civilization (Hutchins, 1952, p. xx). Yes, it was the canon, and it was the Western canon. According to Hutchins, “it would be an exaggeration to say that Western civilization means these books. The exaggeration would lie in the omission of the plastic arts and music, which have quite as important a part in Western civilization as the great productions included in this set. But to the extent to which books can present the idea of a civilization, the idea of Western civilization is here presented” (Hutchins, 1952, p. 2).

Of course, criticism of this approach was not long to come. Critics pointed out that the Great Books canon does not include any works written by women, contains very few texts from the 20th century, and is explicitly limited to the Western world, while it claims to address the fundamental problems and questions that concern humanity as a whole. Additionally, the project’s creators deliberately separated the reading of the Great Books from their academic study, encouraging readers to see classical authors as their contemporaries. This undoubtedly led to rather specific and even amateurish interpretations of the texts. Allan Bloom, who became famous for his lament over the decline of academic culture in America, also pointed out that many of the criticisms leveled against “the good old Great Books approach” were valid: “it encourages an autodidact’s self-assurance without competence; ... the whole movement has a certain coarse evangelistic tone that is the opposite of good taste; it engenders a spurious intimacy with greatness; and so forth” (A. Bloom, 1988, p. 344). At the same time, he saw a certain redemptive mission in the turn towards the Great Books: it was “the only serious solution [of the problems of modern American education] ... that is almost universally rejected” (*ibid*). According to Bloom, reading the Great Books offers significant benefits to contemporary students. It fosters an awareness of the classics and familiarity with the major questions that once dominated

intellectual discourse. Additionally, it provides models for addressing these questions and, most importantly, creates a foundation of shared experiences and thoughts that can strengthen their friendships.

Nevertheless, the weakness of the 'Great Books' project seems to lie not only in the fact that books were taken out of context, stripped of their historical dimension, and presented as 'contemporaries' to the unprepared reader. There is a certain arbitrariness in the selection of these books. The authors intended to create a common space for intellectual interaction among students and to familiarize them with the tradition of Western civilization. However, this tradition primarily existed in the minds of the university professors who were engaged in this project. What seems significant, though, is that they understood the Great Books not as isolated units but as part of a broader historical exchange of ideas and images, which represented for them the concept of Western civilization. They viewed the dynamics of the formation of the Great Books as the inclusion of new participants in an already existing conversation. This image of a shared space for dialogue among elements of tradition seems important for the subsequent development of the idea of the canon.

1.2. The 'Western Canon' of Harold Bloom

The creators of the Great Books project did not use the term 'canon' – they spoke of Great Books or the Great Conversation. The term 'canon' came then from the area of literary criticism, but it signified the very same idea promoted by Erskine and his colleagues – that there is a certain set of texts which stand out among the rest and which an educated person should know.

In the second section of my paper, I will focus on a particular conception of the Western canon as presented in the eponymous book by the renowned American literary critic Harold Bloom. Bloom's intervention in the discussion occurred in the mid-1990s, a time when the main part of the arguments against literary and cultural canons had already been formulated. Thus, Harold Bloom was primarily reacting to the educational and cultural transformations that had occurred in the preceding decades. In 1994, Bloom published a book entitled *The Western Canon: Books and Schools of the Ages*. The book received widespread acclaim and was translated into many languages, including Russian, Romanian, Chinese, and others, and continues to attract interest to this day.

Harold Bloom's book is indeed a manifesto of an elitist view of the literary canon where he attempts to defend the canon from criticism and from the influence of popular social and political movements. Bloom's 'Western Canon' in some respects harks back to the previous concept of the 'Great Books of the Western World,' but the difference is that Bloom's canon primarily dealt with artistic and literary works, whereas the Great Books included texts from various intellectual domains. Nonetheless, both concepts referred to the intellectual heritage of a generalized 'Western civilization.' This implies, on the one hand, that such a historical cultural (or civilizational) entity can be identified, and, on the other hand, that the readers of the canonical texts are willing to perceive themselves as heirs to this cultural unity.

However, in many aspects, Bloom's concept of the literary canon diverges significantly from the previously described educational project of the 'Great Books.' While the Great Books project aimed to reach a broad audience, intending to spread the tradition of reading great works to as many young people as possible within a liberal education framework, Bloom emphasizes that the appreciation of literary works and their associated aesthetic values is likely accessible to only a select few. He insists that in the field of literary criticism "we need to teach more selectively, searching for the few who have the capacity to become highly individual readers and writers. The others, who are amenable to a politicized curriculum, can be abandoned to it" (H. Bloom, 1994, p. 17). The literary criticism is therefore an elitist phenomenon and it does not pretend to satisfy a general public. In a very poetic way Bloom dreams of a contemporary academic *vita contemplativa*: "When our English and other literature departments shrink to the dimensions of our current Classics departments, ceding their grosser functions to the legions of Cultural Studies, we will perhaps be able to return to the study of the inescapable, to Shakespeare and his few peers, who after all, invented all of us."

The creators of the Great Books project believed that reading the selected works would help young people become better individuals and citizens, actively involved in the building of a democratic society. In contrast, Harold Bloom asserts that great literature does not make readers better people or citizens, and neither does reading the great works of Western literature help to create a democratic community or foster communication among people. On the contrary, encountering a literary work is a solitary experience, allowing individuals to connect with their inner selves, enlarge a solitary existence, and confront their mortality

(H. Bloom, 1994, pp. 29–30). “I think that the self [continues Bloom] in its quest to be free and solitary, ultimately reads with one aim only: to confront greatness. That confrontation scarcely masks the desire to join greatness, which is the basis of the aesthetic experience once called the Sublime” (H. Bloom, 1994, p. 524).

A key aspect of the literary canon, according to Bloom, is that it is built around the notion of aesthetic value. The canon is founded upon artistic, that is, aesthetic, criteria (H. Bloom, 1994, p. 22). Aesthetic value is a distinctive inherent characteristic of artistic objects, differing from ideological interests or class struggles. It is perceived by the reader through aesthetic experience and appreciation, though not every reader is capable of understanding or recognizing it. Aesthetic experience pertains to the highest human faculties, involving a special pleasure that is neither easy nor easily attainable. This experience can be painful and demands effort and dedication. The primary acknowledgment of aesthetic value occurs within the circle of those involved in its production. Aesthetic value constitutes itself through the process of inter-artistic influence. “Such influence contains psychological, spiritual, and social components, but its major element is aesthetic” (H. Bloom, 1994, p. 24). According to Bloom, every creator, poet, or writer, is part of a chain of overcoming influence. Each outstanding author grows from the ‘anxiety of influence,’ recognizing the greatness of their predecessors while simultaneously striving to assert their originality against this backdrop.

While Adler believed that the list of the most significant books of Western civilization could be limited to around one hundred titles, Bloom did not consider that it would be possible to create such a list because an ideal corpus of canonical works may contain more than 3,000 titles: “It is not, cannot be, precisely the list I give, or that anyone else might give. If it were, that would make such a list a mere fetish, just another commodity” (H. Bloom, 1994, p. 37). However, in practice, he does not strictly adhere to this principle. Firstly, he readily reduces the Western canon to the body of works by a single author—William Shakespeare. Shakespeare stands out among the masters of world literature for his aesthetic supremacy and unique eminence. Bloom acknowledges Shakespeare as the center of the Western canon, and not only the Western one; if there were a global literary canon, Shakespeare would be at its center as well (H. Bloom, 1994, pp. 62–63). Shakespeare impresses Bloom with his originality, dynamism, diversity of characters, and accessibility to various interpretations. The rest of the canon can be seen as revolving around Shakespeare: it includes

works that prepared for and preceded Shakespeare, positioning themselves in relation to him. Those who come after him live in his shadow—they imitate, overcome, or deny Shakespeare.

In his book Bloom ultimately presents us 26 authors, each of whom, while significant in their own right, is to some extent connected to Shakespeare. Their works either influenced or were influenced by Shakespeare, creating a continuum of literary excellence. The list includes, beside Shakespeare, the following names:

Dante, Chaucer, Cervantes, Montaigne, literary critic Samuel Johnson, Moliere, John Milton, Goethe, William Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Walt Whitman (the center of American canon), Emily Dickinson, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Leo Tolstoy, Henrik Ibsen, Sigmund Freud, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, Fernando Pessoa, Samuel Beckett.

Bloom's selection underscores his view of Shakespeare as the central figure of the Western literary tradition, whose impact and legacy permeate the canon. The 26 authors represent a range of periods and styles, illustrating the dynamic interplay of influence and innovation that characterizes the development of Western literature. By positioning these authors in relation to Shakespeare, Bloom emphasizes the ongoing dialogue within the canon, where each work is both a product of its time and a participant in a larger, evolving conversation. These authors and their works are seen not only as masterpieces but also as integral parts of a tradition that both informs and is informed by Shakespeare's unparalleled contributions. This perspective reinforces Bloom's argument that the Western Canon, while vast and varied, revolves around the aesthetic and intellectual paradigms established by Shakespeare, thus shaping the literary landscape for generations to come.

Having selected 26 authors from a vast body of literature, Bloom asks then what constitutes their greatness and what allows them to be canonical. Bloom finds that we can identify the peculiarity of canonical texts in their 'strangeness.' This strangeness can manifest itself as either something very familiar and close (in the case of Shakespeare) or as something unsettling in its unfamiliarity that we cannot assimilate (H. Bloom, 1994, p. 3). Shakespeare again reveals to be outstanding: "His powers of assimilation and of contamination are unique. Shakespearean drama seems at once utterly familiar and yet too rich to absorb all at once". Thus, for Bloom,

the strangeness of a work – its unique and idiosyncratic quality – plays a crucial role in its canonical status. This strangeness either remains perpetually enigmatic or becomes so integrated into our perception that we no longer recognize its peculiarities.

The authors presented in Bloom's book do not exhaust what can be called the Western Canon. In an appendix, Bloom attempts to provide a more comprehensive list of works, which he proposes as a provisional 'reading list.' This list is divided into three periods. The first period is termed the 'Theocratic Age' and encompasses ancient culture and the Middle Ages. Bloom includes a selection of works from the Middle East and India due to their influence on the Western Canon: *Gilgamesh*, *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, and *The Holy Bible*, as well as *The Mahabharata*, *The Bhagavad-Gita*, and *The Ramayana*. He further mentions 47 authors and over 90 works from the Classic Greek and Roman period and from the Arab and European Middle Ages, ranging from Homer and Plato to *Beowulf* and *The Book of the Thousand Nights and One Night*. The second period, titled the 'Aristocratic Age,' spans from the Renaissance to the early 19th century. It includes 143 authors, categorized by nationality, from Dante to Friedrich Schiller. The third period, the 'Democratic Age,' begins in the post-Goethean 19th century. The list comprises around 159 authors, with American literature significantly represented. Bloom however notes that he refrained from including "a number of sadly inadequate women writers of the nineteenth century" (H. Bloom, 1994, p. 540).

The book concludes with a list of more than 500 names from the 20th century, whose place in the canon may not yet be secure. Bloom refers to this list as 'A Canonical Prophecy.' This list is notably comprehensive and includes not only American and European authors but also writers from India, Africa, the Arab world, and Jewish culture. According to Bloom, each of these authors stands out not for their relevance to the present moment but for their literary qualities and ability to continue the eternal aesthetic conversation.

In the conception of the canon presented by Bloom, it is striking that the responsibility for identifying and presenting the canon primarily belongs to a narrow circle of experts, literary critics. These critics are the ones capable of discerning and recognizing the aesthetic excellence that constitutes the canonicity of a literary work. To some extent, even the reading public does not participate in forming the canon, as they may be captivated by ephemeral trends. At the end of his book, Bloom speaks of the image of the 'competent reader,' to whom his recommended reading

lists are addressed. This competent reader is presumed to be as interested in reading as the literary critic, and capable of following the critic in the pursuit of complex and intriguing aesthetic pleasure.

At the same time, Bloom emphasizes that the canon is not even created by critics, but by the creators themselves. He states that the canon is essentially a dialogue between authors of different eras: "Writers, artists, composers themselves determine canons, by bridging between strong precursors and strong successors" (H. Bloom, 1994, p. 522). Thus, the canon of great literature is something that exists in and of itself. It emerges through the process of literary creation, and literary critics, along with competent readers, can only recognize it. They cannot even influence its expansion or alteration.

1.3. The American literary canon

In the example given above, the canon essentially did not belong to any specific community except the community of poets, writers, and literary critics. The Western canon, as described by Harold Bloom, is related to American culture only to the extent to which American readers, like any others, have the ability to recognize the aesthetic perfection of a literary work. The Great Books of the Western civilization were not strictly American either. The creators of the project saw the United States as the culmination and highest form of the Western civilization's development, although they believed that the foundations of this civilization were laid in Ancient Greece, Rome, and Modern Europe. They were not at all concerned that most of the texts they referenced were written in other languages and contexts. These texts were considered to be the roots nourishing the modern liberal and democratic society of the United States.

A completely different issue arises when we talk about a national literary canon. It can be noted that a national literary canon is more ideologically charged than other canons, as national literature directly relates to the nation's image and its perception of itself and its great achievements. It is not only the greatness of individual representatives of national culture that is of interest here. National literature is an artistic expression of society's view of itself, its values and norms, its past and its future⁸. Thus, a large number of powers and agents are involved in the process of canon formation.

In the case of the literary canon, the expectations of the present-day readers come first. The modern readers, including students seek texts that

speak to them about their own experiences and in their own language. National literature fulfills this requirement best. It shapes national identity, gives meaning to past events, and sets standards and norms of behavior for the present (Šeina, 2021). In the case of American literature, yet another factor encouraged an appeal to the national tradition. American students and educators were keen to highlight and hear the unique voices of American writers and poets in order to end the perception of American literature as “an inferior and parvenu branch of British letters” (Lauter, 1991, p. 16).

In this section, our guide will be the writer and ‘radical teacher’ Paul Lauter, author of the book *Canons and Contexts* (1991), who played a central role in the processes of transforming the teaching of American literature in colleges. He was the creator of the *Heath Anthology of American Literature* and an active contributor to the journal *Radical Teacher*. Lauter’s ideas about expanding the American literary canon to include texts that equally reflect the diverse life and social experiences of people from different backgrounds in American society have been well received in educational practices.

As in the first case, the story began in the 1920s when courses on American literature were introduced in universities. This quickly led to the necessity of moving from general recommended reading lists to lists of literature that became a matter of national pride. Paul Lauter notes that during this process, women and writers of color were gradually pushed out of the existing anthologies and reading lists (Lauter, 1991, pp. 24–37). Most university professors were “college-educated white men of Anglo-Saxon or northern European origins”, and they considered literature written – and read – by women or African Americans unworthy of academic attention. Lauter illustrates, using the example of changes in the content of American literature anthologies published in the first half of the 20th century, how some popular works gradually disappeared from these collections, so that “by the end of the 1950s, one could study American literature and read no work by a black writer, few works by women except Dickinson and perhaps Marianne Moore or Katherine Anne Porter, and no work about the lives or experiences of working-class people” (Lauter, 1991, p. 27).

When national literature became a subject of teaching, it also became subject to greater control by teachers and university administrators who belonged to certain social groups. They determined what should be considered more significant or more representative in the national literary tradition. Paul Lauter provides an example of how this worked, noting that

“a significant portion of canonical literature presents men pushing toward frontiers, exploring, conquering, exploiting the resources of sea and land” (Lauter, 1991, pp. 102–103). These works represented the masculine world of the hunter, the scout, the explorer, and the man living on the frontier. This is strictly related to the image of America as a country of continuous colonization, where the man – the warrior, the hunter, the explorer – is the main driving force of society. However, this focus marginalized all other ways and forms of life in this society – the lives of African slaves, of migrants, the everyday life of women, and the lives of those who were marginalized in this world of militant men. This posed a challenge for people like Paul Lauter – to find a way to reintroduce into literature the themes that had been marginalized by the 1950s canon.

In the 1960s and 70s, access to university education expanded and the student body became a heterogeneous mix of people from different social groups and classes. The political and social movements of the late 1960s challenged the academic system, demanding greater inclusion and attention to women and minorities. As a result of the changing social structure of the student body and the social movements of the 1960s, there was a reconsideration of what national literature should represent as a subject of study and teaching. The first serious discussions began in the early 1970s, when the need to revise the content of American literary education emerged. However, the actual changes occurred quite slowly. In the 1980s the range of literature offered for study expanded and the structures of anthologies changed to give more attention to women’s literature and literature written by African Americans, but significant changes in education still were yet not observed. Lauter conducted a detailed analysis of the university curricula of that period. There was much more variability in these courses compared to the Great Books educational practice. However, a thorough examination of the courses content revealed that very few women’s names were mentioned even in the 1980s.

It may seem that the process of expanding the canon encounters the factor of aesthetic value, which cannot be excluded from the evaluation of a literary work. A text that is included in the pantheon of the national canon must first and foremost demonstrate outstanding aesthetic and artistic qualities that allow it to earn recognition from readers. The fact that a text meets contemporary needs and demands does not exempt it from the requirement of being a high-quality and even exceptional literary work. Lauter, however, points out that aesthetic value alone is not sufficient to grant a work special status (Lauter, 1991, pp. 104–105). Our aesthetic

tastes are contingent and subject to change (Herrnstein Smith, 1991). And most importantly, the aesthetic quality of a work is also determined by the emotional response it can evoke in the reader (Lauter, 1991, p. 105). If old masculine values are no longer in demand in society, then works that celebrate these values are held in less esteem.

The national literary canon follows increasingly the logic of representativeness rather than the logic of aesthetic value. John Guillory called this approach to the canon formation “imaginary politics of representation” because the literary canon is supposed to be a true image of social diversity and “the [literary] work is perceived to be immediately expressive of the author’s experience as a representative member of some social group” (Guillory, 1993, p. 3-10). The cultural movement that led to the revision of the canon within national literature blamed the previous canon as something authoritarian, imposed by a narrow group of people with social, political, and cultural power. The canon, largely formed during the establishment of literary education in universities from the 1920s to the 1950s, was seen as promoting a very male-centered, Eurocentric colonial set of values and perspectives on the nation’s history. At the same time, critics of the canon often proposed not to abolish it but to expand or alter it, thereby creating a new canon that simply included different works while excluding others. The idea was that the canon should reflect the social diversity of the American nation and allow any reader to find something resonant with their own life experiences in the literary works offered for reading.

Under the influence of Marxism, feminism, poststructuralism, and other theoretical movements, there was not only a practical expansion of the list of texts considered worthy of attention in the national literary tradition but also a rethinking of the principles behind the formation of the national literary canon. First of all, the national literature is seen as an important instrument highly adapted to communicate values, shape consciousness, and even influence the behavior of a nation because it encodes a set of social norms and values specific to that society. Another crucial aspect of the literature is its contribution in creation of a ‘usable past,’ which involves a shared evaluation of historical events. Moreover, literature has the unique ability to represent the diverse experiences of people from different social groups. For instance, when we discuss the importance of women’s literature, we not only acknowledge women as authors but also emphasize the specific problems and experiences depicted in their works as distinctly female.

Not surprisingly, the selection of literary texts offered to students turns out to be a process in which a wide variety of powers and actors clash and conflict. These are the attitudes of teachers themselves, the vital interests of students, the commercial and promotional interests of publishing houses, the ideas and ideals of influential literary critics, and the political and ideological interests of those who desire to influence the public image of the past or the images of the future. It is quite logical that such a diverse space of acting forces was proposed to be described in Bourdieu's terms as a field of institutional forces influencing the distribution of cultural capital (Guillory, 1993). It seems, however, that the understanding of the canon as an ideological product that reflects the established social order and must therefore be overcome or rejected is specific to discussions of national literature in the first place. Not surprisingly, the proposal to consider Shakespeare as a product of the class interests of early bourgeois society elicited only perplexity and rejection in such critics as Harold Bloom.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight another aspect of the national literary canon: the processes of its formation. When it comes to the national literary canon, the ideological influence and the impact of social and cultural power and authority become significant. Harold Bloom's literary canon was initially defined through mutual recognition among artists and then through the literary critic's ability to discern and appreciate aesthetic value. In contrast, the formation of the national literary canon is also significantly influenced by the public, schools and universities, national literary awards, and publishing policies. The national literary canon does not only exist in the past; it is continuously created in the present through the recognition and preservation of new literary works emerging in the contemporary cultural space. Thus, the question of the national literary canon is not only about the past and its representation but also about the current selection of works worthy of preservation for the future. In this context, the issues of cultural capital and cultural influence become crucially important. At the same time, no decision by individual experts or cultural policies can bestow popularity and significance on a literary work that does not gain recognition from the broader public, as it must respond to the interests and demands of readers here and now.

2. The Classics/Canon of the Social Sciences

In the second part of this paper, I turn to a different type of reflection on the canon, one that is tied to the formation of disciplinary identity. Here, our focus will be on the disciplinary canon. Inevitably, the question arises as to whether the term 'canon' is properly used in this context, given that the traditional term 'classics' already exists. There are grounds to believe that in the case of the disciplinary canon, there is a metaphorical transfer of meaning – not from the religious significance of the canon, as some authors suggest, but from the cultural and literary understanding of the term. Yet, even in this case, we are dealing with the relationship between the past and the present. The formation of the image of the past involves highlighting certain authors, texts, and ideas that are deemed worthy of preservation in the historical memory of a particular group. This heritage shapes the identity of this group and establishes sets of norms and rules that community members can follow.

In sociology, the use of the term 'canon' to describe the foundational texts of the discipline was not typical until the 1990s. Alan How recalls that in the 1970s, when he was a student, no one spoke of a canon or distinguished between canonical and non-canonical authors, even though Marx, Durkheim, and Weber were already recognized authorities and were placed above Simmel, Mead, or Tönnies (How, 2016, p. 241). When the term 'canon' began to be applied to the sociological classics, it already carried a negative connotation inherited from the struggle against the ideologically charged literary canon. Critics used the term to highlight the exclusivity, authoritativeness, imperialism, and narrowness of the disciplinary canons where the priority was given to a few white European men from the upper middle class. Nevertheless, the term took hold, and the concept of canon found both opponents and defenders.

It may seem that in the disciplinary field of humanities and social sciences the concept of 'canon' complements the concept of 'classics': 'canon' describes the community or collection of authors and texts that individually are called 'classics' (Weinsheimer, 1991, p. 130). Yet, Peter Baehr in his influential book *Founders, Classics, Canons* (1 ed. 1994, 2 ed 2002) criticized the application of the term 'canon' to the classics of sociology. He pointed out that the term has overly explicit religious connotations, making its metaphorical application to secular classics misleading: "the term 'canon' has little sociological value as applied to secular classic texts [...] and erroneously implies that secular classics and

religious canons have fundamentally similar properties" (Baehr, 2002, p. 149). The term 'canon' in its religious meaning describes a fixed, ordered set of sacred texts fundamental to religious doctrine. The classical texts of social sciences lack analogous properties: unlike religious canonical texts, "classical texts are emergent, not the product of calculation; they are not existing as an integrated whole; they are open and fluid, not closed or fixed; and as amenable to discussion and criticism as other secular texts are" (Baehr, 2002, p. 166). This view is also supported by Russian historians Irina Savelieva and Andrey Poletaev, who state that "the use of the term 'canon' in relation to scientific classics seems incorrect to us, even at the level of metaphor, not to mention the concept, which has a stable religious meaning" (Savelieva & Poletaev, 2010, p. 26).

I think one could object here by emphasizing that the terms 'canon' and 'canonical' have no theological origin at all; it seems instead that their usage in the religious contexts may be metaphorical as well (cfr. Gorak, 1991, p. 20-23). In the current debates on the literary canons no one assumes that the canons are fixed, eternally established or immune to criticism. Therefore, there is no reason to consider the employment of the term 'canon' in sociology as inappropriate. Alan How also argues that the secular canon does not exhibit the rigidity that researchers see in the religious canon. However, he believes that distinguishing between canon and classics is useful in sociology, as this distinction reflects the difference between structure (canon) and agency (classics). He insists that "while classics and canons in many actual everyday situations appear fused together, as with agency and structure, they are not synonymous terms, but are analytically separable, speak of different things, and are explainable in different ways" (How, 2016, p. 233). The canonicity of the canon and the classicity of the classics are therefore different properties, and one can conceive of a classic that is not part of the canon or a canonical text that is not considered classic.

According to How, works in a canon represent what a discipline believes about itself. This canon is formed to meet the needs of the discipline to define itself at a particular time by building its identity. In contrast, the nature of a classic lies in its 'classicality,' a property that relates to the Gadamerian horizons of historical tradition. This classicity is acquired through the text's ability to reveal the connections between the past and the present, thereby illuminating the significance of both. A classic is productive of new insights because it can, through tradition, shed light on important aspects of subsequent historical contexts. Texts in

the canon are simply passed down to subsequent generations as elements that structure the disciplinary field. To be a classic text, a work must continually affirm its ability for agency in the present.

While I find it meaningful to distinguish between the concepts of 'canon' and 'classics,' I cannot fully agree with How. It seems to me that canon as structure and classics as agency should not be opposed to each other but rather thought of as two sides of the same reality. Even in a religious context, the canon cannot be imagined as a dead and static legacy of the past, merely serving as a monument. Canonical religious texts are an active source of life for the religious community, as they are constantly read, experienced, and interpreted in light of new historical circumstances. Similarly, the cultural or disciplinary canon is not just a list of texts or theories worthy of being remembered but they serve as a source of inspiration for the present. Henceforth, I will assume that the use of both terms is equally justified, particularly based on the fact that in the research literature on sociology, a clear terminological distinction is not always present. Qualities that some authors attribute to classical works, others ascribe to texts they want to designate as canonical. However, moving forward, I will speak about 'classics' implying that they are also 'canonical.'

Let's start with the question, what does 'classics' refer to in debates about sociology and the social sciences? First of all, a classic should be highly regarded within the scientific community. According to Gianfranco Poggi, classics are simply "the best work the discipline of sociology has produced in the course of its history" (Poggi, 1996, p. 40). Classics stay at the origin of a discipline; they lay its foundation. They serve as a necessary reference point for the unity of the discipline and its relationship to its history and plays "so important a role in the development of [a] discipline or tradition that any history must refer to it" (Thomas, 1992, p. 115 cit. by Baehr, 2002). Classics thus connect the discipline with its past, bridging the gap between archaic pre-disciplinary times and modernity. At the same time, classical texts do not merely belong to the past; they remain relevant to the present. Even if their achievements have long been surpassed, they continue to inspire new generations of scholars. Classics are works that must be read, or whose implications must be incorporated into the broader understanding of a discipline, in order to effectively work in that field in the present (Anne Furlong cit. by Baehr, 2002, p. 144), they are the part of past cultural achievements that retain their relevance in the

present, continuing to exist and remaining in demand alongside more recent scholarship (Savelieva & Poletaev, 2010, p. 20-22).

The general concept of classics emphasizes the ability of classical texts and ideas to have relevance for the present. However, there are many such texts and ideas in the history of every discipline. So, which characteristics distinguish certain specific names that can be legitimately called the canon? By the time this question began to be actively discussed, sociology had already a situation where particular importance in university courses and programs was given to the 'Holy Trinity' of founders: Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim. Many felt that this narrow canon did not reflect the contributions of other individuals who had significantly impacted the field. The most prominent candidate for inclusion in the canon was Georg Simmel, but others like Tönnies, Mead, Parsons, Du Bois were also notable. Therefore, the criteria for distinguishing a classic were, of course, related both to already recognized cases and to those aspiring for recognition.

Here are a few of the most significant aspects scholars have mentioned as the most relevant for recognizing the author's importance for sociology. First, the author must contribute to developing the conceptual framework that enables sociology to emerge as a distinct field of research. They offer a set of highly sophisticated and powerful conceptual tools, a radically new set of metaphors for grasping social reality, "useful for raising interesting questions, solving theoretical puzzles, and preparing the ground for more empirically oriented substantive theories" (Mouzelis, 1994, p. 246). At the same time, different classics of sociology don't need to agree with each other. On the contrary, they can represent opposing viewpoints, creating theoretical tension and dialogue: "what makes canons function is the fact that each classical author offers a singular set of metaphors for grasping the world that either ignores or rejects another set of metaphors" (Illouz, 2003, p. 91).

Second, the works of these authors should have a lasting impact on the community, generating new approaches or fostering discussion. They should be able to attract cultural recognition, be controversial and culturally resonant, that is they should be either vital for a particular cultural project or spark controversy (Baehr, 2002, pp. 120–122). This means they should be perceived today not as mere antiquities, but as effective tools for understanding society, capable of generating new meanings in new historical circumstances. As Alan How argues, in

becoming classic, the author's ideas are taken up by others and shown to be productive in myriad different ways (How, 2016, p. 4).

Third, classical works should possess such a richness of content that they allow multiple and sometimes opposing interpretations. Peter Baehr calls it 'textual suppleness' which lets a work to assume "different significance for different interpreters at different times" (Baehr, 2002, p. 122). Alan How describes this quality of classic texts in terms of Gadamer's hermeneutics, where the meaning of a text is determined by its interaction with the reader's horizon of meanings and expectations. In this way "the classic reveals its continuity with the past, not by staying the same, but by repeatedly becoming different" (How, 2016, p. 204).

As I have pointed out earlier, attempts to explain the role and significance of classics for sociology arose in the context where certain names had already been established in the Anglophone tradition as having special importance as representatives of 'classical sociology.' They are Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim. The formation of this canon did not occur overnight, but by the 1980s it seemed already well-established. It is believed that the particular prominence of Weber and Durkheim was a legacy of Talcott Parsons' school, while Marx entered the pantheon as a result of the surge of interest in Marxism and post-Marxist theories in the 1960s and later (Connell, 1997). Anyway, by the mid-1980s it was difficult to find a sociology curriculum where reading the classical texts of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim was not a mandatory requirement.

In his discussion of the core classics of sociology, Peter Baehr recognizes that the works of Marx, Weber and Durkheim possess profound aesthetic quality and pathos (Baehr, 2002, p. 3). However, he notes that aesthetic profundity alone does not guarantee a text's rise to classical status: "a text must not only be great but also be recognized as such, and this recognition is a culturally mediated process." Perhaps the most important reason for their canonization, according to Baehr, is that these figures were seen as discursive founders of modern sociology. Primarily, they were credited with establishing a specific discourse, that is 'a stock of presuppositional ideas' central for the sociological tradition. Additionally, these thinkers served as crucial symbolic markers for sociology, providing it with a historical lineage and determining its professional boundaries in relation to other disciplines. In essence, these classics played a vital role in the professional legitimation of sociology.

But as we have seen earlier, the founding role is not sufficient by itself, the classics should prove their vitality and usefulness for current

problems and debates. Perhaps the most striking example we can find is Émile Durkheim who was, according to Alan How, “canonical but not classical” until he was rediscovered by Jeffrey Alexander who initiated the cultural turn in sociology. Alexander challenged the traditional ‘positivistic’ interpretation of Durkheim and proposed to take into consideration his book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Thus, he created a new way of reading Durkheim, making him a relevant source of conceptualization of cultural rituals and traditions. At the same time, the symbolic meaning of Durkheim wasn’t completely changed: “The texture of this ‘Durkheim’ is quite different from that of the earlier one, yet he is still recognizably committed to the central importance of social solidarity in social life” (How, 2016, p. 137). If we speak of the names present in the canon as symbolic representations of a complex of ideas, we see that even through subsequent reinterpretation, certain intellectual content remains associated with the name of Durkheim. In this sense, it seems crucial for canonical concepts to possess a combination of two properties. On one hand, they must be sufficiently ambiguous to give rise to new readings and meanings. On the other hand, they must have a clear conceptual core that allows them to be associated with a definite set of ideas, metaphors, or concepts.

In any way, the disciplinary canon seems to be a contingent historical structure that can certainly be revised or reinterpreted in the future, much like any tradition claiming canonical status. It can be demonstrated that the traditional reference to the sociological ‘trinity’ was influenced by specific historical factors, such as Marxist movements or Parsons’ theoretical preferences. Perhaps even more than in the case of cultural or literary canons, texts recognized as canonical or classic within a discipline can and should be subject to revision as the discipline itself evolves. At the same time, the disciplinary canon seems less ideologically charged compared to the national literary canon, and the criticism often directed at the national literary canon is less likely to hold the same significance for the disciplinary canon.

3. Canon in History of Philosophy

In the final part, I would like to summarize some common properties that I observed in the examples of ‘canons’ mentioned above, and apply them to the canon of the history of philosophy.

It is worth noting that during the 'canon wars,' the term 'canon' initially carried a negative connotation. It was used to critique notions of 'greatness,' where 'greatness' was attributed only to a small group of authors, predominantly described as 'dead white men.' However, over the course of the discussion, this negative connotation ceased to be the only possible interpretation, and the canon came to be seen more as a structural part of the narrative about the past.

Thus, the canon is a means of constructing the identity of a national, social, or professional group by highlighting a number of authors, texts, or other cultural items, familiarity with which serves as a form of initiation. In the case of academic disciplines, the canon sets their origin and disciplinary boundaries. For broader national or cultural groups, the canon helps to form a narrative about the norms and values that should be inherited from a necessarily imaginary past. In this case, the canon acts as a kind of frame or grid which helps newcomers to be integrated in a society or a disciplinary community. It does not exhaust everything that a novice needs to know about the past of their community, but it constitutes an important element of the tradition that is passed down and is meant to create a bond between old and new generations.

However, it would be mistaken to think that the canon is created solely by the efforts of those responsible for transmitting the tradition (teachers, officials, publishers). The canon is defined by its reception. The canon is what is impersonally 'considered', 'accepted', or 'taken' as excellent or outstanding. Works aspiring to canonical status must be able to resonate with those to whom they are presented as standards of excellence. Today's recipients (students or novice readers) may become its new transmitters tomorrow, and their internal agreement to accept a canonical work as a significant element of their culture or academic discipline largely depends on the work's ability to be understood and appreciated in contemporary historical circumstances. We have seen that this generates a requirement for a work to 'be rich in meaning' and 'be open to multiple interpretations.' A classic example of this can be found in the canonical texts of Sacred Scripture, which in certain religious practices are interpreted as texts with open meanings. These texts can be read by different people in different life circumstances and still provide answers to very personal and individual questions for those who engage with them.

With these preliminary considerations established, I will now turn to the question of the canon in the history of philosophy. Firstly, the philosophical canon seems to align more with the disciplinary canon

than with the cultural or literary canon. Undoubtedly, some philosophical works contribute to the broader tradition and heritage of the Great Books of Western Civilization and are accessible to readers beyond the narrow philosophical community. In this sense, they are more part of the cultural canon. However, the history of philosophy, as part of an introduction to philosophical practice, primarily aims to establish what is important and significant for philosophy as a distinct intellectual practice that deals with concepts and logical connections. The authors usually discussed in the history of philosophy, such as Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, and others form a body of texts that demonstrate what philosophy entails as a practice, how philosophers ask questions, and how they attempt to answer them. Thus, the philosophical canon is primarily about forming an understanding of what philosophy is, making it more similar to a disciplinary canon rather than a cultural one.

But if we consider the philosophical canon as disciplinary, why do we refer to it as a canon and not as classics? I believe the difference lies in the following: In the case of the classics of the social sciences, they are participants in a dialogue, and placing them in the past is an undisputed fact. We understand that we are not meant to practice sociology as Marx, Weber, or Durkheim did. Conversely, referring to canonical authors in the history of philosophy does not require us to constantly situate them in the past. For us, the philosophical classics are simultaneously subject for imitation in how the practice of philosophizing should be carried out.

I will draw on my own experience to illustrate how the concepts of cultural and disciplinary canons intersect in the context of the history of philosophy. In Russian philosophical education, the history of philosophy curriculum includes a small section on Renaissance philosophy. This is a significant cultural period with a considerable number of texts that have firmly established themselves as important works of Western civilization. Accordingly, it is difficult to imagine a course on Renaissance philosophy that does not discuss Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's ideas on human freedom, Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince*, or Thomas More's *Utopia*. These are undoubtedly essential texts that form part of Europe's intellectual heritage. However, their status as 'philosophical' directly depends on how philosophy is understood as a discipline. If we assume that the distinguishing feature of philosophical practice is the presence of rational arguments, and that philosophical texts of the past should teach us how to recognize, formulate, and criticize arguments, then the aforementioned works may be seen as alien to the philosophical canon because they do not

conform to the standards of rigor typically associated with philosophical texts. However, the question of whether these texts should be included in the canon of the history of philosophy as a discipline does not negate the fact that all these works are significant within the broader cultural canon.

The philosophical canon, like other canons, is not an evil that must be eradicated. It plays an important role in the formation of novices who begin their study of philosophy. It provides them with guidelines that set the rules and standards for the functioning of philosophy as an intellectual practice. At the same time, the specific content of the canon is not untouchable or sacred. Like all other canons, the philosophical canon is open to changes and transformations due to the interests of new generations. Changes in the canon can and should occur to the extent that the definition of the greatness of certain philosophers may depend on new standards that arise in the present. However, this process will depend not only on the activities of transmitters – those who participate in the transmission of tradition and the formation of the canon. It will also depend on the abilities of receivers to resonate with the ideas and images of the past that are presented to them.

Therefore, for the current efforts for expanding the philosophical canon, it would be wise to follow the well-known maxim: “Do what you can, and let what will be, be.”

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to examine a few examples of how the canon is understood and how it functions in several fields in the humanities and social sciences. I think it is important to introduce and capture the distinction between a broad cultural canon, a national cultural (literary) canon, and a disciplinary canon. Despite the general structural similarities noted in the last section, disciplinary and cultural canons differ in both their breadth of scope and their function in relation to the cultural or disciplinary community they aim to reproduce. By capturing this distinction, we provide a tool that can bring clarity to the discussion of the canonical status of particular works.

The distinction introduced allows us to see the difficulty that arises when we attempt to discuss the canon of the history of philosophy. It turns out to be both a part of a broad cultural canon, which embodies the most significant achievements of human civilization (as it often turns out –

primarily Western civilization), and an embodiment of the disciplinary canon of philosophy as an academic discipline. The separation of these two aspects, the emancipation of the cultural meaning of philosophy from the disciplinary one, seems to me to be the key task on the way to the current reconsideration of the philosophical canon.

Endnotes

- ¹ Given the vast number of publications on this topic, I won't provide a bibliographical reference. Instead, I will discuss some of the most relevant works later.
- ² The most recent monograph dedicated to the question of the canon in philosophy is *Historiography and the Formation of Philosophical Canons* (Lapointe & Reck, 2023).
- ³ Among the events of last few years can be mentioned: International Conference *How Legitimate is the Philosophical Canon? Concrete Applications from Greek and Chinese Philosophies* (Thessaloniki, 2023), Conference *Questioning 'Western Philosophy': Philosophical, Historical, & Historiographical Challenges* (Oxford, 2023), NYC Workshop in Early Modern Philosophy *Expanding the Canon* (Fordham, 2022), International conference *New Voices on Women in the History of Philosophy* (Padeborn, 2022), Summer School *In and Out - Questioning the Philosophical Canon* (Zagreb, 2019) and many others.
- ⁴ <https://projectvox.org/about-the-project/>
- ⁵ The description of historical events is taken from Chaddock (2012); Cross (1995); Mcarthur (1989)
- ⁶ In the 1966 edition, Adler added a subtitle *A Guide to Reading the Great Books*.
- ⁷ The italics correspond to names which are not included in the original Erskine's list.
- ⁸ I'm taking as an example the conception of the national literary heritage elaborated in the US during the 'canon wars', but the relevant discussions about the national literary canon were developed in other countries as well. See, for example, Meyer (2021) for Germany, Kučinskienė et al. (2021) for the Central Europe and Baltic countries, Vdovin (2017) for Russia.

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FROM NEUROSCIENCE TO ETYMOLOGY, AND BACK: RECONSTRUCTING 'PROTOSYNAESTHESIA' FROM LANGUAGE

Simona Georgescu

Abstract

I focus on the relationship between sensory perceptions, as it is reflected in language. I provide a comprehensive theoretical framework, which includes an overview of the latest neuroscientific research on the connection between the two main sensorial modalities (in humans), sight and hearing. I then offer a crosslinguistic perspective on the verbalization of this relationship, both in synchrony and diachrony. By showing that many words that denote a visual impression stem from lexical roots expressing an acoustic sensation, we propose a closer evaluation of several Indo-European etymological families related to the semantic field of 'brightness'. I observe that many lexical roots that have been artificially separated into two or more homonymic stems because of an apparent semantic incompatibility actually go back to a common origin, namely the verbalization of a sound, and have followed recurrent patterns in their semantic evolution towards the designation of a luminous phenomenon. This approach could provide new insights in the role played by synaesthesia in language evolution.

Keywords: Historical linguistics, neuroscience, etymology, synaesthesia, Indo-European languages.

1. Introduction: aims and methods

In the *Eudemian Ethics* (1245b, 24), Aristotle speaks of συναίσθησις as a 'shared sensation or perception' between friends, the capacity of 'feeling together', in line with what we call today 'empathy'. This meaning was to remain the main acceptance of the term συναίσθησις throughout Classical and Late Antiquity. Nonetheless, in *Historia animalium* (534b, 18) Aristotle uses the same word to refer to the ability of cephalopods, crustaceans and insects to perceive simultaneously by sight, smell and

taste. It is this meaning that was to make a career in modern languages, albeit with various specialisations, depending on the cultural and scientific perspective.

The concept of 'synaesthesia' has been explored in literature (cf. Engstrom, 1946; Skard, 1946; Lynne Duffy, 2013), studied from a psychological perspective (Simner & Hubbard, 2013), probed in its relation to language (Ullmann, 1957; Miller, 1976), and only recently observed by neuroscientists and increasingly prospected as an innate mammal feature (cf. Gazzaniga *et al.*, 2015: 215-223). Thus, in recent years it has been possible to demonstrate, through empirical research, that perceptions are fluctuating, intertwined in different areas of the brain, and that this biological structure influences our understanding of the world.

The hypothesis put forward here is that this reciprocal influence between perceptions manifests itself in language from the earliest documentation of Indo-European languages, and that it can be reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European, allowing us to outline the notion of 'protosynaesthesia'.¹ In order to circumscribe the subject, allowing for an in-depth analysis, I shall focus on the interference between sight and hearing – the two main modalities in the human hierarchy of senses (cf. Viberg, 1984) – and its reflection in words related to light phenomena ('shine', 'bright') in Indo-European languages.

The implications of such a research subject are twofold and bidirectional. On the one hand, by better understanding how the brain functions, it will be possible both to establish more precisely the genetic relationships between words and to trace back the pathway of a word whose origin is unknown. On the other hand, by establishing a sufficiently consistent inventory of words following a similar conceptual pattern underlain by the connection between brain modalities, we will perhaps be able to return the benefit to neuroscience: thus, while so far the brain's crossmodal features have been studied using invasive methods on animals in particular, plus a few one-off experiments on humans (see §2.3.), language – as the expression of thought, and therefore, to some extent, of the brain – has not been considered. I advocate the study of language as a tool for delving into cognitive functions, while linguistic evolution may parallel certain changes in the human perceptual paradigm.

Quoting an observation that seems self-evident today, 'language would not be this way were it not for the way our minds are' (Enfield, Kockelman & Sidnell, 2014: 11), it should be pointed out that the reciprocal also applies: our mind would not be the same if it had not been for language

to shape our cognition and refine our thinking. Therefore, the analysis of language and the survey of the mind can equally shed light on each other. In Evans and Green's terms (2006: 5), 'language offers a window into cognitive function, providing insights into the nature, structure and organization of thoughts.'

Evidence from neuroscience (Coulson, 2017), neurolinguistics (Bauer & Just, 2019; Brennan, 2022) and cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a) highlights the degree to which our mind and, consequently, our language are conditioned by our bodily functions. The evidence we hold mostly relies on contemporaneous data, on scientific studies made on the brain during the last two decades, and – for cognitive linguistics – on synchronic uses of language. Nonetheless, the relationship between mind and language cannot be fully understood if we limit ourselves to a purely synchronic view.

However, a 'diachronical neuroscientific' perspective would be difficult to attain, given that the brain does not fossilize. Therefore, we have no archaeological information about what the inner structures and neuronal systems looked like in the human brain even two millennia ago, let alone two million years ago (cf. Martínez & Arsuaga, 2009; Balari *et al.*, 2013). We do not know how our ancestors' cognitive mechanisms worked. Thus, we can only rely on the one thing that becomes tangible and that preserves our thoughts, namely language. As a tool used without interruption² for communicating human life (both inner and external), it is the only immaterial element that can be reconstructed with fairly high scientific accuracy. Therefore, by analysing language, we can infer information about the prehistoric speakers' physical, social and spiritual environment³, and equally, we can get a glimpse of how their cognitive mechanisms functioned and combined across time.⁴ In other words, if we use linguistic expression as a mirror, we can explore not only how our ancestors saw the realities that surrounded them through their own 'glasses', but we can also prospect the 'glasses' themselves.

It is my understanding that an 'archaeology of thought' (as, perhaps, a subdomain of linguistic palaeontology⁵ or linguistic anthropology⁶) needs its own tools. Our approach should thus stem from the methods used in historical linguistics, namely comparative grammar – reconstruction (Meillet, 1925). This method consists of inferring protoforms (reconstructed ancestral words, normally in non-attested languages) from their reflexes (related words in attested cognate languages), based on the assumption of regular sound change. Further, from protowords one can derive significant

information about the protoconcepts that underlie these words. In the present study, I shall focus on the protoconcepts that are more likely to be closer to original human cognitive mechanisms because they are sensory-related. In other words, within what I call an 'archaeology of thought', I propose to distinguish an 'archaeology of sensory perceptions'. I thus try to use the same methodological principles used in protoword reconstruction in order to reconstruct the relationship between senses, mirrored by language. Therefore, this study can be considered a search for protosynaesthesia, just as it is encapsulated in etymology.

The structure of the article is designed to take a methodical approach to the issue: in the first part I aim to set out briefly the theoretical foundations of the problem, bringing together perspectives from different fields – cognition, linguistics, neuroscience; thus, the aim is to understand and describe the cognitive mechanisms at work, on the one hand, in the process of understanding and interpreting reality, and, on the other hand, in translating this interpretation into language.

The critical data for evaluating the theories exposed are, nonetheless, linguistic data. Thus, in the second part of the study, the theorized concepts will be validated by a crosslinguistic sample of words reflecting the cognitive mechanisms under consideration. I shall focus more closely on the Indo-European etymological clusters that manifest the cognitive-perceptual phenomena of interest. Through this approach, I intend to corroborate the – still scarce – information from neuroscience, by observing how the connection between different brain areas emerges in language.

These two foundations – theoretical and empirical – will afterwards require a reanalysis of various Indo-European roots whose lexicographic interpretation does not meet the conceptual criteria identified. The new survey will lead to the proposition of a reorganized structure of certain etymological clusters. This third part will represent my concrete contribution to etymology.

Thus, my research is primarily oriented towards the delineation of a comprehensive theoretical framework, by confronting scientific fields that are not generally analysed together, but whose synchronization can highlight new and useful elements in each of them, opening the way to more in-depth analyses in one direction or another. Secondly, the application of validated theoretical notions to Indo-European languages will allow for substantial etymological advances.

From a focused linguistic point of view, relationships between perceptions become essential first and foremost to answer the question of whether language emerged as a great process of synaesthesia, as Ramachandran and Hubbard (2001) propose. According to Nobile and Lombardi Vallauri (2016: 13), 'l'intera questione dell'origine del linguaggio può essere pensata nelle sue prime fasi come un grande fenomeno di sinestesia o transmodalità, incentrato sulla possibilità di "tradurre" diverse forme di motorietà e sensorialità in termini fonoarticolatori e uditivi'. I do not pretend to reach a conclusion about this difficult question by this single study, but I aim to bring a few more details that can be further used to better understand language in close relation to the mind.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The brain in the body: the embodiment theory

Language expresses concepts just as they are shaped in the speaker's mind rather than as objective entities of the external world. Such concepts, as first shown by Lakoff and Johnson (1980b; 1999), emerge from the very nature of our brains, bodies, and bodily experience. The two linguists assess, against a long philosophical tradition, that reason is not 'a transcendent feature of the universe or of disembodied mind'; on the contrary, it is 'shaped crucially by the peculiarities of our human bodies, by the remarkable details of the neural structure of our brains, and by the specifics of our everyday functioning in the world' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999: 15).

Biological research on the brain (Feldman, 2006; Coulson, 2017) renders indisputable the fact that reason has developed merely from human sensory and motor systems and that it uses the same mechanisms and circuits as its functional basis. As Johnson (1987) puts it, 'our thinking systems are typically based on our sensory, motor, affective, and interpersonal experiences and cognitive capacities, all of which involve our embodiment.' In other words, it is common sensations, usual movements, and purely physical contact with the environment that shape our perspective on reality. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 15), 'to understand reason we must understand the details of our visual system, our motor system, and the general mechanisms of neural binding,' because our reasoning, be it basic or abstract, 'requires mechanisms of

neural computation used for other purposes and adapted to thought and language' (Feldman, 2006: 8).⁷

A plain example of how our mind interprets the world in an embodied manner is the way in which language resorts to comparisons with human body parts to give names to non-human elements: we speak of the 'foot of the mountain', the 'shoulder of the hill', the 'arms' or 'mouth of the river', etc. A more abstract level of embodiment can be found in expressions such as 'arms of the galaxy', 'eye of the storm', or 'heart of the engine'. Furthermore, our tendency of projecting the basic movements and actions of our bodies onto mental processes underlies our understanding of intellectual or abstract activities in general: e.g., 'we embrace a theory', 'steal someone's idea', or 'step on someone's pride'. These expressions are synchronically transparent, but the same cognitive processes uphold diachronic semantic conversions, which have lost their transparency: e.g. the Romance verbs meaning 'to understand', Fr. *comprendre*, Sp. *comprender*, originate in Lat. *comprehendere* 'to embrace'; Sp. *entender*, derived from Lat. *intendere*, is also based on an embodiment-grounded comparison between a hand reaching out to grasp an object and the mind reaching out to grasp an idea. Even mental processes that imply a high level of abstract thinking stem from the simple motor functions of our body: understanding consecutive numbers as a string of objects, moving from one number to another as in a spatial displacement, perceiving historical events in a determined spatial order, or, in general, perceiving time as a horizontal axis along which our past and future unfold as we 'advance' in life, are all examples of reasoning anchored in embodiment. Yet, we are so accustomed to this way of interpreting abstract, non-spatial concepts in terms of purely spatial movement, that we do not even realize that our mind uses its motor functions to order abstract categories.

These observations that form the basis of the embodiment theory are strengthened today by the findings of neuroscience, where neuroimaging research reveals the involvement of perceptual and motor systems in conceptual tasks (Coulson, 2017; Bauer & Just, 2019). It is this fusion between empirical neuroscientific research and theoretical linguistic studies that led to the following statement (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999: 44):

The embodied-mind hypothesis therefore radically undercuts the *perception/conception* distinction. In an embodied mind, it is conceivable that the same neural system engaged in *perception* (or in bodily movement) plays a central role in *conception*. That is, it is possible that

the very mechanisms responsible for perception, movements, and object manipulation could be responsible for conceptualization and reasoning.

This assumption is essential to my investigation. The act of perceiving external reality through the senses is closely – indeed, physically – linked to a ‘higher’ instance, that of conceptualisation. The two acts cannot be separated, but occur at the same time. It must be borne in mind that there is an intimate relationship between physical perception (in our case, sight and hearing), the transposition of that sensation into a concept, and the mental association that can generate a set of meanings.

2.2. Synaesthesia

The embodiment theory leads to a re-evaluation of the notion of ‘synaesthesia’. I use the term *synaesthesia* here in its basic etymological meaning, as ‘association between senses’⁸. As indicated, concepts are shaped in our minds through senses, which allow for the translation of the external world in internal terms. In what follows, I shall make some observations on synaesthesia in its relation to language, more specifically, on how the association between senses is reflected at the surface level of linguistic expression. In the next section we shall delve into the field of neuroscience to see how this coactivation of different sensory perceptions can be scientifically explained.

The most obvious implication of synaesthesia for language is the tendency to express one sensation in terms of another: e.g. *sharp sound* (tactile + acoustic), *sweet voice* (gustatory + acoustic), *loud colours* (acoustic + visual) or *sharp smell* (tactile + olfaction). This has led to its interpretation as a type of metaphor. In broad terms, it is indeed a metaphor in the etymological and primary sense of the word (Gk. μεταφορά, lit. ‘transposition’), because it does represent a transfer between two conceptual domains, namely the description of one concept in terms of another. It was only with the book *Metaphors we live by* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a) that linguists stopped analysing metaphor as a figure of speech, intended and used solely for stylistic embellishment, and started to interpret it as an unconscious recourse, more precisely, a method of expression resorted to out of necessity, not out of a purely expressive intention. In the case of the expression of synaesthesia in language, the bodily basis is even more clear. The perceptual modalities are so interrelated that the transfer between them is natural, anatomically explainable, as we shall see (§2.3).

Interesting cases from a linguistic point of view are those in which the source modality has lost its prominence and the word has come to refer exclusively to the target modality, leading to a semantic change: e.g. Lat. *nitidu-* 'shiny' (involving the sense of sight) > Rom. *neted* 'smooth' (perceptible by the tactile sense); Lat. *acru-* 'sharp' > Rom. *acru* 'sour', etc. The fact that we tend to express the characteristics of one sensation in terms of another actually reflects this network of permanent neural connections, a strong biological binding that will be explained in the following paragraphs.

2.3. Synaesthesia in neuroscience

Let us start with a basic example. When we hear a sound, we are able to imagine what provoked it – our brain instantly recreates the event and evokes the properties of the object implied; we do not just analyse the sounds separately from their cause, but we actually recreate the context: this ability translates our brain's capacity of creating images starting from sounds. If, for instance, we hear a *bang*, we can instantly tell from the quality of the sound that there were probably two cars crashing, rather than a peal of thunder or a gun-shot. When we hear a sound like *plump*, we can automatically infer the features of the falling object – its dimensions, its weight –, and those of the material receiving it.

Thus, from the characteristics of auditory perception we instinctively determine many non-auditory characteristics of the events and objects involved. Actually, the ability to distinguish events from the sounds they make is part of the evolutionary adaptation of (at least) all vertebrates. When language emerged in humans, the one thing we know is that there was a very basic form of synaesthetic 'device' at work, the one that makes the connection between acoustic forms and visual forms: this must have been the primary form of synaesthesia – in our terms, protosynaesthesia – and still is the most prominent sensorial association⁹ (Allott, 2001).

In what follows, we shall take a look into the biological basis of the coactivation of the visual and auditory modalities, through the survey of the most recent studies in the field of neuroscience concerning this interplay between perceptions.

It has long been considered that each brain area responds to only one kind of perception, being modality-specific, and that these areas are strictly delimited from each other. However, in the last two decades there has been 'something of a revolution in multisensory research' (Driver

& Noesselt, 2008), due to the observation, supported by an increasing number of studies, that there is a strong connection between different senses, detectable in various brain regions. The existence of numerous multisensory convergence zones in the brain (that is, brain regions where neurons receive afferent inputs from multiple senses) was previously known (Driver & Noesselt, 2008), but more recent studies show that the interplay between different senses also affects brain regions that were traditionally considered to be sensory specific (*i.e.* concerning only vision or only hearing or only touch, *etc.*), while also influencing neural responses and perceptual judgments.

The past few years have seen an increasing research interest in the cross-modal capacity of the human brain, although in order to reach concrete results a significant part of the experiments were conducted on non-human subjects. For instance, experiments on ferrets showed that multiple visual cortical fields innervate the auditory cortex (Atilgan *et al.*, 2018), which means that visual stimuli influence the way sounds are perceived, by enhancing the sound that corresponds to a specific visual stimulus from an amalgam of sounds. By analysing multimodal stimulation in prairie voles, Campi *et al.* (2010) observed the outstanding predominance of auditory responses when the visual area was stimulated, which, corroborated with studies in other mammals, seems to indicate that multisensory inputs are integrated at a basic level of cortical processing, and this basic integration ‘may be a general feature of organization shared by all mammals’ (Campi *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, both monkey and human studies have shown that primary cortices also respond to stimuli from other modalities (Driver & Noesselt, 2008), mainly revealing direct anatomical connections between the auditory and visual areas of the brain (Beer *et al.*, 2011).

Moving forward, experiments on human subjects were initially focused on blind and deaf people, and the results are essential for us, because they attest to parallel crossmodal responses: in blind people, auditory stimuli elicit consistent activity in the visual cortex, creating visual images in the brain (Klinge *et al.*, 2010). Just as there has been reported a ‘widespread auditory network toward visual areas in the blind’ (*ibid.*), studies on deaf subjects point out the processing of visual stimuli in the auditory cortex, translated into the creation of virtual sounds from purely visual stimuli (Finney *et al.*, 2002). The evidence for crossmodal plasticity in deaf and blind subjects attests to the strong connection between these two cortical areas as an inherent characteristic of the brain.

Further imagistic studies on non-impaired subjects have revealed 'the existence of direct white matter connections between auditory and visual cortex' (Beer *et al.*, 2011), which constitutes strong evidence for direct structural connection between the two brain areas.

Additional research on humans exposed to light stimuli simultaneous with auditory stimuli has registered the bidirectional influence of the stimuli addressed to one modality on the cortical area responsible for the other modality: concretely, it has been observed that auditory stimuli can reset or evoke oscillatory responses in visual brain areas (Naue *et al.*, 2011), while visual stimulation can definitely change the auditory interpretation of an acoustic stimulus (see the already classic McGurk effect, cf. Gazzaniga *et al.*, 2015: 215). This supports the idea – essential for our further reasoning – that stimulation of sight triggers an auditory response: this means that our brain not only creates a virtual visual image from the interpretation of a sound, but also creates a virtual auditory scene to match the visual scene.

It has, furthermore, been observed that visual oscillatory activity and auditory stimulation are reciprocally influenced by each other, mostly because an oscillatory light phenomenon is perceived as a movement (Naue *et al.*, 2011). It is primarily movements that are interpreted in terms of sounds (see below, §4), as a result of our mind being accustomed to hearing a sound when it sees a movement. We must bear in mind, for the subsequent demonstration, that oscillatory light is interpreted by our brain as motion.

Together these data provide a biological explanation for the recurrent correspondence between lexical meanings referred to these two modalities. It is also important to notice that, according to most of the studies cited above, it is most probable that the sensory binding between sight and hearing normally occurs within the auditory cortex. This piece of information leads to the conjecture that visual data are being interpreted and processed by the brain area responsible for the acoustic sense, which triggers the conclusion that, for instance, oscillatory light phenomena are automatically transformed into sounds.

It is worth mentioning that studies both on animals and humans have registered a relation between sound intensity and luminance.¹⁰ The association between brightness and loudness was observed and explored by Marks (1974), whose results 'mimic those of synaesthesia and suggest that most subjects may match auditory to visual brightness,' leading him to assert the existence of 'psychological correspondences between light

and sound.’ The more recent study by Atilgan *et al.* (2018) leads to the already outlined conclusion that there are similar instances to measure the two different modalities discussed, and the intensity of one sensorial impression triggers an equivalent intensity in the perception of the other stimulus.

Although these observations may seem significant enough to draw certified conclusions concerning synaesthesia, studies in this field are still in their infancy and many unknowns remain.¹¹ It is, thus, reasonable to assume that a perspective from another field may provide new information either supporting or refuting certain conjectures, while shedding additional light on certain issues and opening new pathways of research.

In §3 we shall see how the relationship between the auditory and visual senses is reflected in different languages. Before that, a few clarifications are necessary regarding semantic change from a cognitive point of view.

2.4. Meaning change as a mirror of cognitive shifts

Since mental processes are mirrored, as previously mentioned, in language, so should most changes in our cognitive structure be.¹² These changes are interpreted in linguistics in terms of semantic shifts, which in the last three decades have begun to be thoroughly explored, precisely in the attempt to understand how the human mind works (Blank, 1999; 2000; Blank & Koch, 1999; Koch, 2000, *etc.*).

Until the cognitive perspective on language emerged, by the end of the twentieth century, it was generally believed that, unlike the apparent regularity of phonetic change, semantic evolution lacked any rules. Given this bias, many of the etymological analyses that rigorously pay attention to the phonetic criterion fail precisely because they place semantic aspects in a marginal position (cf. Georgescu, 2021b: 15-19). It is true that ever since the early twentieth century, it has been noted that meanings do not change in a completely random, chaotic way, but that similarities can be identified either in the semantic evolution of words designating the same concept crosslinguistically, or in the denomination strategies used regardless of time and space. From Lakoff and Johnson (1980a) to Traugott and Dasher (2002), it was emphasized that the laws governing language are ontologically linked to the categorial system of the human mind.

If we interpret in linguistic terms the above-mentioned example of Lat. *comprehendere* ‘to grab from all sides, to embrace’, we would say that it has changed its meaning in Fr. (*comprendre*) and Sp. (*comprender*) to

‘understand’. Precisely because it is a change that stems from the fact that our brain is embodied (see above, §2.1), we should not be surprised to find the same change in the evolution of other verbs, such as: Lat. *capere* ‘to grab’ > It. *capire* ‘to understand’, Gk. *καταλαμβάνω* > M.Gk. *καταλαβαίνω* ‘to understand’, Germ. *begreifen*, *fassen*, Eng. *grab*, *grasp* (an idea), etc. (cf. Georgescu, 2020)¹³.

Such examples suggest that semantic evolutions are not plain accidents, but actually follow certain patterns, recurrent in most cases, because ‘ultimately rooted in our shared human cognitive make-up’ (Evans & Wilkins, 2000: 547).

We should also bear in mind that the evolution of meaning follows a unidirectional trajectory, in the sense that the better-known concept is the one that encompasses the lesser-known concept and gives it its name: it is more likely that the concrete meaning of ‘grasp, embrace’ would acquire the abstract meaning of ‘understand’, than vice versa. This direction is typologically recurrent, given that it stems from universal human experiences, which implies that ‘there must be some overarching principles’ of semantic change (Traugott & Dasher, 2002).

3. Lexical interferences between ‘sight’ and ‘hearing’

On the basis of his survey of more than fifty languages from different families, Viberg (1984) showed that there is a strong typological tendency for verbs expressing a modality higher in hierarchy to extend their semantic area towards other modalities, lower in hierarchy, thus in the following order: sight > hearing > touch > smell/taste. As stated in his analysis, verbs expressing visual perception will be able, crosslinguistically, to cover also auditory perception (and sometimes touch): for example, in Swahili, the verb *onekana*, derived from *ona* ‘see’, can be used for sight, hearing, and touch; in indigenous languages both in Australia and in the Caucasus, the verbs for ‘hear’ are formed on the basis of a verb meaning ‘to see’; moreover, the passive form of ‘to see’ is used to refer both to sight and hearing in Korean and Luo (Viberg, 1984: 140-141).

Several other cases of colexification¹⁴ of these sensory perceptions, mostly in Australian languages, are discussed by Evans and Wilkins (2000): e.g. in Yir Yoront, the verb *karr* covers the two modalities discussed, as does the lexeme *nhaamaa* in Guugu Yimidhirr, etc.

My own independent crosslinguistic survey of verbs expressing the concepts of ‘see’ or ‘hear’ shows, in not a few cases, a clear colexification of the two sensory perceptions. According to the data stored in Lexibank (<https://lexibank.clld.org/>)¹⁵, there are nine languages from different families – indigenous languages from Australia, South America, Africa and Papua New Guinea – that reflect this direct sensorial association: e.g. in Kuku Yalanji (North-East Australia), the verb *nyajil* means both ‘to see’ and ‘to hear’; in the Central African language Kimbunga, the verbal root *ku* is also glossed with both meanings, etc.

Focusing on the Indo-European family, we find significant semantic evolutions from Proto-Indo-European to the Indo-European languages that transparently reflect the strong link between the visual and the auditory perceptions: PIE **(s)keuh-*, whose meaning has been reconstructed as ‘to see’, engendered both English verbs *show* and *hear*, along with Gk. ἀκούω ‘to hear’. Beyond the multisensory binding discussed above, there is a concrete case where the functional interplay between these modalities becomes clear, namely in the Latin descendant from the same root, *custos* ‘watchman’ – who must equally use his auditory and visual senses. Another example is that of the stem **au-* / *auēi-*, with the reconstructed meaning of ‘perceive, understand’ (although, typologically speaking, it is unlikely that the original meaning was abstract and general: normally the direction of evolution is from concrete to abstract): its descendants either verbalize a meaning referring to sight (Hittite *aušzi* ‘sees’, Avestic *aviš* ‘apparent, obvious’, Persian *aškar* ‘clear, bright), or express the concept of ‘hearing’ (Lat. *audio*, Gr. αἶω, ‘hear’).

These preliminary linguistic data help to strengthen the hypothesis that our neural structure involves a direct communication channel between the two brain areas responsible for sight and hearing. The cases of colexification of the two concepts are merely a consequence of our mind’s embodiment.

4. The relation between ‘movement’, ‘light’, and ‘sound’: crosslinguistic evidence

As I have argued above (§ 2.3), our brain interprets visual aspects, like oscillatory light phenomena, in terms of motion and recreates the corresponding virtual sounds. As early as 1923, Jespersen observed that ‘because a sound is always produced by a movement and is nothing

else than the impression left by that movement on the human ear, this movement that causes the sound can be expressed in turn by the word used for the sound (e.g. *bubble, splash, crack* etc.).' He adds: 'even when the movement does not cause a loud sound, the sound is used to describe the movement, e.g. *flutter, flow, slip, glide*.'

These observations, mainly based on Hilmer's works (1914; 1918), are in no need of demonstration. On the one hand, we are perfectly aware that there is a natural tendency to give linguistic expression to a natural sound, by making use of the phonetic system that each language has. It is what we understand by *onomatopoeia* ('a word that imitates natural sounds'), including here not only words like *cuckoo* or *cock-a-doodle-doo*, but also lexemes that reproduce the sound made by a blow such as *bang, bump* or *dump*. On the other hand, there is an equally universal tendency (attested crosslinguistically and diachronically by Georgescu, 2021b) to refer to the movement that produced the sound by using the very onomatopoeia created to render the sound. To give just a few examples from English, *pat*, originally an onomatopoeia expressing 'a sound produced by a light stroke', results in the verb *to pat* 'hit or strike' (OED₂). The same evolution as taken place in the cases of *tap* 'to strike lightly', *plump, huck, knack, knock, crack, etc.* (for more examples, see Hilmer, 1914; Georgescu, 2021b).

As previously shown, light phenomena are perceived as movements and are therefore also interpreted and processed in the auditory area of the brain. In other words, the auditory cortex reacts as if it has received an acoustic stimulus from the gleaming or glittering light. Therefore, in order to describe this kind of phenomena, speakers will instinctively use words that originally expressed sounds produced by movements. In what follows, I shall offer a crosslinguistic perspective on the lexical correspondence between light and sound. This cognitive relationship can be identified in language either synchronically, as colexification, or, more often, diachronically, one meaning having evolved from the other.

It has been noticed that words expressing visual phenomena are expressed by onomatopoeias in various languages (cf. Focșeneanu, 2006). For example, the Dravidian language Kota describes the 'visual sensation caused by flames burning brightly' by the onomatopoeic word *dagdagn*, while in the same language, *bagbagn* means 'to burn with great flames' (Emeneau, 1969, *ap.* Focșeseanu, 2006); the Malayo-Polynesian language Kambera expresses the concept of 'glimmering' by the transparent onomatopoeia *jila*, and 'to glow' by *bila* (Klamer, 2000,

ap. Focșeneanu, 2006). Japanese provides a consistent list of words of transparent onomatopoeic origin referring to different types of visual impressions produced by light and its reflection on various surfaces: e.g. *giragira* 'to shine' verbalises the sunlight reflected in the water, mostly of the setting sun, while *kirakira*, whose translation in English would also be 'to shine', and which also renders the glow of light reflected in water, is rather used for bright morning light; a word like *pikato* expressing a 'glimmer' is used in contexts where its onomatopoeic origin becomes clear (the glimmering goes *pikato*); *chirachira* means 'to flicker' (e.g. 'the starlight goes *chirachira*'), *kuraku hikaru* expresses the light / dark contrast; onomatopoeias like *kiratto*, *pikatto*, *pikapika* suggest reflection of light on solid, smooth surfaces, referring to a flashing, momentary light; further on, words like *pikapika*, *munemune*, *tsuyatsuya* are associated with objects that reflect light (e.g. metal weapons), while *pikapika* also designates 'lightning'; a parallel formation, *chikachika*, verbalizes a strong glow (cf. Focșeneanu, 2006). These examples leave no doubt concerning the binding between different sensorimotor perceptions and its direct reflection in language.

If we take a look at the linguistic expression for the concept of 'bright' in different languages, we notice that it is sometimes colexified with the notion of 'loud' (cf. Lexibank): in the Nakh-Daghestanian language Aghul, *iiai* covers both meanings of 'loud' and 'bright'; the same colexification is registered in the Catuquinan word *isi*, from the Pano-Tacanan family.

Within the Indo-European linguistic family, Lexibank provides the examples of Lat. *clarus* 'loud' and 'bright', and Middle High German *hel*, verbalizing the same pair of concepts (related to the verb *hallen* 'to echo, to resound').

We may add here Lat. *micare*, attesting both meanings of 'to move rapidly to and fro, vibrate, flicker' and 'to shine, glitter, sparkle'. Even the English verb *bright* was, in Old English, an ambivalent verb, meaning both 'luminous' and 'clear (of a sound)' (OED₂). The same connection is visible in Fr. *éclat*, designating at the same time a 'violent sound and movement' and 'light intensity' (TLFi).

Beside the examples cited above, reflecting a synchronic association between the concepts of 'light' and 'sound', we find significantly numerous instances of the same connection in diachrony: many words originally referring to a certain sound acquire a meaning related to luminous phenomena. It is not insignificant that the direction of evolution goes from auditory to visual perception, not vice-versa, which supports the

observation that visual stimuli are also processed in the auditory cortex, which converts them into virtual sounds corresponding, from the point of view of intensity and duration, to the oscillatory light phenomena.

In what follows, I shall bring some examples of diachronic variation from 'sound' to 'light' in various Indo-European languages. The English verb *to glance* originally meant 'to move rapidly', while its modern meaning is 'to cause a flash of light by rapid movement', 'to shine' (OED₂). The same semantic evolution is registered for Eng. *sparkle*, originally 'to fly or spring' (since ca. 1200), today meaning 'to emit sparks' (OED₂). Returning to the example cited above of M. H. Germ. *hel* 'loud, sonorous' and 'bright', it's worth mentioning that its modern meaning has become narrowed to the concept of 'bright' (cf. Kluge-Mitzka, 1960). The same semantic change can be identified in the case of a basic Romance verb for the concept of 'shining', It. *brillare* 'shine' / Fr. *briller* / Sp. *brillar*, derived from the root **birl-* / *bril-* / *pir-* / *pril-* 'to fidget, move' (LEI).¹⁶ Another significant stem giving origin to verbs meaning 'to shine' is the Germanic prototype **brand-* meaning both 'to sparkle' and 'to hit' (FEW 15/1, 242b-252b): it is interesting to notice that it engendered, on the one hand, the verb O.Fr. *brander* 'to shine' (of the dawn, a ray of light), and, on the other hand, M. Fr., Fr. *brandir* 'to throw', 'to shake (the sword)'. These cases attest to the strong mental connection between the two different sensory-motor impressions, reinforcing the findings in neuroscience.

We return now to the above-mentioned example of Lat. *clarus*, for a deeper insight into its etymological family, in order to better understand the semantic networks that may be developed inside an etymological family originated in a root verbalizing an auditory impression. Lat. *clarus* is attested with two meanings: on the one hand 'loud, clear (of a sound)', on the other hand 'clear, bright, gleaming'. It stems from the same lexical root as the Latin verbs *calo* 'call', *clamo* 'cry out' and *clango* 'to make a noise'. The etymological dictionaries (Ernout & Meillet, 1932; Vaan, 2008) establish a genetic relationship between these Latin lexemes and Gk. κλέος 'noise, glory', κλαίω 'cry' and κλαγγή 'penetrating sound', all of which express different types of auditory impressions. If we go further in our quest for the etymological network, we find that all of these words are related to Gk. κλάω 'break', which confirms the conceptual contiguity between a sound and the movement that may produce that sound. Consequently, we may infer that the name for the movement originates in the onomatopoeia created to reproduce the sound. Given the neuronal

perception of oscillatory light as movement, we can recreate the following conceptual scheme:

Sound → cry, shout
→ movement → break
→ light

As we shall see further, this pattern can also be observed in other evolutions of Indo-European roots, which attests to the cognitive grounding of this associative network. By observing and acknowledging this recurrent scheme in the semantic evolution of words originally verbalising a sound impression, we can take steps forward in two directions: on the one hand, we will be able to overlap lemmas that, on grounds of the lack of a semantic integrative perspective, were treated as homonymic by the benchmark etymological Indo-European dictionary, Pokorny's *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (IEW); on the other hand, the systematization thus obtained will bring to light genealogical relations between words that were previously treated as stemming from different roots, or simply as lexemes of unknown origin.

5. 'Shining' in Proto-Indo-European

The significant weight of the concept of 'shining' or 'bright' in the Indo-European vocabulary becomes patent when we look at its large number of verbalizations, as found in Pokorny's IEW. The quantitative aspect of the data is important here: I have counted 42 roots with the meaning 'to shine', which is the highest number of verbalizations of a concept in Proto-Indo-European, as reconstructed in the IEW. In comparison, the second best represented concepts are 'to hit' and 'to cut / break', each with 34 verbalizations, followed in third place by 'to swell / boil' with 28 lexical representations. The notion of 'to move' also has a high weight in the vocabulary, but, even if we put it together with the concept of 'shake' or with various types of spatial movement – from which it is quite hard to separate it –, we still do not exceed 35 lexicalizations. We can therefore establish without doubt a fact that seems to me essential for the present study, namely the immense need to express the notion of 'shining' or 'bright', which indicates the importance of the concept in the life of prehistoric speakers, in their way of relating to the environment.

I provide below the list of roots for which the meaning ‘to shine’ (or a related one) has been reconstructed. It should be noted, however, that modern European languages no longer make precise distinctions between types of ‘shining’ or of ‘brightness’ (as, for instance, Japanese does), given that the variety of light types has lost its importance in our mental and perceptual world; therefore, for the vast majority of protoforms, the reconstructed meaning is the plain generic, prototypical, significante ‘to shine’.

- **auēs-* ‘to shine; gold, dawn, aurora’
- **bha-* ‘to shine’
- **bheig^w-* ‘to shine’
- **bhel-* ‘shining, white’
- **bheleg-* ‘to shine’
- **bher-* ‘shining, brown’
- **bherək-, bhrək-* ‘to shine’
- **bherəĝ-, bhrēĝ-* ‘to shine, white, ash wood’
- **bhleiq-* ‘to shine’
- **bhles-* ‘to shine’
- **bhlēiĝ-, bhlīĝ-* ‘to shine’
- **bhlēi-1 bhlai-, bhlī-* ‘to shine’
- **bhlēu-1 bhlau- : bhlū-* ‘to shine’
- **dei-1, deĵə-, dī-, dĵā-* ‘to shine; day; sun; god’
- **dhel-2* ‘light, shining’
- **dheu-3* shining, to shine
- **erk^w-* ‘to shine’
- **ĝel-, ĝelə-, ĝlē-* ‘light, to shine; to be joyful’
- **ĝhel-1* ‘to shine; green, gold, *sun’
- **ĝher-3* ‘to shine, shimmer’
- **ĝhūoig^w-* ‘to shine, star’
- **ĝhūōk^w-, ĝhūək^w-* ‘to shine, shimmer’
- **(g^whēi-) g^whəi-, g^whaid-* ‘bright, shining’
- **kai-lo-* ‘bright, healthy’
- **kand-, skand-, *(s)kend-* ‘to glow; bright, *moon’
- **kad-2* ‘to shine, to flaunt’
- **keuk-* ‘shine, glow’
- **keu-2* ‘to shine, bright’
- **kuei-3, kuei-d-, kuei-s-, kuei-t-* ‘shining, white’

- *lā[i]p-*, *lāip-*, *lāp-* ‘burn, be bright’
leuk-* (leuĝh-*) ‘bright, to shine; to see’
**meigh-*, *meik-* ‘glimmer, twinkle’
**meis-* ‘twinkling, glimmering’
**mer-2* ‘to shimmer, shine’
**nei-2*, *neiā-*, *nī-* ‘move vividly, shine’
**(s)p(h)el-2* ‘to shine, shimmer’
**skāi-*, *skāi-* ‘to glimmer (of wet things); shadow’
**sp(h)eng-* ‘to shine’
**stilp-*, *stilb-* ‘to shine; to show’
**sueid-1* ‘to shine’
**tuei-2*, *tuei-s-* ‘to excite, shake, move around; to shimmer’
ulek-*, *uġk-* (sulek-*) ‘to shine, fiery’

Not a few of these reconstructed roots have a very similar form, sometimes differentiated only by the vowel length. These differences could simply be due to the internal variation of the PIE language, thus going back to a single prototype. Nonetheless, there still remain a substantial number of formally different stems meaning ‘to shine’, which can only indicate the importance of the concept and its many facets. It is improbable that all of these roots designated the exact same type of brightness: it is well known that it is counterproductive for a language to hold series of synonyms that cover the same meaning; if there are more words referring to the same concept, they either involve different nuances, or reflect a diatopic variation.

At the same time, it has been observed that in primitive languages, the physical descriptions of objects give primacy to the qualities of ‘bright’ or ‘dark’, even prior to characteristics like ‘big’ or ‘small’, ‘round’ or ‘flat’ (cf. Allott, 2001).¹⁷ The Japanese model allows us to understand, on the one hand, how many types of brightness humans can perceive (although it no longer seems important for us to name them); on the other hand, the typological overview leads us to the hypothesis that these kinds of luminous effects, being associated with movements, could have been named using onomatopoeia. Going back to the observation concerning the similarities between some of the established roots, it is not improbable that the phonetic variation is the result of the interplay of an expressive variance in pronunciation, in a time period when their linguistic motivation was still perceived.

In what follows, I shall try to show that the connection between ‘shining’ and ‘movement’ can be detected within etymological families, or even within the semantic area of a single word.

6. The etymological relationship between ‘light’ and ‘movement’ in Indo-European clusters

In what follows, I shall explore the Indo-European etymological families that mirror the crossmodal interference between ‘oscillatory light’ (like sparkling, glimmering, shining) and ‘movement’. I shall start from the stems that were reconstructed by Pokorny either with both meanings (e.g. ‘shine’ and ‘move’), or with a meaning related to one of the concepts, but among the descendants of which we find words expressing the other concept.

The stem **ar(e)-ĝ-* is reconstructed with three meanings: ‘glittering’, ‘white’, and ‘fast’. This triple semantic diagram must have been created by Pokorny starting from the Greek word ἀργός which encapsulates the meanings of ‘white’ and ‘fast’. At first sight, these two concepts do not share a common ground, but actually their point of contiguity is represented precisely by the notion of ‘glittering’: as previously shown, it is plausible from a typological point of view that this notion is neuronally processed in the same terms as the visual impression of ‘fast (moving)’ and it is equally likely that it has engendered the concept of ‘brightness’, often perceived and lexicalized as ‘white’.¹⁸ To the same etymological family belongs Lat. *argūtus*, whose ambivalent meaning mirrors the same perceptual connection: on the one hand, it encapsulates a meaning that addresses the visual sense, ‘lively, clear’, and, on the other hand, it has an acceptation involving the auditory sense, ‘piercing (for the ear), shrill, noisy, talkative’. Its basic meaning in Latin seems to have been related to sound production and perception, Lat. *arguo* ‘to declare’, ‘to accuse, blame’, so the root could have been a mere onomatopoeic lexicalization of speech. As we can infer from other examples as well (see above *clarus* and below **bha-*), the semantic pattern could be synthesized as:

Sound → speech
→ (fast) movement → glitter → white

For the stem **nei-/nī-*, Pokorny establishes both meanings of ‘to move vividly’ and ‘to shine’, starting from the two semantic pathways that it

followed: it engendered both Lat. *niteō*, *-ēre* ‘gleam’ (*nitor* ‘radiance’) and Old Eng. *nīð* m. ‘fight’.

Parallely, **tuei-* is reconstructed with the meaning ‘to excite, shake, move around’, but also ‘to shimmer’. Among its descendants we can highlight Gk. *σειώ* ‘shake, swing’ and *σεῖπιος* ‘ardent’, hence the name of the star Sirius; the same twofold evolution can be observed in Avestic, *ǵwaeso* ‘trembling, shaking’ and *ǵwisra-* ‘luminous’.

In the same vein, **sp(h)e(n)d-*, semantically reconstructed as ‘to shiver, to shake’, gave origin to several words meaning ‘to gleam, shine, bright’: e.g. Lithuanian *spįstu* ‘gleam, glisten’, *spindžiu*, *spindėti* ‘id.’, Latvian *atspīst* ‘shine intermittently’, *spīdēt* ‘gleam, shine’, *spuōžs* ‘gleaming, bright, luminous’, etc.

The PIE root **aig-* with the reconstructed meaning of ‘move swiftly, swing, vibrate’ gives origin, on the one hand, to Old Church Slavic *vъzigrati* ‘hop, jump’, and, on the other hand, to Gk. *αἴγλη* ‘gleam, radiance’; this word verbalizes the vibration of light, and although Chantraine (s.v. *αἴγλη*) expresses doubts about a possible relationship with Sanskrit *éjati* ‘to move, tremble’, and Beekes (2010) firmly rejects this conjecture, the neural contiguity between oscillatory light and movement holds up the hypothesis of a common origin for these words.

Another case significant for the present study is **bhlaǵ-* ‘to hit’. Among its descendants we find, on the one hand, words designating a hard blow, like Old Icelandic *blak* ‘blow, knock’, but on the other hand, the same language registers the word *blakra* ‘blink, glitter, flash’; the same pattern can be observed in Norwegian *blakra* which comprises the meanings of ‘fan’ and ‘shine’.

The cases discussed so far provide lexical proofs of sensorimotor binding, for which we find consistent evidence in neuroscience. These linguistic samples foreground the scientific finding that the perception of oscillatory light phenomena is germane with the perception of movement, interpreted and processed in the same terms by the auditory cortex and turned into virtual sounds.

In the following section, I shall present some situations where the cognitive basis is the same, but has not been identified as such. Starting from the observations drawn so far, I shall try to reshape the etymological families according to the semantic criteria exposed.

7. Semantic reconstruction: reshaping etymological clusters

Most of the existing etymological dictionaries – not only those common to all Indo-European languages, but also the lexicographic tools dedicated to individual languages – lack an integrated semantic perspective. The little attention given to historical semantics at the time when the great etymological dictionaries were created is reflected in the types of solutions adopted: the rigorous phono-morphological reconstruction of a protoform is not coordinated with an equally valid semantic reconstruction, so that, not infrequently, obviously related Indo-European words are attributed to etyma considered homonymic (or with an artificial phonemic differentiation) precisely because they do not seem to be semantically concordant.

In the Indo-European family, obviously to a higher degree than within the history of an individual language, semantic relations remain hidden in plain sight. This is understandable, because the considerably larger spatial and temporal platform occasioned by the successive waves of separation of the Indo-European languages gave rise to increased divergences, to semantic (and formal) camouflages that cannot be easily detected. In order to reconstruct genetic relationships between words, linguistic surveys must be coupled with a deep understanding of the concepts behind the words, and therefore of the cognitive mechanisms that govern our linguistic expression.

Therefore, a reconsideration of the semantic criteria (which lacked a unitary and systematic perspective in Pokorny's approach) can lead to a deeper analysis and, consequently in certain cases, to a reorganization of the etymological families. It is of no use to strictly apply the phonetic criteria, if the semantic aspect is neglected. When meanings that stem from the same core are seen as unrelated, the reconstruction will not result in a single root, but in two, three, even five lemmas, identical or almost identical from a phonetic point of view, but separate because of the meanings reconstructed independently from one another.

In what follows, I shall rediscuss the lemmatization proposed by Pokorny for certain etymological clusters related to the concept of 'oscillatory light', in accordance with the cognitive relationship with movement and with auditory perception that I have theorized.

7.1. **bherāk-*

For the stem **bherāk-*, *bhrēk-*, Pokorny reconstructs the meaning ‘to shine’. Yet, among its established descendants, we find some whose semantic area refer clearly to physical movement: O. Ice. *bregða*, (preterit) *brü* ‘quick, fast move, swing’, O. Eng. *bregdan*, *brēdan* ‘quick, fast move, swing’ (→ Eng. *braid* ‘flax, wattle, braid’), M. H. Germ. *bretten* ‘pull, tear, twitch, weave’. Although the association between oscillatory light and movement is proven from a biological-cognitive point of view, we should bear in mind that the binding between concepts follows a systematic causal or consecutive order, which also translates in the unidirectionality of semantic change (see above §2.4): intermittent light is perceived as an iterative movement, but movement is not interpreted, reciprocally, in terms of oscillatory light, therefore it is only possible for a word with the more common meaning of ‘move’ to evolve towards the more specialized meaning of ‘shine’. This pathway is actually shown by the roots cited above whose meaning could only be reconstructed as related to ‘movement’, and whose descendants acquire a significate related to light phenomena, but not vice versa. Following these arguments, we must presume that in the case of the root **bherāk-* too we should establish as an original meaning that of ‘move’ rather than ‘shine’.

7.2. **bher-*

Another arguable case that I shall focus on here is that of **bher-*. Under this phonetic form, Pokorny places no less than five different roots. Leaving aside **bher-* ‘to carry’, which I shall not include in the present discussion, we remain with **bher-2* ‘to boil, swell’, **bher-3* ‘to scrape, cut’, **bher-4* ‘roar, buzz, onomatopoeic words’ (in Pokorny’s own terms), and **bher-5* ‘shining’.

The words that Pokorny establishes as descendants for each of these roots, in not a few cases, overlap semantically: for instance, under **bher-2* ‘to boil, to swell’, Pokorny places Middle Eng. *brim* ‘blaze, glow’, Nor. dial. *brīsa* ‘blaze, flare, shine; set on fire’, *brīs* ‘fire, flame’, O. Ice. *brimi* ‘fire’. According to his semantic distribution, he should have placed these words directly under **bher-5* ‘shining’.

Moreover, he does not establish any relation between **bher-4* ‘roar, buzz, onomatopoeic words’ and **bher-3* ‘to cut’, where he includes, for instance, Lat. *feriō*, *-īre* ‘to strike, knock, hit’, and other verbs with the same

śávas- ‘strength’ (from the idea that the strong ones are bigger, *i.e.* swollen, cf. Georgescu, 2020), Gk. *κῦμα* ‘wave’, Lat. *cumulus* ‘heap’, Ltv. *šuka* ‘haycock’, etc. On the other hand, **keu-2* ‘to shine’ gave origin, according to the same etymologist, to O. Ind. *śúmbhati* ‘shines’, Avestic *savah* ‘morning’, Armenian *šukh* ‘radiance, splendour, fame’. Nonetheless, following, the above demonstration concerning the identity between **bher-* ‘swell’ and **bher-* ‘shine’, I consider that these two supposed homonymic stems, **keu-* ‘swell’ and **keu-* ‘shine’ are, genetically speaking, a single lexical core.

7.4. **deĵa-*

Another case we should rediscuss here is that of **deĵa-*, split by Pokorny into *deĵa-1* ‘to shine’ and *deĵa-2* ‘to swing, move’. It is under *deĵa-1* ‘to shine’ where words like Lat. *dies* ‘day’, *deus* ‘god’, Old Irish *die* ‘day’, Gk. *Ζεῦς* ‘Zeus’, as well as O. Ind. *dyut-* ‘gleam, shine’ are discussed. From *deĵa-2* ‘to swing, move’ stem, in accordance with Pokorny’s classification, lexemes such as O. Ind. *dīyati* ‘fly’, Gk. *δῖνος* ‘whirl’, or O. Ir. *dian* ‘quick, fast’. Given the recurrent cognitive pattern observed in neuroscience and proven by the already numerous lexical cases discussed, it should be patent that here, too, we are dealing with a single root, originally referring to ‘movement’ and expanding its semantic area towards ‘oscillatory light’.

7.5. **dhel-*

The root **dhel-3* is reconstructed with the meaning ‘to tremble’, separate from **dhel-2* ‘shine’. We have already seen several cases where words meaning ‘to tremble’ and ‘to shine’ were acknowledged as stemming from the same root, cf. **tuei-* ‘shake, move around’ and ‘shimmer’; **sp(h)e(n)d-* ‘to shiver, to shake’ > Lith. *spįstu* ‘gleam, glisten’, Ltv. *atspīst* ‘shine intermittently’, *spîdēt* ‘gleam, shine’, *spuôžs* ‘gleaming, bright, luminous’. Considering the semantically overlapping descendants placed divergently under one lemma or another, and on the basis of the semantic criteria outlined above, I suggest that these two entries should also be reduced to a single one, with the original meaning ‘to shiver’, ‘to tremble’.

7.6. **bha-*

A similar rationale must be considered in the case of **bha-*, treated under two different lemmas, **bha-1* 'shine' and **bha-2* 'speak', to which a third one could be added, **bha(t)-* 'hit': according to Walde (1869-1924), *-t-* is nothing but a phonetic extension which could be absent, while Pokorny only suggests that the root could simply be *bha-*.

The relation between 'shine' and 'hit', as two concepts derived from 'movement', has already been discussed. An apparent divergence might seem to be the meaning of 'speak', but if we bear in mind that both meanings 'to hit' and 'to shine' are, by their very nature, based on an onomatopoeia, the logical relationship between them becomes patent. Indeed, what could be more onomatopoeic than the verb 'to speak' itself?

A plausible explanation is that this root was originally an ideophone used to reproduce either the sound of speech, or the impression produced by a hard blow. Consequently, it could verbalize both the idea of expressing (articulate) sounds, thus 'speak', and that of 'making a movement': from here, it is not hard to recognize the recurrent patterns in the semantic evolution of such a lexical root, either towards the meaning 'to hit', or, referring to light phenomena, 'to sparkle, shine'¹⁹.

In conclusion, it is likely that we are dealing with a single root, **bha-*, with the following semantic developments:

Sound → speak
 → movement → hit
 → shine

7.7. **mer-*

Our last example is that of **mer-*, divided in five lemmas: **mer-1* 'to plait, weave', **mer-2* 'shimmer, shine', **mer-3* 'dark', **mer-4* 'die', **mer-5* 'rub, wipe, grab, rob'. For now, I shall not discuss **mer-4* 'die', but I shall focus on the other four lemmas.

Firstly, regarding the meaning 'plait, weave', we can highlight its conceptual relationship with 'movement' as seen in the case of **bherāk-*: in the above-mentioned etymological family (§6.1), the descendance is clear, being developed even within the same language, e.g. O. Eng. *bregdan* 'fast move' > Eng. *braid*, in correspondence with Germ. *bretten* 'pull, tear, twitch, weave'. As we have shown, the action of braiding is

basically perceived as a rapid and repetitive movement, so the name must have been created as a specialisation of the meaning ‘fast move’. At the same time, as discussed at length above, the perception of instant or oscillatory light as fast movement entails applying to it the same name used for motion. In the absence of phonetic counters, therefore, there is no impediment to joining under a single lemma **mer-* ‘move’ the concepts of ‘plait’ and ‘shimmer’.

In immediate relation to these meanings is **mer-5* (following Pokorny’s lemmatization), with the reconstructed meanings of ‘rub, wipe; grab, rob’. The latter two meanings are not justified, since they are found only in Sanskrit, and only as secondary meanings – hence probably derived on Sanskrit ground. The other two, ‘rub’ and ‘wipe’, are in fact subsumed to the idea of movement, fast, uniform and constant, being just one of the possible directions of specialization. I therefore consider that it is not justified to reconstruct these meanings as the original semantic core. Constant and rapid movement includes the idea of ‘hitting’ and ‘violence’, and it is probably from here that were developed such verbs as O. Ice *merja* ‘hit’, Middle Low German *morken* ‘crush’, and, a step forward conceptually, Arm. *mart* ‘fight, struggle’.²⁰ We can thus attach to the concept of ‘movement’ also the idea of ‘rubbing’, ‘wiping’, and therefore I believe that **mer-5* can easily be merged with the family of **mer-* ‘move’.

We still have a few semantic pathways to clarify. Gk. μάρναμαι ‘to fight’ is classified by Pokorny under the lemma *mer-5* ‘rub’, a semantic relation accepted by Chantraine (1968) and Beekes (2010), also on the basis of Frisk’s (1960) supposition that μάρναμαι should have initially meant ‘crush, smash’. Yet, a significative clue about its original meaning can be found in the recurrent Homeric formula (*Iliad*) μάρναντο δέμας πυρός ‘they fought like fire’, where δέμας ‘like’ actually has a very concrete meaning, of ‘body’; therefore, we have almost a material image of the fight taking the ‘bodily’ shape of fire. This syntagm could not be explained by the meaning of ‘crush’. Haudry (2009: 321) sees here a representation of ‘the fiery nature of the hero’, in accordance with his own theory of the human being seen as fire. The picture is, however, much more concrete here, while the proposed metaphor seems a little too far-fetched. I think that the relationship between fight and fire can be interpreted in two ways: the comparison is based either on the lively, agile movement of fire, which actually attracts its categorization as a being in many cultures²¹, or, more concretely, on the glow of armour and weapons in the sunlight, a feature so prominent in weapons that it constantly appears in their epic description.

Therefore, it is possible that the verb μάρναμαι is etymologically related to μαρμαίρω ‘to gleam, glitter, shine’, a concept derived, in its turn, from movement. I do not exclude the possibility that the same verb actually derives directly from the idea of movement, without the intermediary of ‘shining’. In any case, all the words grouped by Pokorny under **mer-5* ‘rub’, ‘wipe’ can be included without difficulty under a broad sense of ‘to move’.

Another word we should reanalyse from a semantic and etymological point of view is Gk. μάρμαρος ‘marble’. Frisk (1960) suspects a relationship with μάρναμαι, from the idea of ‘smashing’ – a hypothesis explained by Pokorny as follows: just as Lat. *rupes* ‘stone’ comes from *rumpo* ‘break’ (in fact an uncertain relationship), so must be the case of μάρμαρος, coming from **mer-* ‘crush’. Frisk believes that the meaning of ‘marble’ resulted from the folk-etymological connection with μαρμαίρω. On the other hand, Liddell, Scott and Jones’ (1843) definition for μάρμαρος, ‘a crystalline rock which sparkles’, implies a more plausible etymological hypothesis, a name that stems from the visual characteristic of this type of stone. According to Beekes (2010), the genetic relation between μάρμαρος and μαρμαίρω ‘to glow, to sparkle, to shine’ is certain, which would place μάρμαρος in the conceptual field of ‘shine’, not ‘smash’.

The last issue I shall touch upon is the perceptual relationship between light and darkness. As shown above, the meaning established for the third lemma created by Pokorny for the protoform **mer-* is ‘dark’. Perhaps a good place to start is the verb Gk. μαπαίνω (of the fire) ‘to go out’, (of flowers) ‘to fade’. Its etymological relationship with μαρμαίρω ‘shine’ cannot be denied (both being built on the lexical root μαρ-), which brings up a significant issue for our discussion. The fact that both ‘shimmering’ fire and fire ‘going out’ are named by the same lexical root suggests that this stem might have been originally applied to intermittent light, encompassing in its conceptual area both the moment of luminosity and that of absence of light: it is actually their rapid succession that makes them perceptible, thus these two momentary states make up the concept of oscillatory light.

If we step out of this etymological family, we find several parallel examples. For instance, among the descendants of the root **bhleg-* ‘to shine’, we find both the Germanic protoform **blank-* ‘white’ (cf. Eng. *blank* ‘clear’, ‘transparent’ and Eng. *black*). The hypothesis we can propose for these two opposite directions of evolution is a lexicalization of the two hypostases of flashing light: as we already suggested, for the glitter to be perceived, there needs to be a moment of darkness followed by an

instance of light, which actually entails its interpretation as movement. In the case of other roots, the two senses are reconstructed together as the original semantic core of the root, precisely because of the impossibility of separating its obviously cognate descendants covering both meanings: e.g. **kel-* / **kal-* ‘dark or light spot’. There are also cases where a lexical root referred to either ‘light’ or ‘darkness’ evolved towards the opposite meaning: e.g. **(ha)mer(gw-)* ‘dark’ gave origin to both Rom. *amurg* ‘dusk’ and Germ. *Morgen* ‘dawn’; **ghel-* is the basis for Eng. *glitter*, *gleam*, etc., but also for *gloom* ‘darkness’.

In fact, Pokorny classifies under **mer-2* ‘shine’ words obviously referred to ‘darkness’, which overlap perfectly from a semantic point of view with those grouped under **mer-3*:

- **mer-2* ‘glow, brightness’ > O.C.S. *mrakъ* ‘darkness’, *smerk* ‘twilight’, Rus. *mórok* ‘darkness, mist, clouds’;

- **mer-3* / **mor-* ‘darkness’ > Arm. *m̐rayl* ‘darkness, mist, clouds’.

In the light of these observations, we can conclude that the separation made by Pokorny between **mer-2* ‘shimmer’ and **mer-3* ‘dark’ is artificial, the two aspects being sides of the same coin and perceived together. Either of the two successive momentary states (light / darkness) can be prototypically lexicalized starting from this originally undifferentiated perception, just as it could happen that the common core splits into two, providing a name for both states, eventually with a slight phonetic differentiation (cf. Eng. *black* vs *blank* – with nasal infix).

In summary, four lemmas (out of five²²) with the protoform **mer-* should, in my opinion, be reduced to a single one, with the meaning of ‘repeated movement’.

8. Conclusions and future research

The main aim of my approach has been to outline the theoretical and empirical foundations of what we may call ‘protosynaesthesia’. From a methodological point of view, I started from the idea formulated by Casanto (2017), who emphasizes the relationship that needs to be constantly considered between cognition and language. Thus, he points out, we can build ‘cognitively informed theories of language’, in which case ‘discoveries about brain and mind serve as sources of hypothesis and potential constrains, but the data that are critical for evaluating these

theories are, for the most part, linguistic data.’ On the other hand, when we build ‘linguistically informed theories of cognition, discoveries about language serve as sources of hypotheses and potential constraints, but the data that are critical for evaluating these theories are, for the most part, nonlinguistic data (e.g. studies of how people think, perceive, act, feel, decide, remember or imagine).’ In my endeavour, I had to use both approaches, while trying to propose both a ‘cognitively informed theory of language’ and a ‘linguistically informed theory of cognition’: the two perspectives underpin each other, and the data provided as support for each become the basis for the other theoretical frame.

Based on neuroscientific data, I first show that there is a close relationship between sensory perceptions, especially between sight and hearing (the two most developed modalities in humans), and that light phenomena are generally perceived as motion. As a result, they will be denoted by the same words expressing motion, themselves generally originating in onomatopoeias reproducing the (virtual) sound of the movement. Thus, what was considered to be merely a formal coincidence between words referring to light phenomena and those expressing sounds or sudden movements, can be now interpreted as a genetic relationship: the supposed homonymy, as treated in lexicography, is nothing but a colexification. I have supported these findings with a considerable number of linguistic examples, both from non-Indo-European and Indo-European languages. I have then tried to illustrate their applicability to concrete vocabulary analysis, and my proposed task was to reexamine Indo-European etymological clusters that either originated in a root referring to a light phenomenon, or included words that touch on this meaning. The semantic reinterpretation allowed me to rebuild large etymological families that were previously separated in lexicography by artificial criteria.

The theoretical and empirical foundations proposed here can be thought of as an opportunity to reanalyse cases of unknown, uncertain or erroneous etymologies. Modern lexicography still encounters many difficulties in establishing the origin of words with meanings related to light phenomena, whether they belong to classical languages or to modern European, often Romance, languages.²³ The principles presented here will serve as a platform for future etymological studies. At the same time, I hope that the linguistic data provided will open new pathways for interpreting the perceptual mechanisms that govern human – embodied – cognition.

Endnotes

- ¹ I shall use here the term *protosynaesthesia* not in its general acceptance of ‘supposed innate form of synaesthesia’, as it is approached in psychology (Fassnidge, 2018), but with a coined meaning exploiting the value with which the prefixoid *proto-* is used in linguistics – in compounds like *protoword* and *protolanguage* –, namely the specialized, technical sense of ‘reconstructed’, or the wider meaning of ‘original, primary’: I thus use the term ‘protosynaesthesia’ to mean a ‘reconstructed connection between sensory perceptions’, or a ‘primary form of synaesthesia’, as it can be detected in a reconstructed language.
- ² Although we do not have infallible clues about the period when it appeared, the most recent opinion places the origin of language no further than about 90,000-75,000 years ago (Balari *et al.*, 2013), but our possibility of concretely exploring language does not go beyond 8,000-7,000 years, the period for which we can reconstruct Proto-Indo-European (Heggarty *et al.*, 2023).
- ³ One of the best representatives of this approach is Emile Benveniste (1969), who reconstructs the whole Indo-European conceptual field of social, economic, and religious institutions on the basis of reconstructed words.
- ⁴ Here may be mentioned the ground-breaking work of Sweetser (1990), showing that there is a recurrent pattern in the semantic evolution of Indo-European verbs from ‘sight’ to ‘knowledge’, in different periods and various geographical spaces. Besides this study, there have, to the best of my knowledge, been no significant attempts to test linguistically whether the same kind of interpretations of the world, grounded on the association between body and mind, can be identified in prehistoric or ancient thinking.
- ⁵ The concept of ‘linguistic paleontology’ was coined by Adolphe Pictet (1859-1863) to refer to the reconstruction of social and material life through linguistic reconstruction.
- ⁶ For an overview of what linguistic anthropology should be (and unfortunately is not yet), see Stasch (2014). For the (desirable) relation between archaeology and language, see Blench (2014).
- ⁷ In Roher’s terms (2007: 38), ‘What is crucial to the argument of the embodiment hypothesis is that the *same* neural mechanisms which are responsible for “lower-level” activities like perception and movement are taken to be *essential* to “higher-level” cognitive abilities, namely to our reasoning and conceptualization”.
- ⁸ There is also a narrow use of the term, describing a specific neuronal condition that has been named ‘genuine perceptual synaesthesia’, defined as a condition in which stimulation in one sensory modality systematically and automatically leads to experiences in a different modality. The grapheme-colour synaesthesia is by far the most common form, in which, for example,

a specific letter or number reliably and involuntarily triggers a specific colour response (Fingerhut, 2011: 11; Simner & Hubbard, 2013).

⁹ Seeing and hearing are the most active senses in the human being (*cf.* Miller & Johnson-Laird, 1976: 18): first, because, unlike taste and touch, they do not need direct contact, but only air and light; they differ from the sense of smell, conditioned by a more reduced spatial limit and diminished also through the millennia, compared to the animals' homologous sense.

¹⁰ For a psychological approach to intensity, both in vision (= brightness) and in audition (= loudness), see Miller & Johnson-Laird (1976).

¹¹ *E.g.* 'the pathways transmitting nonvisual information to visual cortex are currently unclear' (Klinge *et al.*, 2010); 'the neural pathways that mediate these crossmodal effects of sounds on visual processing are still disputed' (Beer *et al.*, 2011); 'how auditory and visual information are integrated to form a coherent perceptual object is unknown' (Atilgan *et al.*, 2018); 'the contribution that visual activity in auditory cortex makes to auditory function remains unclear' (*ibid.*), *etc.*

¹² 'Il mutamento di significato e di fatto considerato come uno specchio che permette di intravedere gli elementi della struttura mentale del linguaggio e la sua interfaccia con il pensiero e con la cultura' (Steiner, 2016: 4).

¹³ Recurrent patterns in semantic change may also be observed in cases such as 'to see' > 'to know' (Sweetser, 1990), 'to swell' / 'boil' > 'to rage' (Kövecses, 2000; Gevaert, 2005), 'hard blow' > 'fragment' / 'prominence' / 'cavity' (Georgescu, 2021b), *etc.* We may also recall Tagliavini's seminal work on the names of the 'pupil (of the eye)' in fifty languages of various families, where he observes that the strategies for designating this body part are actually limited to three basic concepts, regardless of space and time. To test the assumption about the existence of cognitive universals and as a continuation of the work initiated by Tagliavini, a project on the strategies used in naming the body parts in Romance languages has been proposed, but not (yet) carried out (Gévaudan & Koch, 2011).

¹⁴ I understand by 'colexification' the expression of two or more concepts by the same word.

¹⁵ Lexibank is a databank that contains 2029 languages and 3033 concepts, allowing complex types of crosslinguistic search (List *et al.*, 2022; List *et al.*, 2023).

¹⁶ Actually, TLFI establishes two homonyms in French, *briller* 1 'to fidget, move here and there, wiggle' and *briller* 2 'shine', although the former is considered to have derived from the latter. According to the argument presented here, the direction of evolution would have been the opposite.

¹⁷ As shown by Kay *et al.* (2009), the primordial colour system in languages is binary, bright vs dark, and it is only as languages evolve that they add other colour names, following almost the same stages.

- ¹⁸ See the parallel examples of PIE **kand-*, *skand-*, ‘to glow; bright’ > Lat. *candidus* ‘bright, white’, PIE **leuk-* ‘bright, shine’ > Gk. λευκός ‘white’, PIE **bher-* ‘shining; brown’ > Russ. dial. *bryněť* ‘white, gray’, R.C.S. *bron* ‘white; varicolored (of horses)’, etc.
- ¹⁹ See above (§5) the parallel semantic network developed from **ar(e)-ĝ-*, whose Greek descendant evokes the meaning of ‘shining’, while the Latin one denotes the act of ‘speaking’.
- ²⁰ This meaning is also attested in Greek, but I do not think that it followed this pathway; I develop my hypothesis below.
- ²¹ See, for instance, the “living fire” in several European communities (Frazer, 1966).
- ²² Whether ‘to die’ is related to the idea of extinction (verbalized by Gk. μαραίνω) or to that of darkness will be left out of the discussion for now, in the absence of a detailed onomasiological study of the concept of ‘death’ in Indo-European.
- ²³ I may mention here the numerous lexical entries with a meaning referred to ‘light’ or ‘darkness’ grouped by Wartburg (FEW 23, 183b-184b) in a volume dedicated to words of uncertain origin in French (and, in general, Gallo-Romance languages or dialects).

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THE MAKING OF MONASTIC HAMARTIOLOGY II: THE CONTRIBUTION BY EASTERN ASCETIC FATHERS OF THE FOURTH–SEVENTH CENTURIES TO THE CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF SIN*

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Abstract

This article considers the theology of sin among Eastern ascetics of the early Byzantine period, exploring their theology's focus, key points, and terminology. It highlights the main stages in the formation and development of monastic hamartiology by examining the contributions of three major ascetic schools: the schools of Egypt, Palestine, and Mount Sinai. Consideration of their key representatives (Evagrius Ponticus, John Cassian, Barsanuphius and John, Dorotheus of Gaza, and John Climacus) provides a panoramic view of the main streams in the development of monastic hamartiology and assesses its significance for the broader Christian doctrine of sin.

Keywords: monastic hamartiology, sin, evil thoughts, passions, Evagrius Ponticus, John Cassian, Barsanuphius and John, Dorotheus of Gaza, John Climacus.

1. Introduction

Interest in monastic issues has never waned among scholars, and the current generation, with its interdisciplinary focus on social and psychological issues, is no exception. Ascetic writings of the early Byzantine period,

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however, also contain theological ideas that deserve scholarly attention but are usually overlooked by systematic theologians. If we examine dogmatic textbooks, for example, we will rarely find mention of ascetic authors and their contribution to the Church's theology. And the same is true for the particular area of hamartiology. The root of this term comes from the Greek word *hamartia* (ἁμαρτία) which originally referred to missing the mark¹. In Christian theology, this word has usually referred to any failure to adhere to God's law; hamartiology, then, is the theological study of the origin, nature, and consequences of sin.

Because they had to deal with it each day in their ascetic practice, sin was part of the early ascetics' inner drama; sin was an issue of paramount importance on their path to holiness. The realization of the radical persistence of evil in their lives and the search for ways out of this fallen state led ascetics to reflect on the problem of sin – its origin, nature, and effects on the soul – but they did so with special emphases that were typical of their monastic environment. The context of the formative relationship between fathers and disciples produced a characteristic approach to the problem of sin and spawned corresponding literary genres, such as apophthegmata, chapters, and other examples of paraenetic discourse.

In recent years, several scholars have studied aspects of monastic hamartiology, focusing on individual ascetic authors or the interdependence of their ideas (Brakke, 2006; Stewart, 2005; Villegas-Marín, 2013; Squires, 2013; Gravier, 2022). There have also been attempts to trace an evolutionary development from the Evagrian scheme of eight thoughts to the seven deadly sins proposed by Gregory the Great (540–604) (Tilby, 2009; Okholm, 2014). Still lacking is a synthetic study showing the trajectory and main stages of the development of monastic hamartiology and integrating it into the Church's doctrine of sin. The present article, therefore, undertakes such a synthesis, highlighting the contribution of early Byzantine monasticism to the developing Christian doctrine of sin.

This article addresses three main questions: 1) Can we speak of a contribution by ascetic authors to Christian hamartiology, and if so, what was the nature of that contribution? 2) What are the key points of the monastic doctrine of sin and the main stages of its development? 3) What is the specific focus of monastic hamartiology, and in what ways is it original? Exploring monastic hamartiology from a historical perspective, this article shows how attempts to solve the problem of sin in their daily life prompted the early monks to systematize their knowledge of sin, and how subsequent generations of monks sought to elaborate those early

views. The main sources for this exploration are the writings of important Eastern ascetic authors from the fourth through the seventh centuries. Since the ascetic literature of this period is quite extensive and diverse, I limit myself to the key writings of the Egyptian, Palestinian, and Sinaitic monastic schools of that era, such as the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, works by Evagrius of Pontus (345–399) and John Cassian (c.360–c.430), the correspondence of Barsanuphius the Great and John the Prophet (6th cent.), as well as writings by Dorotheus of Gaza (505–565) and John Climacus (7th cent.). Analysis of relevant passages from these monastic sources reveals a specific ascetic approach to the issue of sin as well as the main stages in the formation of monastic hamartiology. As a result, we gain a panoramic view of the development of monastic hamartiology and its significance for the broader Christian doctrine of sin.

2. The Egyptian School

The basic characteristic of monastic theology is the fact that it developed from the ascetic practice. Though monks sometimes engaged in theological discussions, such controversies have never been the seedbed of their theology but rather a manifestation and defence of monastic beliefs. In the development of monastic hamartiology, we can trace three stages, connected with the three important monastic centres settled in the region of Egypt and Palestine. Besides, there were also other ascetic settlements and communities with their ideas of sin but they did not influence the mainstream of this development as much as these three above-mentioned centres. The first of them was settled in the desert of Lower Egypt, mainly in the monastic sites of Scetis, Nitria and Kellia, where the apophthegms of the desert fathers originated.

2.1. The Desert Fathers

When reading the apophthegms, we usually do not find any explicit teaching on sin, because the main preoccupation of the Desert Fathers was very practical: they were striving for salvation, for which they needed to obtain forgiveness for their previous sins and by all means to avoid potential sins, temptations and worldly attractions. They tried to achieve this goal through the radical withdrawal from the world in order to escape its temptations and allurements. The withdrawal from the world created

favourable conditions for the forgiveness of sins, for it allowed the early ascetics to stay patiently in the cells, weeping for their sins (*AP*, Gelasius 6, John the Dwarf 12, Macarius the Great 27, 41; Milesius 2, Poemen 119, Pior 3).

It was a culture *sine qua non*, a constant practice of all the Desert Fathers, which they kept throughout their whole life, even if their sins were forgiven (*AP*, Dioscorus 2). On the one hand, it helped them to avoid unnecessary judgements on a brother's faults and kept them in humility (*AP*, James 2, Amoun of Nitria 4; Moses 2; Pior 3). Abba Sarmatas expressed this conviction in these words: "I prefer a sinful man who knows he has sinned and repents, to a man who has not sinned and considers himself to be righteous" (Sarmatas 1). Also, Antony the Great taught that the main task of the monk was "always to take the blame for his own sins before God and to expect temptation to his last breath" (*AP*, Anthony 4). On the other hand, weeping and compunction helped the ascetic to gain both deliverance from faults and the acquisition of virtues (*AP*, Poemen 97, 119, 162, 208). The penitential discipline of the Desert Fathers drastically differed from the ecclesiastical one and was considerably mitigated (Dörries 1962). When brothers asked abba Sisoës whether one who sinned must do penance for a year, six months or forty days, the old man answered, "No, he needs to do penance for a few days. But I trust in God that if such a man does penance with his whole heart, God will receive him, even in three days" (*AP*, Sisoës 20).

While one could easily and quickly receive forgiveness of his sins through repentance and weeping, it was much more difficult to preserve himself from future sins. The apophthegms contain diverse advice from the monks with regard to various kind of sins, including problems of anger and judging others, lust, fornication and other sexual temptations, love of money and greed, slander, hatred, heresy and idolatry, accidie, vain-glory and pride, etc. To deal with all these sins and temptations, the ascetic early or late had to enter into the twofold interior struggle: on the one hand, he was to master and control his passions and evil thoughts and on the other hand he was to fight the demons. From their experience of this struggle the desert fathers were well aware that "the demons attempt to capture a man's spirit through his own impetus", and "they draw him in this manner until they lead him to an invisible passion" (*AP*, Cronius 2). Therefore, "if anyone wants to drive out the demons, he must first subdue the passions; for he will banish the demon of the passion which he has mastered. For example, the devil accompanies anger; so if you control your anger, the

devil of anger will be banished. And so it is with each of the passions" (AP, Pityrion 1). So finally, a struggle against passions became central in the monastic routine as a prophylactic means for avoiding sins and as a precondition for overcoming the demons.

The constant struggle with passions does not mean that the desert father never enjoyed peace and freedom from passions. They certainly had such experiences too, as abba Joseph acknowledged this before his disciples, saying: "I am a king today, for I reign over the passions" (AP, Joseph of Panephyss 10). However, this experience usually was temporary and short-lived, as abba Longinus clearly explained to abba Acacius with this example: "A woman knows she has conceived when she no longer loses any blood. So it is with the soul: she knows she has conceived the holy spirit when the passions stop coming out of her. But as long as one is held back in the passions, how can one dare to believe one is sinless? Give blood and receive the Spirit" (AP, Longinus 5). Most of the time the monks combined manual work with prayers and meditations which inevitably brought them to struggle against destructive thoughts as impediments to a pure prayer. The struggle against such thoughts became a basic daily routine of Egyptian monks as an effective prophylactic means to prevent falling into sins. It is in this context that the Evagrius teaching of eight generic thoughts (λογισμοί) appeared and became fundamental not only for monks but also for the entire Church.

2.2. Evagrius' scheme of eight generic thoughts

Evagrius Ponticus, one of the greatest intellectuals of the fourth century, summarized the desert experience and his own intellectual insights. On this basis, he developed a comprehensive list of eight generic thoughts (λογισμοί) as a pedagogical and diagnostic means to assist monks in their ascetical strivings². He saw the goal of the monk as pure prayer and contemplation of God which can be tasted only after achieving *apatheia*, the state of freedom from tempting thoughts and passionate impulses and movements. As David Brakke pointed out, the goal of the Evagrius monk was "to become not merely a 'monastic man', that is, someone who has withdrawn from committing sins in action, but rather, a 'monastic intellect,' that is, someone who is free even from thoughts of sin" (Brakke 2009, 26). Since sin "arises from the thoughts that are in our intellect" (*Antirr.* Prol. 5), Evagrius' main interest was not in sins but in thoughts and passions as the source and predecessors of sin. These terms became

predominant in the ascetic environment of the East and pushed aside the terminology of sin per se. Moreover, they became technical terms in the ascetic theology of Evagrius and acquired a specific meaning, somewhat distinct from their common use.

The concept of thoughts (λογισμοί) presupposes not purely intellectual or abstract ideas that take shape in the mind, but a mental phenomenon that allows for the presence of certain non-intellectual elements such as emotions and volitions. The λογισμός need not be necessarily an abstract idea; it can also be a certain image produced by the imagination (φαντασία) or a recollection evoked by memory (μνήμη). Moreover, Evagrius usually employs this term in a negative sense, associating it with the idea of “temptation” (πειρασμός). In the *Praktikos*, he defines temptation as “a thought (λογισμός) that rises up through the passionate part of the soul and darkens the intellect”³.

The negative connotation dominating the term λογισμός brings it closer to the term “passion” (πάθος). In a narrow sense, thought is certainly not the same as passion. Evagrius clearly states that thought is the manifestation of the disorder in the soul (i.e., passion) and it can also be the source of passion (*Prakt.* 74; *Eul.* 2, 5, 8, 12, 21; *In Prov.* 6:19). However, in his writings, there are also statements that almost equate these terms and use them interchangeably as synonyms or rough equivalents⁴: he mentions once the thought itself, another time the passion associated with it, still another time the demon, responsible for the emergence of a certain thought or passion (*Prakt.* 7-14; *Ep.* 39:2). Such interchange does not mean that Evagrius confuses all these terms; rather he points to their close connection, which we will discuss below.

Though Evagrius typically used *logismos* in a negative sense (Guillaumont & Guillaumont 1971, 56), the term itself, as Columba Stewart rightly points out, “was not necessarily pejorative and was certainly less judgmental than ‘sin’ or ‘vice’”; it was a technical term that allowed one “to distinguish between the source of a thought, which was often beyond human control, and its reception, which required human cooperation” (Stewart 2005, 17). It presupposed an element of moral evaluation and a possibility of longer duration. It is more about a certain process of thinking, considering, dissecting something rather than a single thought⁵. When such a thought persists in the mind, it inevitably engages passions and “bring[s] the *nous* down to ruin and perdition”, for if the mind does not resist the harmful thought, “it becomes overwhelmed by passion and risks moving towards sin in action” (*Peri logismon* 22 I 24). Therefore, to

avoid sins, the monk needed to watch over his thoughts, discern among them the dangerous ones and cut them off. To help the monk to do this task effectively, Evagrius composed a list of the eight principal thoughts as a certain pedagogical and diagnostic instrument, providing a clear description of their symptoms and manifestations as well as supplying the means for overcoming them.

The list of the tempting thoughts includes: gluttony (γαστριμαργία); lust or fornication (πορνεία); avarice or love of money (φιλαργυρία); sadness or dejection (λύπη)⁶, anger (ὀργή)⁷, despondency or listlessness, also called accidie (ἀκηδία)⁸, vainglory (κενοδοξία) and pride (ὕπερηφανία)⁹. The order of the thoughts in the list reflects the general idea of spiritual progress, when one is progressing from the fight against the more materialistic thoughts such as gluttony, lust, avarice; to the confrontation with the more interior temptations such as dejection, anger, despondency, and finally, when the former are tamed, to the more subtle intellectual thoughts of vainglory and pride. Sometimes Evagrius reduces this list of eight thoughts to the three primary and fundamental ones – gluttony, avarice, and vainglory – for they formed a front line behind which all other evil thoughts go: it is impossible for a man to fall under the power of any demon, “unless he has first been wounded by those in the front line”. That is why the devil suggested these three thoughts to the Lord: “first, he exhorted him to turn stones into bread” (temptation by gluttony); “then, he promised him the whole world if he would fall down and worship him” (temptation by love of money); “and thirdly, he said that if he would listen to him he would be glorified for having suffered no harm from such a fall” (temptation by vainglory) (Lk. 4:1–13; *Peri logismon* 1).

The Evagrian list was not fully original. We can find similar lists and terms in Origen and in other Church Fathers. What was original and valuable in this scheme of eight generic thoughts is that Evagrius combined this list with the tripartite structure of the soul, which he borrowed from Platonic anthropology through his teacher Gregory of Naziansus. Following Plato, he teaches that the soul consists of *nous* (νοῦς), desire (ἐπιθυμία) and indignation/aversion (θυμός). Like Gregory the Theologian, he also speaks of the threefold division of the soul into rational (λογιστικόν), concupiscible (ἐπιθυμητικόν) and irascible (θυμικόν) parts (*Prakt.* 89). This tripartite division of the soul became a basis for his instructions to the monks about ascetic practice but since he used the two similar schemes, his concept of the soul could acquire both a broad and a narrow sense: sometimes he speaks of the soul consisting of three elements: *nous*, *thumos*

and *epithumia*; sometimes he reduces the meaning of the soul to a narrow sense including only its irrational faculties subject to passions (*thumos* and *epithumia*), while the *nous* is considered as something separate (*In Prov.* 23:22)¹⁰.

The *nous* is the rational part of the soul, while *epithumia* and *thumos* constitute its irrational and passionate part, which can be used according to nature or against it. The proper use of the *epithumia* is to desire virtue, while the *thumos* is meant to resist evil. Since these two faculties of the soul are irrational, they need to be guided by the *nous*, otherwise they easily deviate from their natural activity to the movement against nature. Being moved by memories, bodily senses and appetites, thoughts and demonic instigations, they tend to act against nature. When they do act according to nature, Evagrius names them the “powers” (δυνάμεις) of the soul, emphasizing their positive function; when they act against nature, they become “passions” (πάθη)¹¹.

The tripartite structure of the soul probably shaped the selection of the *logismoi* and their order in the Evagrian scheme. Thus, the first three thoughts (gluttony, lust and avarice) are connected with the concupiscible part of the soul as driven by desire and appetites (*epithumia*), anger and sadness are connected with reaction (*thumos*), and thoughts of vainglory and pride are connected with the rational part of the soul (*nous*)¹². The place of *accidie* in the scheme is somewhat ambiguous: due to its complex character, it cannot be confined to a single part of the soul. On the one hand, it is connected with both concupiscible and irascible parts of the soul, as it can be of “animal” origin, having its roots in desire and reaction and being the prolonged movement of both (*In Ps.* 118:28); on the other hand, it is linked with the rational part of the soul, since it can also be of “human” origin, like vainglory and pride, arising from the intellect, affecting it and suffocating it (*Skemmata* 40)¹³.

The eight thoughts make up a chain, in which every next thought is born from the previous one: gluttony opens the way to lust, avarice to anger, anger to sadness, prolonged combination of anger and sadness results in *accidie* and so on. Therefore, a monk who strives for spiritual progress should certainly conquer all these thoughts, and the struggle usually follows the same order: an ascetic begins to purify the concupiscible part of his soul struggling with gluttony, lust and avarice, then he needs to overcome the thoughts of the irascible part (anger and sadness) and *accidie* that affects both passionate parts of the soul, and finally, he passes to the struggle against more subtle intellectual thoughts of vainglory and

pride. In practice, this order is certainly not so strict and can vary, but the scheme clearly demonstrates the trajectory of ascetical practice toward the final goal of contemplation which cannot be achieved unless one purifies oneself from all these thoughts.

Since thoughts and passions are so closely connected, it is necessary to clarify the relationship between them. Evagrius points out: “One should pay attention to whether it is the thoughts that set the passions in motion, or the passions that set the thoughts in motion. Some people have held the first opinion, others the second” (*Prakt.* 37). He sides with neither of the two opinions but explains that both scenarios are possible, depending on the origin of the tempting thoughts— from within or from without.

The first scenario takes place when the tempting thoughts come from within, produced by bodily senses (αἰσθησις), memory (μνήμη) and temper (κρᾶσις) (*Prakt.* 38). The material human nature presupposes that through the act of perception by bodily senses the intellect receives the images and representations which, being preserved in memory, form the material for thoughts and memories that trouble irrational parts of the soul and the intellect. As Evagrius explains, sensation gives birth to desire and “desire is a source of every pleasure” (*Prakt.* 4). If the monk neglects to control the passionate part of his soul, the desire confines the intellect in sensual reality and activates the passions that produce passionate thoughts, imaginations and memories, affecting the soul. So, it can be said that perception is a source for the origin of passions (Pitrea 2019, 265).

The second scenario takes place when others (namely demons and people) implant tempting thoughts (λογισμοί) by affecting the body (*Prakt.* 35–36). In this case, the thoughts set the passions in motion in such a way. The demon introduces the tempting thought, representation or memory into the *nous* and as soon as the *nous* accepts it, the thought sets in motion the passionate parts of the soul – *epithumia* and *thumos*— then the passions reach the intellect, join the thought, making it passionate, and push the *nous* to concentrate on the sensitive things instead of the rational ones (Harrison 2021, 133–150).

Both scenarios are at work only when the *epithumia* and *thumos* are not healed. However, when love and abstinence are present, the passions are not set in motion; for love is the bridle for the passions of the irascible part of the soul as abstinence is for the concupiscible part (*Prakt.* 38). Both scenarios presuppose the responsibility for the monk but the difference is when the responsibility starts. In the first scenario, the monk is responsible for the presence of the passionate thoughts, while in

the second scenario, the monk is not responsible for the presence of the evil thoughts but becomes responsible for the state of his *epithumia* and *thumos* which are activated under the influence of the demonic thoughts (Harrison 2021, 150).

These two scenarios also shed light on why Evagrius uses such terms as thoughts, passions and demons interchangeably. When he describes the first scenario, he usually equates the thoughts with the passions, using them as synonyms; when he speaks of the second scenario, he interchanges the terminology of thoughts and demons¹⁴, for here the λογισμός is simply a semantic abbreviation for a phrase “a thought coming from a demon” (Guillaumont & Guillaumont 1971, 57). Though Evagrius blurs the difference between δαίμων and λογισμός and speaks of them “as though they were synonyms”, it does not mean that demons for him are merely a metaphorical reality or “a symbol for psychological dynamics” (Harmless 2004, 327). As Harmless points out, “‘Thoughts’ were simply the most common mechanism by which desert solitaries encountered demons” (*Ibid.*). Therefore, Evagrian teaching on the eight thoughts is closely connected with his demonology. Like Origen, Evagrius combines the psychological and demonological concepts of sin and internalizes the struggle against demons, locating it within the mind of a monk. Such combination of the psychological concept of thoughts with demonology allows him to emphasize the external origin of the thought, on the one hand, and to preserve the personal responsibility for welcoming these thoughts, on the other¹⁵. Evagrius often speaks of demonic tactics, means and crafty schemes in seducing people to sin and explains that the demons “war with seculars more through objects, but with monks they do so especially through thoughts” and “to the extent that it is easier to sin in thought than in action, so is the warfare in thought more difficult than that which is conducted through objects” (*Prakt.* 48). According to him, the demons are specialized in concrete vices and attack people successively with one after the other and the weaker is followed by the stronger. Their activity can also be mutually exclusive like, for example, fornication and vainglory.

There are two ways in which the demons attack the ascetics through thoughts: one is when the passionate part of the soul is not yet healed, and the other is when the person has been healed of the passions and has tasted contemplation. In the former case, the demons look for weaknesses in a person and plant related evil thoughts, which set the corresponding passions in motion. Usually, they stir up the passions through the bodily

senses (*Or.* 64) or memory (*Prakt.* 34). The latter comes into play when the passionate part of the soul is healed and a person has developed virtues and put the passions under control. In this case, because it is no longer possible to bring such a person down by the senses or memory, the demons try to distract him from prayer and contemplation through thoughts that bring false knowledge. Evagrius explains this figuratively in his interpretation of Psalm 143:7:

“Draw me up and deliver me from many waters, from the hand of foreigners”. The *foreign hand* is the tempting-thought (*logismos*) arising in the impassioned part of the soul and constraining the *nous*; but this *hand* touches the ascetical practitioners, while the hand that touches contemplatives is false knowledge of the objects themselves or of their contemplations, which suggests that their creator is unjust and devoid of wisdom. (*In Ps.* 143:7–8).¹⁶

According to the different ways in which demons affect a person through their thoughts, Evagrius proposes different remedies against them. In order to eliminate evil thoughts originating from the human senses and memory, one must get rid of passions and achieve *apatheia* through ascetic exercises (fasting, vigils, anachoresis, etc.) and training in virtue, while “[more] subtle [tempting-]thoughts [are laid aside] through endurance in prayer and spiritual contemplation” (*Peri logismon* 40). Since the assault of evil thoughts is so fierce, an ascetic cannot win it by his own power and needs to pray with endurance and call God who alone can silence the mind (*Cap. Tria* 3)¹⁷ and brings victory over the thoughts, either calming them, as He calmed a great storm on the sea (*Peri logismon* 24), or completely destroying them, as Psalm 67 allegorically says: “God indeed crushes the heads of his enemies” (*In Ps.* 67:22)¹⁸.

Evagrius distinguishes between imperfect *apatheia* and perfect *apatheia*. Christoph Joest has defined the difference between the two by stating that “imperfect *apatheia* belongs to a man who still experiences temptations, but once he has overcome all demons, then is perfect passionlessness attained” (*Peri logismon* 40)¹⁹. The experience of *apatheia* is not the goal but only the necessary precondition for the state of pure prayer (*Or.* 71). And even pure prayer is not the end of all efforts. The true end is the mind’s ability to contemplate the mystery of the Holy Trinity, which is only made possible through *apatheia* and pure prayer. When this state is achieved, all internal and external distractions fail to disrupt the monk from his focus.

Evagrius offers a powerful image of a saint who had reached this state: “when the demons attacked him and for two weeks used him as a ball, tossing him into the air and catching him on his mat”, nonetheless “they were not able even for a little while to bring his mind down out of his fiery prayer” (*Or.* 111). This saint was able to remain in prayer during this ordeal because his mind was no longer troubled by the impure thoughts and passions (*Or.* 71). However, the state of pure contemplation, and thus of perfect *apatheia*, cannot last infinitely, for it is not in the power of man to prevent thoughts from troubling our minds, and yet the monk always has the opportunity to maintain a state of imperfect *apatheia*.

Evagrius’ scheme of eight generic thoughts came to exert a significant influence on many later monastic figures. It was further developed and popularized by his disciple John Cassian who brought the scheme to Gaul and made it known in the West.

2.3. John Cassian’s elaboration

John Cassian is traditionally considered to be the disciple of Evagrius, or at least dependent on his thought and writings. The scholarly consensus concerning this dependence was firmly established in the 20th century²⁰ and still continues to prevail²¹, though there are also voices, arguing that both Evagrius and Cassian independently relied on the same oral tradition of the Desert Fathers, according to their own witness in the writings²². Whatever were the sources of both authors, Cassian’s teaching on eight principal vices basically reproduced and developed the Evagrian scheme of eight generic thoughts with some slight but important changes, which mostly concern the shift in terminology. While Evagrius preferred to speak of tempting or passionate thoughts (*logismoi*), sometimes interchanging them with passions and demons or spirits, Cassian consistently uses the term “*vitium*” (vice or fault) instead of the Latin equivalent “*cogitatio*” (thought) for the Greek *logismos*. By such change, he effected a subtle shift of emphasis from thinking to behaviour (Stewart 2003, 212).

Like Evagrius, Cassian also uses alternative terms for indicating tempting thoughts such as “passion” (*passio*) and “spirit” (*spiritus*), preferring the latter to the word “*daemon*”, which is used in his stories rather than in his theoretical presentation of vices (*Ibid.*, 214). When he considers eight principal vices in his *Institutions*, naming them as the spirit of gluttony, the spirit of fornication, etc. (in the titles of the chapters), these are for him no more than figurative names for certain vices and refer not to the

demons of gluttony, fornication, etc., but to the passions that afflict the soul. While Evagrius classified demons into various categories according to their specialities, such as the spirit of gluttony, fornication, vainglory, etc. (Harmless 2004, 328), Cassian's approach is more nuanced. On the one hand, he acknowledges that "not all devils can implant all the passions in men but certain spirits brood over each sin", and "each one implants in the hearts of men that sin, in which he himself revels, and they cannot implant their special vices all at one time, but in turn, according as the opportunity of time or place, or a man who is open to their suggestions, excites them" (*Conl.* 7:17). On the other hand, Cassian never treats vices and demons as interchangeable synonyms but speaks of them separately and clearly shows the difference. Sometimes he even contrasts them, saying that "those men are more wretched who are possessed by sins than those who are possessed by devils" (*Conl.* 7:25) and "it is more wonderful to have cast out one's faults from one's self than devils from another" (*Conl.* 15:8).

In Conference 24, he explains that there is one source and origin of all vices, "but different names are assigned to the passions and corruptions in accordance with the character of that part, or member, which has been injuriously affected in the soul" (*Conl.* 24:15). Since its structure is tripartite – rational (*logikon*), irascible (*thumikon*) and concupiscible (*epithymitikon*) – the name of the vice is given to it in accordance with the part affected: "For if the plague of sin has infected its rational parts, it will produce the sins of vainglory, conceit, envy, pride, presumption, strife, heresy. If it has wounded the irascible feelings, it will give birth to rage, impatience, sulkiness, accidie, pusillanimity and cruelty. If it has affected that part which is subject to desire, it will be the parent of gluttony, fornication, covetousness, avarice, and noxious and earthly desires" (*Ibid.*).

Cassian knows that the source of evil attacks is the devil and his demons, whom he names respectively as "the pestilent blast of sin" (*Conl.* 24:17) and "spiritual wickednesses" (*Conl.* 4:13), tempting the soul with crafty malice, using evil thoughts as the main tool for their temptations. He describes the mechanism of their action upon the soul: evil spirits tempt the soul by laying insidious snares for those particular affections of the soul which they have seen to be weaker and feebler and unable to make a stubborn resistance to the powerful attacks of the foe and therefore susceptible to being taken captive by evil spirits (*Conl.* 24:17). Cassian points out that the enemies (demons) are constantly harming us, but they oppose us only by inciting to evil things, not by forcing. That is, their

evil cannot deceive us without our consent, since we have the power of rejection and the liberty of acquiescing. Therefore, if someone goes wrong, it is because he does not immediately meet evil thoughts with refusal and contradiction but allows the devil to overcome him (*Conl.* 7:8).

Another important shift in terminology concerns the Evagrian concept of *apatheia*, which Cassian replaced with the Latin phrase “purity of heart” (*puritas cordis*, or *puritas mentis*, or *puritas animae*). Some argue that he made this change intentionally to evade the doctrinal controversy (Sheridan 1997, 306). Others believe that the term “purity of the heart” (*puritas cordis*) was at that time a generally accepted equivalent of the Greek term “*apatheia*” and its use in the Latin terminology was already established (Raash 1966; Kim 2002, 88–89). Still others suggest that Cassian creatively reworked the teaching of Evagrius and adapted it to the ascetic context of the Latin West (Stewart 1998, 41 and 2003, 217–218). Without excluding any of the possible reasons, we can suggest that, writing in the aftermath of the Origenistic and Pelagian controversies, Cassian needed to adapt Evagrian teaching to the context, which did not welcome the concept of *apatheia* due to its misinterpretation by Jerome as insensibility or impassibility (Misiarczyk, 2021b). So, he replaced it with a more neutral Biblical term.

However, the “purity of heart” as Cassian’s equivalent for Evagrian *apatheia* was not the only term to express the final goal of monastic life. In his *Conferences*, this goal shifts from purity of heart (*Conl.* 1:4) to unceasing prayer (*Conl.* 9:2; 10:7), to perfect chastity (*Conl.* 12), to constant rumination upon Scripture (*Conl.* 14:13), to distinct goals for anchorites and cenobites (*Conl.* 19:8), and finally to remembrance of God (*Conl.* 24:6). As Columba Stewart pointed out, “a traditional explanation for this variety would have been the attribution of the conferences of various elder monks” but, in fact, it reflects “Cassian’s own pedagogical method at work as he offers several perspectives on monastic perfection” and his view of monastic life developed in the process of writing (Stewart 2003, 211).

One more change introduced by Cassian concerns the interpretation of the Gospel story about the three temptations of Christ (Mt. 4:1–10), which Evagrius associated with the front-line thoughts that open the way to all the others. As seen above, according to Evagrius, these were gluttony, love of money and vainglory. Cassian also refers to this account, when he speaks of three main vices among the eight, but he modifies the list of

main temptations into gluttony, vainglory and pride, and gives a somewhat different interpretation of this story.

On the one hand, he explains in detail why Evagrius singled out these three thoughts, but on the other hand, he modifies this list. For having vanquished gluttony, Jesus could not be tempted by fornication, “which springs from superfluity and gluttony as its root”, and he “had no experience of the fiery darts of carnal lust, which in our case arise even against our will, from the constitution of our natures”. Therefore, the devil did not venture to tempt the Lord to fornication, but passed on immediately to the temptation of covetousness, which he knew to be the root of all evils (1 Tim. 6:10), and when again vanquished in this, he did not dare attack Him with any of those sins which follow and spring from this as a root and source; and so he passed on to the last passion, pride, which affects even those who are perfect (*Conl.* 5:6). Here we see an essential change. Where Evagrius speaks of vainglory, Cassian speaks of pride.

Yet, even in this modified form, Evagrius’ list did not suit Cassian. Whereas Evagrius was based on Matthew’s Gospel, Cassian refers to Luke’s version, where the order of temptation is somewhat different: after the temptation with hunger, the devil tempts Jesus with all the kingdoms, and only then says: ‘If you really are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here’ (Lk. 4:9). This sequence fits better with Cassian’s idea of the three principal temptations, in which he replaces love of money with vainglory and vainglory with pride. According to Cassian, the Lord was tempted with gluttony when the devil said to Him: “Command these stones that they be made bread”, with vainglory through the words of the devil: “If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down”, and with pride, when the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world (*Conl.* 5:6).

Cassian also gives an explanation for the number of “eight”, using Origen’s allegorical interpretation about seven hostile nations (Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, etc.) whom Israel had to defeat in order to possess the Promised Land of Canaan (Deut. 7:1–2). To these seven he added the Egyptians (representing gluttony) for a total of eight²³. The reason why that nation is not commanded to be utterly destroyed, like the seven others, but only to have its land forsaken, is this: man cannot get rid of bodily needs, as it is said: “Do not abhor the Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land” (Deut. 23:8); rather he can only separate himself from them in order to avoid lust²⁴. The affections of the other seven faults, however, must be completely rooted out in every possible way as being harmful to the soul (*Conl.* 5:18-19).

Along with the allegorical interpretation of the seven nations and the Egyptians as the figures of the eight vices, Cassian appeals to other Scripture verses where God enumerates ten nations whose land He promised Abraham to give to his seed (Gen. 15:19-21; Ex. 3:17). Explaining the significance of these ten nations as figures of the ten vices, Cassian adds two more faults to the eight: "idolatry, and blasphemy, to whose dominion [...] irreligious hosts of the Gentiles and blasphemous ones of the Jews were subject, while they dwelt in a spiritual Egypt" (*Conl.* 5:22). But when one has renounced these and conquered gluttony (the spiritual Egypt), then one will have to wage war only against those seven which Moses enumerates.

Introducing relatively slight changes, Cassian further developed and systematized Evagrius's teaching about the eight thoughts. Although in the writings of Evagrius the order of thoughts is not fixed²⁵ and their number sometimes varies²⁶, Cassian enumerates the eight vices in a strict order (*gula, luxuria, avaritia, ira, tristitia, acedia, vana gloria, superbia*), reversing the place of anger and sadness, and classified the vices according to different criteria. His basic distinction is made between *natural vices* (gluttony and fornication) and *unnatural vices* (avarice, anger, sadness/dejection, accidie, vainglory and pride) (*Conl.* 5:2)²⁷. He also divided the vices into four couplets and classified them according to the way of their operation: gluttony and fornication operate in and through the body, while vainglory and pride do not require any bodily action; avarice and anger are excited outside us, while sadness and accidie are motivated by internal feelings (*Conl.* 5:3).

Depending on the nature and interrelations between the vices, Cassian divides them into six "former" (gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, accidie) and two "latter" (vainglory and pride). The former are sequentially connected with a special affinity and form together a chain, so that the excess of the previous gives rise to the next. For from the superfluity of gluttony springs fornication, from fornication avarice, from avarice anger, from anger sadness, and from sadness accidie. Cassian teaches that it is necessary to contend with these vices in the same order, i.e. starting with gluttony and proceeding to accidie. As to the latter two vices (vainglory and pride), they are not connected with the former six, as they do not spring up from them, but, on the contrary, flourish after the former six have been eradicated (*Conl.* 5:10). Finally, Cassian divides the vices into carnal and spiritual.

In the *Institutes*, Cassian offered a more advanced and better classification of the vices according to their kinds. The division of thoughts into types had been started already by Evagrius and now brought to completion. Describing the nature of the eight principal vices, their origins, causes and manifestations, Cassian marks out the subdivisions of each. Of gluttony there are three kinds: the madness of the belly, which is the delight “in stuffing the stomach, and gorging all kinds of food”, the madness of the palate, which is the pleasure in more refined and delicious meals, and eating outside meal-times (*Inst.* 4:23). The nature of fornication is twofold: that of the body and that of the soul (*Inst.* 6:1, 22). The disease of avarice is threefold: the first persuades the monks to covet and procure what they never previously possessed in the world (the example of Gehazi, 2 Kings 5:21–27); another forces them to resume and once more desire with excessive eagerness the possession of those things which they renounced (the example of Judas, Mt 27:5); a third does not allow the monks to strip themselves of all their worldly goods, and entices them to keep money and property which they ought to have renounced and forsaken (the example of Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1–10; *Inst.* 7:14). While Evagrius usually distinguishes between anger and indignation, Cassian speaks of three kinds of anger, naming them in Greek words: the one (θυμός) blazes up interiorly (Ps. 4:4); the other (ὀργή) breaks out in word, deed and action (*Conl.* 3:8); the third (μῆνις) lingers, simmering for days and long periods (Eph. 4:26; *Inst.* 8:9; *Conl.* 5:11)²⁸. Sadness is twofold: one form is found to result from previous anger, the other springs from the desire of some gain which has not been realized (*Inst.* 9:4). Accidie is twofold: one sends the monk to sleep; another makes him forsake a cell and flee away (*Inst.* 10:2-5). Vainglory can take various forms and shapes but there are two main kinds of it: one is being puffed up about carnal and visible things; another is desiring vain praise for spiritual and invisible things (*Inst.* 11:1–2; *Conl.* 5:12). Similarly, pride can be carnal and spiritual: the former assaults even beginners and carnal persons, the latter particularly troubles the best of men and spiritually minded ones (*Inst.* 12:2. *Conl.* 5:12).

Cassian’s writings contributed to the popularization of the Evagrian scheme of the eight thoughts so that it became firmly established in the West. Later, Pope Gregory the Great (c.540–604) transformed it into a list of seven deadly sins: vainglory (*inanis gloria*), envy (*invidia*), anger (*ira*), dejection (*tristitia*), avarice (*avaritia*), gluttony (*ventris ingluvies*), lust (*luxuria*)²⁹. Inspired by the Vulgata text that *initium omnis peccati est superbia* (Sir 10:15), Gregory left pride off the list as a source of all sins

and reversed the order, putting vainglory at the beginning and gluttony and lust at the end of the list. He also added envy (*invidia*) and combined accidie with sadness (*tristitia*). Later, when *tristitia* was again replaced by *acedia*, and vainglory was merged with pride, the list took on the following form: pride (*superbia*), anger (*ira*), envy (*invidia*), sloth (*akedia*), avarice (*avaritia*), gluttony (*gula*), and lust (*luxuria*)³⁰.

3. The Palestinian School

While John Cassian brought Egyptian monastic tradition and adapted it to the Western context, there were also later, different Egyptian influences. The dramatic events in the Egyptian monastic sites in late fourth and early fifth century, such as the Origenistic crisis and the devastations of Scetis by the Mazices, resulted in the escape of many monks, and this led to the flourishing of another monastic centre in the fifth and sixth centuries. Some of these fugitives settled in the region of Gaza, trying to adapt their Egyptian tradition to a new context. The monastic centre of Gaza, reinforced by the Egyptian infusion, gave a new impulse to a further development of monastic theological thought, including that of sin. The school of Gaza covers three subsequent generations of monks with such prominent figures as Isaiah of Scetis/Gaza (+491)³¹, Barsanuphius the Great (+543) and John the Prophet³², and their disciple, abba Dorotheus of Gaza (505–565) who not only exercised spiritual leadership in their monastic community but also had considerable influence on a broader ecclesiastical and social context of the area. They left a massive trove of instructions concerning various aspects of spiritual life, including sin as the main problem of monastic preoccupation.

3.1. Isaiah the Solitary

Abba Isaiah provided a certain link between Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism. About 451 he left Scetis for Palestine and moved to the region of Gaza where he lived as a solitary offering his spiritual guidance for local ascetics. In his *Ascetic Discourses*, he discussed various aspects of the monastic life, including some theoretical and practical issues concerning sin and the passions. His concept of sin is closely connected with his anthropology and soteriology (Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky 2006, 131). He teaches that the passions were part of created human nature. Adam

in Paradise possessed several natural senses such as desire, ambition, anger, hatred and pride which were innate to humanity from creation but, after the fall of Adam, “all of his senses were twisted toward that which is contrary to nature” and “changed within him into shameful passions” so that instead of leading him to love for God they became a source of all sins and vices (*Log.* 2).

All monastic life and ascetic practices aim at returning to the natural state of the intellect and restoration of the counter-natural passions into natural senses. This can be achieved only with the help of the Lord. The task of the ascetic is “taking control of all our bodily members until they are established in the state that is according to nature” (*Log.* 2) and the former human integrity is renewed. To progress on this way toward the renewal of the natural human state is possible through an ongoing process of self-reforming, examination of consciousness, discernment of thoughts and memories, repentance, prayers and mourning. Isaiah believes that the best way to practice all this is detachment from the world and solitary life, which provide suitable conditions for constant vigilance, and avoiding not only small faults but also the very occasions or preconditions of sin. This process is so painful that abba Isaiah compares it to crucifixion, following that of Jesus Christ. His ascetic discourses contain various practical instructions and advice to help monks to proceed along this way of struggle against sins, passions and demonic machinations. While Isaiah’s theoretical concept of sin betrays his Monophysite position, his practical theology is free from these traits and was adopted by subsequent generations of Gazan monasticism which gradually shifted from a solitary to a coenobitic type.

3.2. Barsanuphius the Great and John the Prophet

The two prominent leaders of the next generation were Barsanuphius the Great and John the Prophet. The two elders settled as recluses near the coenobitic monastery of abba Serid in the neighbourhood of Gaza, Tabatha, and functioned as the spiritual guides of its community. Barsanuphius, Egyptian by origin, was called the Great elder and the main leader, while John the Prophet was at first his disciple and then became “the other elder” of the monastery. Both, though living separately as recluses, preserved a deep spiritual connection with each other and communicated with the world through letters. Their extensive correspondence includes about 850 letters, addressed to hermits, coenobites, laymen, priests and bishops³³.

Later they were collected and edited by an anonymous monk and became the pearl of monastic literature in the Christian East. This correspondence strongly contrasts the apophthegms of the Egyptian desert fathers since it provides a detailed record of the process of spiritual guidance and monastic formation on a daily basis. Though the correspondence deals with a quite broad spectrum of daily monastic and secular problems, the main attention of the elders is always focused on the interior asceticism, and the problem of sin and the passions is one of the key issues of their letters.

In their instructions to the monks, the elders never discussed the theoretical foundations of their teaching on sin. Barsanuphius only mentioned Satan as sharing responsibility for the fall of humanity with humans (*Ep.* 69). His views on the former state of humanity are ambiguous. On the one hand, he states that humanity was created dispassionate and the passions are result of the fall (*Ep.* 246); on the other hand, he teaches that “there is anger that is natural (θυμός φυσικός), and there is anger that is against nature (παρὰ φύσιν) (*Ep.* 245). Schenkewitz considers that here Barsanuphius contradicts himself and his statement is reminiscent of Isaiah’s teaching on positive and negative passions. However, it may be that Barsanuphius understands “θυμός” not in terms of passion but as the irascible faculty of the soul alongside the rational and appetitive ones.

In their instructions, the two elders preferred to focus on practical issues of daily ascetic routine, including the struggle against sins and the passions. In their letters Barsanuphius and John shared their thoughts and experience concerning various aspects of sinful behaviour, sexual temptations as well as potentially dangerous situations that could lead to sins including contacts with family and women, illness, food, prayers, etc. The correspondence reveals what the ascetics of Gaza considered to be sin or misconduct in their conscience. Practical advice of the elders also sheds light of some of their theoretical ideas of sin. Barsanuphius, for example, was well aware of how the process of falling into sin developed from the moment of temptation to a sinful action. He describes it in detail to a brother, suffering from the passion of fornication and wondering how he is to understand whether the temptation derives from his own desire or from the enemy. The old man instructed him that “when people are tempted by their own desires, this means that they have neglected themselves and allowed their hearts to meditate on deeds committed in the past” (*Ep.* 256). If one indulges the desire, then the process goes as follows:

So the intellect gradually becomes blinded and begins unconsciously to heed or to speak to people with desire. And the intellect proposes excuses to itself about how to speak or sit with a particular person, and tries to fulfil this desire in every way possible. Now, if one allows the thought free rein in these matters, the warfare is increased to the point of falling into sin, if not in body, then at least in spirit through consent; as a result, one finds oneself adding wood to the fire that burns within. (*Ep.* 256)

Later John Climacus would summarize this knowledge by giving a clear name and definition to each of the stages in this process.

Being in full solidarity with Barsanuphius, John the Prophet often served as the interpreter of some rather obscure words of the Great elder. When one brother asked him what cutting off the root of the passions means, John explained that “this occurs by cutting off one’s own will and by afflicting oneself as much as possible and by tormenting the senses in order to keep them disciplined, so that they may not be wrongly exercised” (*Ep.* 462). Another brother, troubled by his weakness and inability to follow the advice of the saints, asked him whether ignorance with regard to the passions could be better than the failure to fulfil the words of the saints, and John gave him this answer: “Such a thought is really terrible. So do not tolerate it at all. For if one learns something and then sins, one will surely incur condemnation. If one has not learned anything and still sins, then one will never incur condemnation; in this way, one’s passions will continue to be unhealed” (*Ep.* 372). John’s explanation turns the brother to his monastic vocation which is not to remain in ignorance in order to avoid condemnation but to seek healing from the passions. The inability to overcome passions by human efforts would lead to humility which enables God to heal the monk from all his passions. So the passions are afflictions (*Ep.* 304), a certain pedagogical means, by which God educates us in humility and, finally, he heals us from them (*Ep.* 109, 130). Therefore, both elders emphasize the role of invoking God’s name as a remedy against sins and the passions, “for the name of God dispels all of the passions, when it is invoked, even without us knowing how this actually occurs” (*Ep.* 424).

3.3. Dorotheus of Gaza

Abba Dorotheus of Gaza represents the third generation of the Gazan monasticism³⁴. Trained by the two elders, Barsanuphius and John, he

later became himself a prominent spiritual leader who summarised and systematised the teaching of his predecessors, adapting it to the needs of his coenobitic community. As Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky rightly pointed out, Dorotheus “integrated his ascetic teachings on sin into a patristic theology of salvation history” (Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky 2006, 142). He not only discusses particular questions pertaining to sin but also situated each problem within a broader framework of God’s economy of salvation. In his Instruction 1, he explains its origin and how it can be overcome.

In contrast to Isaiah and Barsanuphius, Dorotheus teaches that the passions were alien to the humanity’s created nature and entered it only after the fall. The natural state of humanity in Paradise was completely dispassionate and characterized by virtues, but after the transgression, Adam “fell from a state in accord with his nature (κατὰ φύσιν) to a state contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν), i.e. a prey to sin, to ambition, to a love of the pleasures of this life and the other passions; and he was mastered by them, and became a slave to them through his transgression. Then, little by little evil increased and death reigned” (Rom. 5:14; *Doct.* 1:1). After the fall, humanity became infected with the illness of the passions which could be cured by God alone. Dorotheus sees the reason for the first sin of humanity in pride (self-elevation and pretensions to superiority) and speaks of its three offshoots: self-justification, self-confidence and attachment to self-will. People justified themselves and did not want to correct. They turned away from God and followed their own judgement. So, God gave them over to their own will to walk the destructive path of evil so that they could wake up and repent, but people buried their conscience, that intrinsic natural law, and did not repent. In his mercy, God gave them the law of Moses and sent his holy prophets, but nothing could heal fallen humanity from its illness of the passions (*Doct.* 1:2-3). Finally, God sent His only begotten Son (τὸν μονογενῆ) who restored fallen human nature to its sinless state and through holy baptism delivered us from all sins. Taking into account that the tendency of humanity to sin still remained, God also gave us the holy commandments to discern the passions and become free from them through the cultivation of ascetic virtues (*Doct.* 1:5). By his commandments God intended to awaken our dormant conscience and bring it to life, rekindle this buried spark (conscience), and to teach us how to achieve dispassion through the observance of His commandments (*Doct.* 3:40)³⁵. From that time on, it is our deliberate choice whether to listen to our conscience, letting it shine and enlighten us, or to put it to sleep again.

Dorotheus clearly distinguishes between sins and the passions as the root and cause of sin: "Sin (ἁμαρτία) is one thing but instinctive reactions or passion (πάθη) is another. These are our reactions: pride, anger, sexual indulgence, hate, greed, and so on. The corresponding sins are the gratification of these passions: thus, a man acts and brings into corporeal reality those works which were suggested to him by innate desires (passions)" (*Doct.* 1:5). In short, the passions are simply dispositions (διάθεσεις), sins are their actualization (ἐνέργειαι) in bodily actions. Everyone is subject to passions, but it is possible not to set them in action. Since the passions are alien to the human nature, to return to the former dispassionate state one needs not only to control the passions but fully uproot them. Yet, Dorotheus acknowledges that not all can achieve this level. For those incapable of achieving dispassion, he offers a more realistic ascetic goal of controlling the passions and not allowing them to be actualised in actual sins. Those who follow their passions generate evil and commit sins. Evil has no essence in itself but comes into existence due to the lack of virtue. Just as wood produces worms, cloth produces moths, and iron produces rust, and the latter (worms, moths, rust) spoil and destroy the former (wood, cloth, and iron); in the same way the soul, deviating from its inherent health, which is virtue, generates evil in itself and becomes sick and passionate (*Doct.* 10:106).

Therefore, gaining freedom from the passions should be the primary preoccupation of a monk. It can be achieved only with the help of God through fulfilling His commandments. This process is slow and requires much struggle and endeavour. However, not all people deal with the passions in a proper way. Dorotheus defines three categories of people based on how they deal with the passions. The first category includes those who do what the passions prompt them to do. Dorotheus likens them to a man, who, being attacked by the arrows of the enemy, catches an arrow and plunges it into his own heart. There are also others who resist the passions, not allowing them to become rooted (στερεωθῆναι), but they do not cut them off. Using their reason, they seem to bypass them, but still preserving them in themselves. Those are like a man who is shot at by an enemy, but, being protected with a breastplate, he receives no serious wounds. There are still others who uproot their passions. These are like a man who, being shot at by an enemy, strikes the arrow and turns it back into his enemy's heart, as the psalmist says: "Their own sword shall enter their own hearts, and their bow shall be broken to pieces" (Ps 36:15). As Dorotheus points out, these three states of the soul with regard to the

passions themselves have a wide spectrum of conducts and approaches. (*Doct.* 10:108).

Those who allow the passions to operate run the risk that they will develop into the passionate attachment (προσπάθεια) that leads to the evil habit (ἔξις). Passionate attachment is an intermediate state that develops as a result of our indulgence in passionate desires, when we succumb to evil inclinations and repeatedly fall into the same sins. This state signals a dangerous tendency to habituate the passions. Passionate attachment can be overcome by cutting off our self-will (κόπτειν τὰ θελήματα ἡμῶν) and by discipline, and one who progresses along this way can reach detachment (ἀπροσπάθεια) which opens the way to dispassion (ἀπάθεια, *Doct.* 1:20). However, if one does not resist passionate desires but indulges and fosters them, then the passionate attachment, finally, brings him into the state when the passions become bad habits, making him sin habitually. Dorotheus warns the ascetics against neglecting small things, which can lead to the development of bad habits:

Let us not tread it under foot even in the least things, for you can see that from the smallest things, which of their nature are worth little, we come to despise the great things ... Let us live circumspectly, let us give heed to trivial matters when they are trivial, lest they become grave. Doing what is right and what is wrong: both begin from small things and advance to what is great, either good or evil. (*Doct.* 3:42)

For if, as they say, we do not despise little things and think they are of no consequence to us, we shall not fall into great and grievous wrongs. I am always telling you that bad habits are formed in the soul by these very small things – when we say, ‘What does this or that matter,’ – and it is the first step to despising great things. (*Doct.* 6:69)

Dorotheus describes the danger of indulging and cultivating the passion in the metaphor of a small offshoot growing into a large tree with a strong trunk. When the passions grow to any degree of maturity and develop into bad habits, they become almost impossible to cure, so that “we shall no longer be able to remove them from ourselves no matter how we labour unless we have the help of the saints interceding for us with God” (*Doct.* 11:115). Therefore, everyone should discern his state and apply a proper remedy to his illness in order to walk the way back from the passion to dispassion: first, getting rid of evil habits, then, putting the passions under control, and, finally, uprooting them.

Dorotheus sees the way to sin and to virtue as our cooperation with demons or angels respectively: "For a man who harms his own soul, is working with, and helping, the devil, and a man who seeks to profit his soul, is co-operating with the angels" (*Doct.* 6:75). By his death Christ defeated the devil, so that the devil lost his power over the people. He can regain this power only to the extent that people surrender to their passions and own will (*Doct.* 1:5 and 5:62)³⁶. To incline our will toward sin, demons use diverse machinations, sowing evil thoughts in our souls. As soon as we accept an evil thought, it, like combustible material, inflames sinful passions and prompts us to sin (*Doct.* 8:90 and 12:137). Therefore, it is necessary to fight against the passion and the best way to do so is to cut off thoughts and suggestions before they activate the passions (*Doct.* 10:108). Dorotheus explains this through the allegorical interpretation of the "Psalm of the exiles", praising those who pay back to the "daughter of Babylon" (that is, enmity or hostile malice of demons) what she has dealt them (namely, by leading them into sin): they take her infants (that is evil thoughts [λογισμοί]), and dash them against the rock, which is Christ (Ps 136:8–9, *Doct.* 11:116)³⁷. Therefore, all efforts should be directed to resisting evil thoughts. Such strategy helps to avoid sins and control the passions but it is not sufficient to eradicate them, since they grow like weeds, and "if one does not pull out the roots properly but cuts off the tops only, they spring up again" (*Doct.* 12:130).

To get rid of the passions and prevent their returning and growing, we need to cultivate the opposing virtues, which are signs of the healthy soul (*Doct.* 12:134). This goal requires not only great efforts and struggle but also the divine action and God's medicine. Dorotheus teaches that Christ is the best physician who knows to give a proper prescription for every passion as well as provides more general medicine that can restore us to our former health. On the medicine, Dorotheus explains that, since pride has overthrown us, "it is impossible to earn mercy except by the contrary, that is to say, by humility" (*Doct.* 1:6). It is through humility, obedience to God's commandments and cutting off self-will that one can gradually reach freedom from desire and perfect dispassion (Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, 2006, 144)³⁸.

The three generations of the monastic school of Gaza show some progress in the development of the idea of sin. On the one hand, they continue to preserve the former tradition of the desert fathers, and on the other hand, they adapted it to the local context and the coenobitic type of monasticism. As Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky pointed out, "they came

a long way in their existential science and definitions of sin, but they are still a world away from the academic preoccupations of scholasticism" (Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, 2006, 144). However, their goal was not to articulate a definition of sin but to avoid it by all means. They saw that the best way to this aim lies in cherishing an acute sense of sin in their conscience that easily detect situations and conditions that would advance the operation of the passions and lead to the falling into sin. Their tactics were twofold: first, they cut off all external occasions and causes for sin and then concentrated their efforts on fighting the source of sin, which they saw in the passions and activities of demons. It was against these two causes that their ascetic strivings were directed. To eliminate these causes by human efforts was obviously not an easy, or even a possible, task. The attempts of the ascetics of Gaza to put those areas under control contributed to further deepening their knowledge of the psychological processes of falling into sins, developing sinful habits and strengthening the passions as well as the opposite processes of liberating from them. This knowledge was eventually summarised and systematised by the Sinai school of monasticism, particularly by John Climacus.

4. The Sinaitic School: John Climacus

The penetration of thought into the heart was most fully and profoundly described by the fathers of the Sinaitic monastic tradition, in particular John Climacus (7th century). In his work, the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, he presents his doctrine, based on the sources of early monasticism – the Desert Fathers, Evagrius, John Cassian, Macarius, Mark the Monk, the school of Gaza (Barsanuphius and Dorotheus), while he also borrows thoughts from his contemporaries (such as Pope Gregory the Great)³⁹. In his teaching, John Climacus without doubt depends much on Evagrius's teaching on the eight generic thoughts with the distinction between three principal thoughts and five derivative ones. Yet, he prefers Gregory the Great's shortened list of seven capital vices⁴⁰. Being aware of both lists, he does not strictly follow either of them but borrows from both what suits his own ladder of vices and the virtues opposed to them. To reduce the number of sins to seven, he omits sadness from the Evagrius list. Following Gregory the Great, he brings together vainglory and pride as the beginning and the end of the same vice: "The only difference between them is such as there is between a child and a man, between wheat and bread..." (22:1), yet

he still distinguishes them. Nor does he follow the order of the Evagrian or Gregorian list. Instead, he intertwines the vices from the former lists with some additional vices which he believes are serious impediments in spiritual life. Among them he counts remembrance of wrongs (malice), slander or calumny, talkativeness, lying, insensibility, excessive sleep, unmanly and puerile cowardice. To each of these additional vices John dedicates a separate chapter in his *Ladder*. Moreover, he discusses some other sins and vices in passing, as for example, blasphemy⁴¹. His approach also differs from that of Evagrius as John refused to speak of any mystical experience and mainly focused on remedies against vices and the way of undoing them and transforming them into virtues. For this, it was necessary to understand clearly how passions appear, develop and get rooted in the soul. The detailed description of this process was John Climacus's main contribution to the monastic doctrine of sin. He makes out six stages in this process: 1 – suggestion (or attraction, or assault, προσβολή), 2 – coupling (or converse, or intercourse, συνδυασμός); 3 – consent (συνκατάθεσις), 4 – captivity (αἰχμαλωσία), 5 – struggle (πάλη), 6 – passion (πάθος) (15:74)⁴². This scheme was not John's invention but rather a synthesis of what was already known and tested by long experience. The elements of this scheme can be traced in the teachings of Evagrius, Mark the Monk, Barsanuphius and Dorotheus. Climacus's contribution is that he reproduced the process with its stages in the most detailed and explicit way. Let us have a closer look at the stages of this scheme.

The first stage, a suggestion (assault, attraction, προσβολή) is “a simple conception, or an image of something encountered for the first time which has lodged in the heart” (15:74). It does not arise in the mind (νοῦς), but in the lower part of the soul (διάνοια), which lacks intuition and is therefore exposed to contradictory arguments. The suggestion pops up in the soul and arouses interest and curiosity, like a thrown ball that can hit the wall and bounce, or be caught in the hands. It is the first trick of the evil one to attract the attention of a person. In itself, the suggestion – neither good nor evil – is independent of the individual. One has no power to stop the first appearance of such “thoughts”, as it is impossible to catch the wind, but one can decide whether to accept or reject them. The suggestion is in fact a touchstone to test our will, whether it leans towards virtue or sin, manifested in the way a person reacts to this trick. If a thought lingers in the mind, it evolves a series of ideas, associations and recollections mixed with pleasure and gradually begins to displace all other thoughts in the mind.

If one does not divert one's attention from this chain of memories and associations by the effort of will but welcomes the thought into the mind, then a coupling (συνδυασμός) follows. The term συνδυασμός indicates a close connection between attention and thought, a strong predominance of thought in the mind, so that there remains no room for other thoughts. It is as if the mind starts a conversation with a thought, and therein lies the danger. For once the mind is coupled with the thought, it is no longer able to resist it and is increasingly inclined towards the passionate thought.

From that moment on, the process is difficult to control, because the balance of mental forces is disturbed and humans will become too weak to resist the thought. To stop the process of falling into sin, one needs additional energy – God's grace. If it is not received, then the mind acquiesces to the thought, and the third stage follows, which John Climacus names consent (συνκατάθεσις), "the bending of the soul to what has been presented to it, accompanied by delight" (15:74). This stage is crucial with regard to the responsibility for the consent to a tempting thought. Depending on one's spiritual condition, it can be sinful (for advanced ones) or not (for beginners). For those who are inexperienced in the spiritual struggle and not aware of this process of development such lapses are forgivable. Those who were conscious of the hostile suggestion, but did not resist, finding pleasure in it, have already committed sin in their intentions. For such combatants the responsibility for sin starts already in the previous state of intercourse, since they welcomed the thought and found pleasure in it. As soon as the mind gives its consent, the thought gradually transforms from being its companion into its master and tyrant, driving a person to commit a sinful act.

The mind, being unable to resist the evil thought that has already darkened and mastered it, falls into captivity (αἰχμαλωσία), which Climacus defined as "a forcible and involuntary rape of the heart or a permanent association (συνουσία) with what has been encountered which destroys the good order of our condition" (15:74)⁴³. At this stage, it is very difficult to overcome the temptation which finally leads one to sin. Even so, such an outcome is not necessary and can still be avoided, if one continues to resist. Moral responsibility at this stage of captivity is judged differently "according to whether it occurs at the time of prayer, or at other times; it is judged one way in matters of little importance, and in another way in the case of evil thoughts" (15:74). The guilt is determined by the next stage.

The unrestrained desire to satisfy what has been suggested is confronted with the awareness of the sin involved, which gives rise to a certain

hesitation in the soul in choosing between the desire of pleasure and moral obligations, an experience which in ascetical literature is called struggle (πάλη). John Climacus defined struggle as “power equal to the attacking force, which is either victorious or else suffers defeat according to the soul’s desire” (15:74). It is an important stage through which every ascetic has to pass, for “he who has never been struck by the enemy will certainly not be crowned” (26:157). If he falls, it is the occasion for punishment, but if he endures and withstands so that he does not commit sin, he will be rewarded by God, for “as our conflicts increase, so do our crowns” (26:157). John Climacus gives a prominent example of such a reward: “Just as a king orders a soldier who has received serious wounds in battle in his presence not to be dismissed from his service but rather to be promoted, so the Heavenly King crowns the monk who endures many perils from demons” (26:246). Therefore, “struggle is the occasion of crowns or punishments” (15:74). The peculiarity of this stage is that, unlike other stages, which follow in strict sequence, the place of the struggle can vary, depending on the state of the soul, or it can have no place at all. This is subject to the discernment of the experienced ones: “Sometimes the combat has earned a crown; sometimes refusal has made men reprobate. It is not feasible to lay down precepts in such matters, for we have not all got the same character or dispositions” (27:71). If one fails to resist the ensnaring thought and succumbs, the captivity of the mind finally results in a sinful action (ἁμαρτία). Repetitive lapses into the same sin eventually lead to developing a sinful habit (πονηρὰ ἔξις) and inclination (πρόληψις), that, finally, grows into the sixth and final stage, passion (πάθος), an illness of the soul due to the abuse of its natural faculties.

According to John Climacus, passion is “that which lurks disquietingly in the soul for a long time, and through its intimacy with the soul brings it finally to what amounts to a habit, a self-incurred downright desertion” (15:74). John Chrysavgis, trying to determine whether Climacus’ idea of the passions is Aristotelian (passions are ethically neutral) or Stoic (passions are intrinsically evil), concludes that Climacus has no consistent view, defining passions as ‘blind’ (in the sense of being disoriented and misdirected) drives, which need to be re-educated and redirected towards God (2004, 191–192). However, it is more proper to analyse John’s teaching on the passions within the framework of his ascetic background than those of the philosophical schools. The author of the *Ladder* clearly acknowledges that the passions are evil and are “unequivocally condemned in every case, and demand either corresponding repentance

or future correction" (15:73). They were "not originally planted in nature, for God is not the Creator of passions" (26:67), and "those who say that certain passions are natural to the soul have been deceived, not knowing that we have turned the constituent qualities of nature into passions" (26:156). Following Dorotheus of Gaza who taught that the passions are parasitic on our natural inclinations (properties) like rust on iron, Climacus similarly teaches that passion twines around natural virtue "just as bindweed twines round cypress" (26:161). Thus he, too, points to the parasitic nature of the passions, and his book is, in fact, a manual with instructions on how to get rid of them.

Like Dorotheus, Climacus also teaches that the passions have various degrees of rootedness in the soul and speaks of sinful habits that develop along with the passions and help them to take hold and firmly establish themselves in the soul. The process goes as follows: "Practice produces habit, and perseverance grows into a feeling of the heart; and what is done with an ingrained feeling of the heart is not easily eradicated" (7:63). The soul that has thoroughly acquired the habits of vice, becomes its own betrayer and enemy (19:2). The evil demons have no further need to tempt it as it is now used to sinning by itself (26:65). One who has contracted sinful habits comes under their tyranny and, lacking strength to bind the foe (26:171), is unwillingly carried away by him like "steel attracted to the magnet even without meaning to be" (26:ii, 26). Therefore, habits of vice are crucial in both ways: towards passions and from passions to dispassion. They pose a serious impediment to salvation and are not easily curable, if at all (5:30; 7:63; 19:2; 26:ii, 49, 55). One who has developed sinful habits needs much struggle and assistance to overcome them (26:ii, 15). When passions become habitual, they cause severe punishment. Sometimes they can even be unforgivable, as was the case with one ascetic whose disciple learned a bad habit from him and "although he who taught came to his senses and began to repent and gave up doing wrong, his repentance was ineffectual on account of the influence of his pupil" (26:127). In this teaching, Climacus strictly follows Dorotheus.

In general, his six-fold scheme of the development of passion gathered and summarised all previous ascetic experience and knowledge, which can be traced in Evagrius, John Cassian, Macarius, Mark the Monk, Diadochus, Barsanuphius the Great and John the Prophet, and Dorotheus of Gaza (Ware, 1965, 297–299; Kordochkin, 2003, 79–82). A similar scheme is proposed by his contemporary Maximus the Confessor (thought – coupling with passion – assent – sin)⁴⁴. From his time onward,

this scheme became traditional in the East⁴⁵. We can find it with some variations in the writings of the later ascetic writers such as Theodore of Edessa (thought – coupling – assent – submission – sin)⁴⁶, Philotheus of Sinai (provocation – coupling – assent – captivity – passion)⁴⁷, Hesychius of Sinai (provocation – coupling – assent – sin)⁴⁸ and Peter of Damascus (provocation – coupling – assent – struggle – passion)⁴⁹.

The scheme reflects the interest of John Climacus in genesis and outcomes of the passions. Some steps of his Ladder finish with a dialogue in which a passion reveals its origins and its ways of strengthening, its interaction with other passions as well as the weapons which can overcome it. For example, he personifies the vice of insensibility, which says the following: “I have no single parentage; my conception is mixed and indefinite. Satiety nourishes me, time makes me grow, and bad habit entrenches me. He who keeps this habit will never be rid of me. Be constant in vigil, meditating on the eternal judgment; then perhaps I shall to some extent relax my hold on you” (18:6). Here, too, Climacus distinguishes six stages in the development of passion (conception – birth – strengthening – growth – affirmation – obsession), which perfectly correspond to the stages with the above presented scheme:

suggestion – conception

coupling– birth

consent – strengthening

captivity – growth

struggle – affirmation

passion – obsession. (Lepakhin 1998, 17)

No less is John Climacus interested in the process of liberation from passions, tracing its stages by means of personifications. For example, the passion of anger confesses: “If you know the deep and obvious weakness which is in both you and me, you have bound my hands. If you starve your appetite, you have bound my feet from going further. If you take the yoke of obedience, you have thrown off my yoke. If you obtain humility, you have cut off my head” (15:86)⁵⁰. So one has to go the same way back from passion to suggestion, starting with the simple practice of controlling the passion in struggle (binding its hands), then gradually moving to actions opposite to the passion (binding its feet); then coming under obedience to someone more experienced (throwing off its yoke), and finally, obtaining a virtue that eliminates the passion (cutting off its head). We can visualise this process as follows:

possession by passion
 struggle – binding its hands
 captivity – bind its feet
 consent – throwing off its yoke
 coupling– cutting off its head.

This scheme does not deal with a suggestion which is sinless and impossible to avoid. That will remain as a test for human will and an occasion to earn crowns.

Climacus employed anthropomorphic symbols of personifications not only for the genesis of the passions but also to their interrelations. He presents passions in various types of relations such as marriage (26:151), friendship (26:50), mutual support (11:2; 16:2–3; 23:6; 26:50), mentoring and apprenticeship (22:45; 23:2). However, the predominant type of relationship is kinship, often combined with incest (Lepakhin 1998, 17–19). Passion has its father and mother, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters as well as many other offspring (9:29; 13:15; 14:36). Kinship relations between passions, however, should not be understood absolutely, for they are extremely complicated: the situation when a mother-passion gives birth to a daughter and then becomes the daughter of her own daughter is not uncommon (18:2). Furthermore, any passion may not always be born of the same passion, but at different times and in different people from different passions (8:28). Sometimes passions can have several fathers and mothers and be products of fornication. As Climacus points out, “the irrational passions have no order or reason, but they have every sort of disorder and every kind of chaos” (26:40).

Besides generic relations, the passions are also connected in their functions. They can affect a person both individually and jointly, fighting, waging war, seeking to completely subdue a person. In this aspect, the relations between them are no less complicated and have many variations. Passions can follow one after another (9:1; 25:5; 26:41–48, 64), sometimes they act in agreement, aiding each other (26:173), sometimes they compete among themselves (26:85) and even quarrel (4:33; 22:27; 26:151), they can withdraw temporarily to deceive the ascetic (8:9; 26:61) and return (3:7; 26:158) or leave a person irrevocably to deprive him crowns (4:27), sometime they remain forever due to one’s evil habits (26:65) or according to God’s dispensation (26:71); they rejoice in increasing vices and even virtues in order to open the way to vainglory and pride (7:68, 14:9; 22:3, 5, 35). Describing these various tactics and traps of the passions, Climacus further develops Evagrius’ and Cassian’s teaching of different tricks of

demons or passions. As in the case of these predecessors his teaching on passions is closely connected with demonology.

Climacus's scheme of the development of passion also helps to distinguish between sin and passion. While Evagrius spoke of eight evil thoughts in a monitory way as a prophylactic against sins, Cassian referred to eight vices and Gregory the Great to seven cardinal (or deadly) sins, they were all implying almost the same set of human misconducts. Such inconsistent use of terminology caused much confusion in understanding sins and passions, since these terms often overlapped and were interchanged as rough equivalents. John Climacus introduced precision into the terminology of sin and clearly distinguished between passions and sins. He said: "Sin is one thing, idleness another, indifference another, passion another and a fall another" (26:94). For Climacus, sin signifies any transgression of God's commandments in actions, words or thoughts. Passions are not sins or any kind of fall but a consequence of our consent to fall and to commit sinful actions. They are the wounds we inflict on ourselves when we sin. While this wound is still fresh and warm it is easy to heal, but if we persist in vices and repeatedly fall into the same sins, then the old wound, being neglected and festering, becomes hard to cure and requires for its care much treatment, cutting, plastering and cauterization. Moreover, as Climacus pointed out, many such wounds from long neglect become incurable, and yet "with God all things are possible" (Mt. 19:26) (5:30).

As soon as the passions get established in the soul, they provide favourable ground for new sins and the development of sinful habits. It is much more difficult to get rid of passions than of sins. Climacus clearly attests this: "Many have soon obtained forgiveness of sins, but no one has obtained dispassion quickly; this needs considerable time, and love, and longing, and God" (26:ii, 58). Nevertheless, passion does not necessarily close the way to salvation.

Perhaps the best explanation of how sin and the passions are interrelated is given in the image of the celestial palace, in which John Climacus figuratively describes the difference between the forgiveness of sins and the state of dispassion with its different degrees:

Imagine dispassion as the celestial palace of the Heavenly King; and the many mansions as the abodes within this city, and the wall of this celestial Jerusalem as the forgiveness of sins. Let us run, brethren, let us run to enter the bridal hall of this palace. If we are prevented by anything, by some

burden or old habit, or by time itself what a disaster! Let us at least occupy one of those mansions around the palace. But if we sink down and grow weak, let us make sure of being at least within the walls. For he who does not enter there before his end, or rather, does not scale the wall, will lie out in the desert of fiends and passions. (29:14)

This image clearly shows that the forgiveness of sins suffices for obtaining salvation, while dispassion is a part of a few true ascetics⁵¹. It also demonstrates that just as the obsession by passion has different degrees so also the state of dispassion does, for there can be one who is more dispassionate than others (29:6). Even a passionate soul can be saved and earn crowns, if one resists temptations and avoids sins, as it is seen from the example of Joseph who “is honoured for avoiding the occasion of sin, and not for showing dispassion” (26:166).

Besides sins and passions John Climacus also distinguishes idleness from negligence. The former is the state when a person is idle and does not do those works of God which he is obliged to do. The latter is when he does them, but carelessly, without love and diligence. It causes insensitivity, demonic attacks and sins (5:29; 18:1; 26:6). 37. As by nature we cannot live without food, so up to the very moment of our death we cannot, even for a second, give way to negligence. These two are not sins in a strict sense of the word but they create a suitable precondition that leads towards falling into sins. Therefore, one should not even for a second give way to them (26:ii, 37).

Moreover, among sins Climacus singles out a particular category of sins which he calls “falls”. They concern different kinds of sexual immorality. He wonders: “Why in the case of every other sin do we usually say that people have slipped, and simply that; but when we hear that someone has committed fornication, we say sorrowfully: So and so has fallen?” (15:44). To answer this question, he refers to the words of a wise man in a dialogue with him:

A certain learned man put a serious question to me, saying: ‘What is the gravest sin, apart from murder and denial of God?’ And when I said: ‘To fall into heresy,’ he asked: ‘Then why does the Catholic Church receive heretics who have sincerely anathematized their heresy, and consider them worthy to partake in the Mysteries; while on the other hand when a man who has committed fornication is received, even though he confesses and forsakes his sin, the Apostolic Constitutions order him to be excluded

from the immaculate Mysteries for a number of years?’ I was struck with bewilderment, and what perplexed me then has remained unsolved. (15:48)

Although this explanation does not fully answer the question, it sheds light and provides hints as to where the answer can be found. Later commentators developed and explained this idea in their scholia to the *Ladder*, underlying different aspects of the sexual falls⁵². Without getting into these details we can see that John’s approach to sexual sins, which are counted among the heaviest transgressions, is determined by his ascetic background and environment. Since virginity constituted the very essence of a monastic vocation and ascetic life, so whoever has defiled virginity and has truly fallen, was considered as having broken his monastic vows of chastity.

One more important aspect of Climacus’ teaching on sin is his differentiation in the gravity of sins. While he believed that a fall is heavier than a sin, he also distinguished between degrees of responsibility for the same sins. He instructs that “one and the same sin often incurs a condemnation a hundred times greater for one person than for another, according to character, place, progress, and a good deal else” (15:59). What is considered sinless for one can be a serious sin for another. For example, speaking of the problem of the distraction during prayers, Climacus admits that it is the property only of an angel to remain undistracted, but this constant ascetic problem is judged differently for the beginners and the advanced monks: while it is forgivable for the former (4:92), it is never justifiable and, in the latter, deserves accusation: “Therefore we should unceasingly condemn and reproach ourselves so as to cast off involuntary sins through voluntary humiliations. Otherwise, if we do not, at our departure we shall certainly be subjected to heavy punishment” (25:55)⁵³. This also makes apparent that, like John Cassian, Climacus denies the possibility of sinlessness, since there remain many secret and unconscious sins, of which one still needs to be purified through repentance.

5. Conclusion

Having passed through four centuries of monastic hamartiology, how can we assess the contribution of these early ascetics to the Christian theology of sin? Our investigation has demonstrated the high interest of monks in

this topic and their sincere desire, from the beginning of the monastic movement, to comprehend and cope with the problem of sin. As early as in the fourth century, monks formed an understanding of the causes and origin of sin, along with its nature and consequences, and they had more than one or two explanations for each of these important issues. Monastic views regarding the methods and means of overcoming sin were equally diverse. The different approaches were influenced by various external and internal factors, such as geographical conditions, cultural context and mentality, political, economic, and religious challenges, as well as personal background, temper, and limitations. In the monastic centre of Lower Egypt, where Evagrius and Cassian received their monastic formation from the desert fathers, the influence of Origen's theology and the Alexandrian school coloured the way the monks understood sin and sinlessness. The ascetics of this monastic centre elaborated the basic terminology of sin and built a framework for the further development of monastic hamartiology. Evagrius, for example, created a tool that became fundamental for subsequent monastic communities, indeed for Christian communities in general. His scheme of eight generic thoughts was also, through Cassian, accepted in the West; later, in slightly adapted form, this scheme formed the basis of Pope Gregory the Great's teaching on the seven cardinal sins, which is still foundational to Catholic doctrine. Likewise, in the East, the Evagrian scheme became firmly established, and remains a cornerstone of ascetic teaching in the Orthodox Church. Generations of ascetics have relied on it as a useful tool in ascetic practice.

Fighting against sin on a daily basis, falling and rising, at times defeated and at times victorious in their spiritual combat with evil, the early monks developed an acute sensitivity to sin and its various aspects, but they were still far from being able to give a clear definition of sin that would win widespread acceptance. Every ascetic environment forms its own idea of sin based on the actual context, methods of formation, prominent leaders, and the personal experience of the monks. The following generations of monks in the late fifth through the seventh centuries did not make much progress toward a unified concept of sin. The monastic centres of Gaza and Mount Sinai, following their Egyptian predecessors, focused more on the practical task of implementing prophylactics against sin and eliminating its consequences than on theoretical thought about sin. Indeed, to avoid potential sins it was necessary, on the one hand, to control one's thoughts by cutting off tempting thoughts that could lead to sin. On the other hand, after renouncing the world a monk needed to get rid of the consequences

of his former sins; those sins could result in evil inclinations and passions, which, once firmly rooted in the soul, would render the monk susceptible to sin. Eliminating passions and learning the discernment of thoughts were two crucial tasks for every ascetic who wanted to achieve *apatheia* and make progress on the way to perfection. For Evagrius, the state of *apatheia* was a necessary precondition, without which no spiritual growth in virtue or knowledge of God would be possible.

Therefore, early monks kept a careful watch over their minds, practicing discernment between the good and evil thoughts in order to protect themselves from potential falls. The problem of the passions was even more challenging, as it was not at all easy and sometimes even impossible to get rid of them. Through the experience of many falls and rises, monks discovered the ways in which the passions typically originated and worked, and the same monks invented diverse methods of dealing with them. Many of Evagrius' ascetic treatises resemble manuals for monks concerning the passions, with detailed treatment of their kinds, manifestation, and typical ways of operation, as well as the remedies by which a monk could more effectively overcome the passions and the temptations that activated them.

The intensive work of self-improvement sharpened the spiritual senses of the early monks so that they became extremely sensitive to the spiritual world of both angels and demons. Accordingly, they realized that the cause of sin lies not only in the fallen state of humanity but also in the hostility of evil spirits, which exploit human weaknesses and passions to entice people to evil. The Evil One (as Satan, or the devil, is sometimes called) and his subservient demons became enemy number one, and it was against them that the monks directed their spiritual weapons. The experience that the monks acquired from this hand-to-hand combat with demons led to the development of a monastic demonology, and many of our ideas about the world of evil spirits are shaped by the knowledge that the early ascetics transmitted. They taught, for example, that every Christian will sooner or later enter into a war with demonic forces, and that it is impossible to win the war by human strength alone. We must wage this war with varying success and inevitable defeat until by experience become tested warriors.

The knowledge and experience of early Egyptian monasticism underwent further development among the monks of Palestine and Mount Sinai. The Gazan school of monasticism, responsible for preserving and transmitting the Egyptian heritage, transferred the wisdom of the desert fathers to a new, quasi-urban context. The Gazan school was able to

advance some aspects of hamartiology; in particular, it articulated a deeper understanding of the origin and root of the passions. This development was summarized by John Climacus from Sinai, who described the main stages of the passions and added to the Evagrian scheme one more important pedagogical tool that helped monks to discern and resist tempting thoughts. To put this new tool into practice, monks had to carefully examine their souls, watch their mental processes, and unmask tempting thoughts, evil inclinations, and passions; it was in this way that the monks gradually learned to overcome sin. Climacus not only described the main stages by which thoughts (*logismoi*) developed into sinful actions and passions, he also evaluated each stage of this process with respect to the personal responsibility of the monks, which depended on their spiritual state. Considering his approach, we can only admire the differentiated way in which Climacus judged the gravity of sins and the unexpected explanations he gave for his judgment. Such an approach, however, was neither innovative nor extraordinary. The approach continued the long-established monastic tradition of a compassionate attitude to sinners and the willingness to judge each sin not simply by its matter and form, but also by the spiritual state of the sinner and other mitigating circumstances, such as the time, place, and conditions of a concrete sin.

Although many twenty-first century Christians might find John Climacus's *Ladder*, as well as the other ascetic writings analysed above, difficult to read, and in some respects perhaps even unbearable or insane, we feel compelled to acknowledge that, in their striving for freedom from sin, the early monks acquired a subtle knowledge of sin in its various aspects and transmitted that knowledge to us in their writings. Because it reveals the hardship and challenges of the seemingly endless fight against sin, monastic hamartiology may seem pessimistic and discouraging. The monks, however, encourage us to take up this challenge and to embark on the long path to perfection. They set before us a lofty ideal and, by showing us that we are still at the beginning of the journey, do not allow us to relax or indulge in self-satisfaction. Their writings help us recognize the depths of human sinfulness, which we might not have previously fathomed. Reading such literature broadens our understanding of sin's manifold nature and exhorts us to a radical opposition to evil, so that, in the words of the Apostle, we are determined to resist sin even to the point of shedding our blood (Heb. 12:4).

Abbreviations

<i>AP</i>	<i>Apophthegmata Patrum</i>
<i>Antirrh.</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>Antirrheticus</i>
<i>Cap. tria</i>	Evagrius, <i>Capita tria de oratione</i>
<i>Conl.</i>	John Cassian, <i>Conlationes</i>
<i>Doct.</i>	Dorotheus of Gaza, <i>Doctrinae</i> (= <i>Instructions and Discourses</i>)
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistula(e)</i>
<i>Eul.</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>Tractatus ad Elogium</i>
<i>In Ps.</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>Scholia in Psalmos</i>
<i>In Prov.</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>Scholia in Proverbia</i>
<i>Inst.</i>	John Cassian, <i>Institutiones</i>
<i>Gnost.</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>Gnostikos</i>
<i>Log.</i>	Abba Isaiah of Gaza, <i>Logoi</i>
<i>Or.</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>De Oratione</i>
<i>Prakt.</i>	Evagrius Ponticus, <i>Praktikos</i>
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
PG	J.-P. Migne, <i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PL	J.-P. Migne, <i>Patrologia Latina</i>
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>

Endnotes

- ¹ The term *hamartia* was first introduced by Aristotle in his *Poetics* to describe the error of judgment which leads to the tragic hero's downfall or misfortune. Later it was widely used in dramatic literature. It can refer to an inherent flaw or defects of a character as the reason of a potential downfall, an error of judgment or discernment due to ignorance, a moral failure due to the weakness of a character, a wrongdoing or a mistake with devastating consequences. See Van Braam, 1912.
- ² On the origin of the scheme and its possible sources and inspirations, see: Wrzoł, 1923, Hausherr, 1933; Stewart, 2005, Misiarczyk, 2018; Vazquez & Gargiulo, 2021.
- ³ See: Guillaumont & Guillaumont, 1971, 662; also: *In Ps.* 123:4; compare: *Peri logismon* 1.
- ⁴ See for example, *Peri logismon* 23: "A solitary should never withdraw into solitude [burdened] with anger or gloominess, nor flee from the brethren while perplexed by these [tempting-]thoughts. For madness can arise from such passions as these...". Also see: Crislip, 2005, 143, note 2; Elm, 1991, 109; Watson, 2016, 237.
- ⁵ For a detailed consideration of different aspects in the Evagrian concept of *logismoi* and their synonyms such as νόημα, φαντασία, λογισμός, δαίμων ἢ πνεῦμα, see: Nieścior, 1996, 208; Tobon 2010, 96–101; Harrison, 2021, 120–133.
- ⁶ On sadness, see: Burton-Christie, 2009; Macheta, 2017; Zecher, 2023.
- ⁷ On anger, see: Bunge, 2009; *Cattoi*, 2019; Gibbons, 2011, Gillette, 2010; Louth, 2010; Nieścior, 2018; Rozumna, 2017; Stewart, 2000.
- ⁸ On accidie, see: Aijian, 2019; Bunge, 2012; Crislip, 2005; Gibson, 2018; Glangiobbe, 2016; Joes,t 2004; Louf, 1974; Macheta, 2017; Peretó Rivas, 2013.
- ⁹ On pride and vainglory in Evagrius, see: Paša, 2010. For a comprehensive study on all eight thoughts, see: Misiarczyk, 2021a.
- ¹⁰ Compare: *In Ps.* 107:3. I would suggest that when Evagrius uses this Platonic anthropological scheme, he can reduce the meaning of the soul to its irrational part, but when he uses Gregorian threefold division of the soul into rational, concupiscible and irascible parts, he usually treats the soul in a broad sense, embracing all three elements. More on the Evagrian anthropology, see: Gauillaumont, 1958, 37–39l; Gauillaumont & Gauillaumont, 1971, 105; Gravier, 2018; O'Laughlin, 1985 and 1988; Misiarczyk, 2016; Stewart, 2005 and 2012.
- ¹¹ *Prakt.* 4, 6, 7, 34, 38–39, 51, 54, 87; *Peri logismon* 3, 17, 18, 34, 36, 40.
- ¹² More detail consideration of the derivation of the *logismoi* from the parts of the soul and possible variations, see: Tobon, 2010, 122–128.

- 13 See also: *Chapitres des disciples d'Évagre* 177 (= Géhin, 2007, 244); Stewart, 2005.
- 14 See: Graiver, 2018a, 75 and 2018b, 50–51; Stewart, 2011, 268.
- 15 See: Tobon 2010, 103; O'Laughlin, 1987, 268; Crislip, 2005, 143, note 2; Elm, 1991, 109; Watson, 2016, 237.
- 16 For the numbering of the scholia see Rondeau 1960.
- 17 Compare: *Peri logismon* 67.
- 18 Compare: *Or.* 94.
- 19 See: Joest, 2004, 280–281; Clark, 1992, 83; Tobon, 2010, 199–200.
- 20 See: Marsili, 1936, 81–87; Balthasar, 1939; Chadwick, 1968, 82; Stewart, 1997.
- 21 See: Harmless, 2008, 142; Tilby 2009, 4; Casiday 2013, 131; Stewart 2016, 226.
- 22 See: Weber 1961; Nichols, 2020, 31–32; references to this dependence of the two writers, see: Evagrius, *Prakt.* Prol. 9; John Cassian, *Conl.* 5:1 and 5:18.
- 23 Moses mentions seven nations, because at the time Israel has already left Egypt. Compare with Evagrius who in the Prologue to the *Antirrheticus* refers to gluttony and “the seven other demons”, though this could be an allusion to Mt 12:43–45 (*Antirr.* 1:12–13).
- 24 Compare: Rom. 13:14; 1 Tim. 6:8.
- 25 Compare *Prakt.* 6, 10–11 and *De octo spiritibus malitiae* 4–5, where, the positions of sadness and anger are reversed.
- 26 In his treatise *On the Vices Opposed to the Virtues*, Evagrius inserts the thought of jealousy between vainglory and pride.
- 27 Abba Sarapion's scheme adapts the second and third Epicurean categories of desire: *natural but unnecessary desires* correspond to gluttony and fornication, whereas *unnatural and unnecessary desires* correspond to avarice, sadness, anger, accidie, vainglory and pride.
- 28 On anger in Cassian, see: Gillette, 2010, 51–57.
- 29 See Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job* 31:87–88.
- 30 For a detail analysis of this transformation, see Bloomfield, 1967, 60–75.
- 31 On abba Isaiah see: Vailhé, 1906; Regnault 1970; Chitty, 1971. His writings see: Draguet, 1968; English translation by Chrysavgis & Penkett, 2002.
- 32 See: Hevelone-Harper, 2005; Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, 2006. On the theological views of the two elders see: Hombegen, 2004, 173–181.
- 33 On the correspondance of Barsanuphius and John see: Hevelone-Harper, 2017, 418–432; Neyt, 1969. For the critical edition of the correspondance François Neyt, see: Barsanuphe et Jean de Gaza, 1997–2002; English translation by John Chrysavgis (2006–2007). Another edition by Derwas J. Chitty, based on *Coislianus* 124, *Vatopedi* 2, Nikodemos's edition, and

- Sinaiticus* 411, see: Barsanuphius and John, 1966. On this edition see: Chitty, 1966, 49.
- 34 On Dorotheus of Gaza, see: Hevelone-Harper, 2005, 61–78; *Spiridonova*, 2011a. On his theological views, see: Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, 2006, 215–222; Canivet, 1965, 336–346; *Spiridonova*, 2011b, 140–144; Hombergen, 2009; Grillmeier, 2002, 113–117.
- 35 See: Bitton-Ashkelony & Kofsky, 2006, 143. On obedience and the conscience in Dorotheus, see Tomas Spidlík, *Le concept de l'obéissance et de la conscience selon Dorothée de Gaza*, in *Studia Patristica* 11 (1972) 72–78.
- 36 See: *Bernatskyi & Shlenov*, 2007, 38–39.
- 37 Compare: 1 Cor. 10:4.
- 38 On healing from passions see also: Schenkewitz, 2016, 56–82. On ambiguity of Dorotheus's notion of humility and its connection with the fulfillment of commandments (humility either arises unconsciously in the course of fulfilling the commandments (2, 36), or it is a precondition for their fulfillment [*Doct.*1, 10]), see: Bulanenko, 2021, 82. A general study on Dorotheus' teaching on humility see: Faure, 2014.
- 39 For possible influences on John Climacus, see: Zecher, 2018; *Chrysavgis*, 2004, 183–193.
- 40 The source of Climacus' shorten list of seven cardinal sins is disputable. Some argue Climacus follows Gregory the Great (see: John Chrysavgis, 1988 and 1989, 32, note 117). Others point to the similarity with Gregory the Theologian's idea of seven evil spirits (*Oratio* 39:10, Kordochkin, 2003, p. 76, note 1).
- 41 On blasphemy in John Climacus's *Ladder of the Divine Ascent*, see: Pancerz, 2014.
- 42 Here and below John Climacus's *Ladder of Divine Ascent* is cited only by numbers.
- 43 Compare with Philotheus the Sinaite: "It is the stage when 'the object has taken the soul that desires it captive and leads it to do its work like a bound slave'" (*Nēptiká kephálaia*, 34, in *The Philokalia* (1986), vol. 3, 29).
- 44 Maximus the Confessor, *Capita de caritate* I, 84: "First the memory brings some passion-free thought into the intellect. By its lingering there, passion is aroused. When the passion is not eradicated, it persuades the intellect to assent to it. Once this assent is given, the actual sin is then committed".
- 45 In the West, a much simpler scheme was developed. On the basis of Augustine's interpretation of Ps. 143:6, the process was seen as consisting of three stages: suggestion (*suggestus*), delectation (*delectatio*), and decision (*consensus*). Although Augustine also spoke of struggle and sinful actions (*consuetudo*), the scheme was not elaborated further. – See: *Augustinus, Enarratio in Psalmum* 143:6; Špidlík, 1978, 237.

- 46 Theodoros the Great Ascetic, *A Century of Spiritual Texts* 19: "Every assent in thought to some forbidden desire, that is, every submission to self-indulgence, is a sin for a monk. For first the thought begins to darken the intellect through the passible aspect of the soul, and then the soul submits to the pleasure, not holding out in the fight. This is what is called assent, which – as has been said – is a sin. When assent persists, it stimulates the passion in question. Then little by little it leads to the actual committing of the sin" (see: *The Philokalia* (1984), vol. 2, 17–18).
- 47 Philotheos of Sinai, *Nēptikā kephálaia*, 34: "First there is provocation; then a coupling with the provocation; then assent to it; then captivity to it; then passion, grown habitual and continuous" (*The Philokalia* (1986), vol. 3, p. 29).
- 48 Hesychius of Sinai, *Capita de temperantia et virtute* 46: "The provocation comes first, then our coupling* with it, or the mingling of our thoughts with those of the wicked demons. Third comes our assent to the provocation, with both sets of intermingling thoughts contriving how to commit the sin in practice. Fourth comes the concrete action – that is, the sin itself". (English translation: *The Philokalia* (1982), vol. 1, 170). See also: Kirchmeyer, 1963, 319–329; Völker, 1968, 291–314; Waegeman, 1974.
- 49 Peter of Damascus, *A Treasure of Divine Knowledge*, Book I (see: *Φιλοκαλία των Ιερών Νηπτικών* (1986), vol. 3, 180–181; English translation: *The Philokalia*, vol. 3, 207).
- 50 On the struggle with the vice of anger, see: Nieścior, 2018.
- 51 See also 26:82: "It is impossible for all to become dispassionate, but it is not impossible for all to be saved and reconciled to God".
- 52 Scholium 24 to the *Ladder* (attributed to Elias the Presbyter and Ekdikos, Metropolitan of Crete) explains: "If anyone sinned, by what way he was led astray, by that way he returns. For example, if someone has rejected God with his mouth, he can confess Him again with his mouth; if someone has stolen his neighbour's property with his hands, he can give his property to the poor with his hands. It is the same with other sins. But he who sinned against chastity does not return by the way he fell, but by another way, that is, by weeping, fasting and wailing. Therefore, the sin of fornication is called a fall..." (PG 88:912, see also the Russian edition: Ioann Lestvichnik, 2013, 212, note 1). Scholium 26 provides a similar explanation: "Heresy is a deviation of the mind from the truth and a sin of the mouth or tongue, whereas fornication is a sin of the whole body, which damages and depraves all the feelings and powers of body and soul, darkens the image and likeness of God in man, and is therefore called a fall. Heresy comes from presumption, while fornication comes from bodily comfort. Therefore, heretics are corrected by humiliation, and sensualists by suffering" (PG 88:912–913). On the basis of previous sources, Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos (1250–1330) explains: "The heretic is impious only with his words, which

is why he is treated with words. The fornicator, however, because they sin with their soul and body, needs plenty of time and strenuous asceticism to be purified of the illness of the sin. The heretic considered heresy good, which is why he chose it. While the fornicator, although knowing the act is wicked, overlooked this because of their sensuality". (His scholia were published in: Νικηφόρος Κάλλιστος Ξανθόπουλος 2002. See also: Anthonopoulou 2007. I cite according to: *A Conundrum in "The Ladder of Divine Ascent"*, <https://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/2015/03/a-conundrum-in-ladder-of-divine-ascent.html>, March 28, 2015).

⁵³ See also: John Climacus, *Liber ad pastorem* 12:7, where John Climacus acknowledges that "the mental sin of the pastor is heavier in the judgement of God than the sin actually committed by the novice, as the crime of the soldier is lighter than the malice of the commander".

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TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNITY VS. SOCIALIST CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: CREATING THE INTERNATIONAL KODÁLY SOCIETY IN COLD WAR HUNGARY (1960S-1970S)*

Szabolcs László

Abstract

This article examines the clash between top-down state socialist agendas and bottom-up transnational community aspirations as viewed through the 1975 founding of the International Kodály Society (IKS) in Hungary. The IKS, born from an informal network connecting Hungarian Kodály-method advocates with global music educators, faced tension as Hungarian authorities sought to bring it under state control for international propaganda. The article traces the origins of the Kodály-method's global promotion, highlighting the role of Hungarian mediators, of US financial and institutional support, and the subsequent appropriation attempts by the Hungarian state that aimed to capitalize on the method's popularity for socialist cultural diplomacy. Through this example, the article sheds light on the broader features of conflict and interdependency between state and non-state actors during the Cold War. It explores the tension between competitive Cold War cultural diplomacy and the collaborative rationale of professional networks, revealing the limitations of state authorities in the face of established transnational dynamics. The study concludes by highlighting the resilience of the trans-Atlantic Kodály-community against state efforts to shape it into an international propaganda tool.

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"I frankly doubt that man is capable of mustering sufficient moral strength and selfless labor to attain 'universal harmony' in the utopian meaning of the term, [but] thanks to the ideals of Zoltán Kodály and their active support by men like yourself, [...] we are at least on the way to creating a healthy texture of international counterpoint" – wrote Alexander L. Ringer, professor of musicology at the University of Illinois, to Endre Rosta, president of the Institute of Cultural Relations (ICR) in March 1974.¹ The collaborative project that the American professor referred to was the creation of the International Kodály Society (IKS), envisioned as a global organization for music teachers interested in studying, promoting, and adapting the increasingly popular Kodály-method for music education.² The Society was the outgrowth of the informal and dynamic transnational professional network that connected the Hungarian "ambassadors" of the Kodály-method with their colleagues around the world – and especially across the Iron Curtain – since the mid-1960s.³ The ICR, acting on behalf of the Hungarian state socialist authorities, took charge of preparing and hosting the founding meeting of the Society, with the promise of accommodating this global community.⁴ However, as the international delegates assembled in Kecskemét – Kodály's birthplace – at the founding meeting of the IKS in August 1975, they soon realized that the Hungarian authorities were acting according to a forceful agenda, wanting to bring the future organization under state control. Disregarding the existing collegial dynamic of the trans-Atlantic community and its vision for a "texture of international counterpoint," the Hungarian state wanted to dominate the Society and use it as a tool for international propaganda.

Accordingly, the aim of this article is to analyze the clash between these two agendas: how the top-down intentions of the state socialist authorities conflicted with the bottom-up agenda of a transnational community of pedagogues. The informal network of music educators dedicated to using and promoting the Kodály-method was built up in the second half of the 1960s by a handful of Hungarian mediators and their international partners. During this initial period, the socialist Hungarian state was not involved in this promotional and educational work abroad – so the

trans-Atlantic mobility of experts and the transfer of skills and knowledge was realized overwhelmingly due to meso-level initiatives and with the help of federal and private funding secured by the American educators. Yet, as the Kodály-method grew into a global educational brand, the Hungarian state moved to capitalize on a fully formed and popular cultural product and appropriate it for the official socialist cultural diplomacy agenda.

By focusing on this example, the analysis will shed light on the general features of the conflict and interdependency between state and non-state actors, and between the geopolitical and the transnational realms during the Cold War period. Examining the preparation and the founding of the IKS will show the tension between the competitive logic of Cold War cultural diplomacy and the collaborative rationale of professional networks. Moreover, it will reveal the limitations on the reach of socialist authorities when faced with the established dynamics and practices of a transnational group of experts. As such, the article will start by presenting the semi-autonomous promotional activity of Hungarian mediators, move on to outlining the role that US support played in the buildup of the professional network, and close with a detailed discussion of how the socialist state aimed to incorporate the global Kodály-movement into its own cultural diplomacy framework.

1. The Bottom-up Promotion of the Kodály-method in Socialist Hungary

The composer and musicologist Zoltán Kodály started to focus on reforming music education during the 1920s, echoing an international trend of similar progressive efforts by such reform pedagogues as Émile Jaques-Dalcroze or Fritz Jöde. As per Kodály's oft-repeated slogan "*Music is for everyone! (A zene mindenkié!)*," he believed that everyone should have the right to obtain musical literacy and be trained on high quality music, because this would improve not just the lives of individuals, but also the national or political communities they belonged to. Despite his forceful vision for music education, Kodály never set out to propose and create a comprehensive method. It fell to his colleagues and students – most prominent among them Jenő Ádám, György Kerényi, Erzsébet Szőnyi, Katalin Forrai, and others – to build a coherent pedagogical edifice in terms of theory, techniques, and goals.

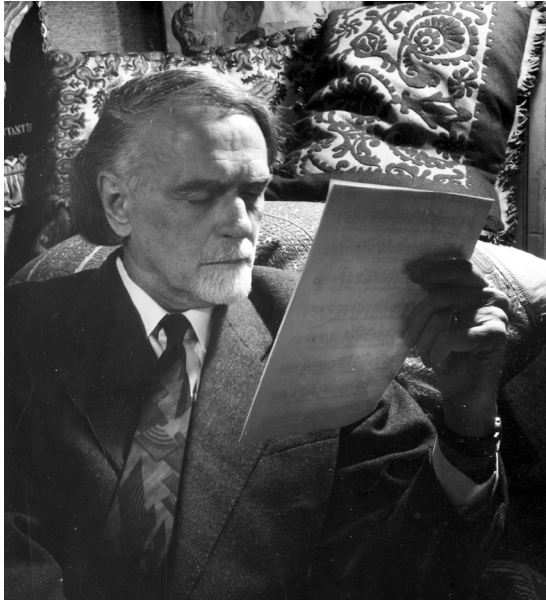


Photo 1. Hungarian composer and musicologist Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967). Source: Fortepan, 210928, by Kutas Anna, 1952.

The particular approach to music teaching that emerged from Kodály's writings and the work of his colleagues and students was aimed at offering to young children daily music classes following a sequential curriculum that prescribed the collective singing of Hungarian folk songs and the use of the tonic *sol-fa* (movable *do*) technique to teach the reading and writing of music.⁵ These music classes were meant to progress from playing folk games in kindergarten to acquiring musical literacy through singing pentatonic folk songs in elementary school and arriving eventually to the comprehensive understanding of other nations' folk music and the established canon of classical music.⁶ Accordingly, the eventual aim of building up the musical literacy of every child was to make them comprehend a dimension beyond the national, to gift them access to the shared and cosmopolitan world of European classical music that was – and, to a certain degree, still is – available only to urban elites.



Photo 2. School children learning music through the Kodály-method in 1962. Source: Fortepan, 135793, photograph donated to the Fortepan collection by the Sütő family.

Kodály's vision and the theoretical-methodological work of his followers came to be implemented in Hungary only in the late 1940s, in the newly configured and transitional postwar political environment. The revised education law of 1945-46 that created the institution of eight-grade "general schools" and made attendance compulsory stipulated that music should be taught at least twice a week through a focus on folk songs and the movable *do*. In 1948, together with Jenő Ádám, Kodály published a series of "Song Books" that provided the first comprehensive musical guide to his pedagogical principles throughout all eight grades of elementary school.

The communist takeover in 1947 had significant consequences for the implementation of Kodály's pedagogical vision. Within the new regime, the socio-political context in which his proposed approach could be applied was drastically expanded. Most importantly, forceful nationalization of all schools made it possible for Kodály's ideas to be introduced on a national scale. At the same time, ideological changes were imposed upon the "Song Books" written with Ádám. The new editions

excluded religious psalms, but retained the Hungarian folk materials and added a dozen marching songs and Russian folk songs. Nonetheless, until the early 1960s the national curriculum for music education, the content of music books, and the channels for teacher training were overwhelmingly determined by the work and personal influence of Kodály.

A change came with the 1961 educational reform, characterized by a push for vocational schools and the intention to prepare students for entering the workforce, downgrading the overall position of music education. Leaving only one class per week in the first grade of general school seemed to especially undermine the effectiveness of the Kodály vision that stressed the importance of children's early and intensive engagement with music.⁷ Furthermore, Kodály's music books were replaced in 1963 by new ones that overemphasized newly composed ideological songs to the detriment of folk songs and Kodály's own compositions.

However, the domestic marginalization of Kodály's pedagogy was counterbalanced by its increased internationalization.⁸ Relying on his world-wide prestige as a composer, Kodály and his close colleagues sought out and embraced international professional partners committed to reforming music education across the world.⁹ The aim – and eventual result – of such an outward engagement was to create a reputation for Kodály's ideas beyond the borders of Hungary and, by leveraging this prestige, to entrench the professional credentials of his approach at home.

The pathway towards internationalization led through increased Hungarian involvement in the activities of the International Society for Music Education (ISME).¹⁰ Like similar international organizations, the Society provided a professional forum for educators from the West, the Eastern bloc, and eventually, the Global South to meet and exchange ideas. The Hungarian approach to music education was introduced to the international professional community by two leading Kodály-experts: in 1958 by Jenő Ádám in Copenhagen and then again in 1961 by Erzsébet Szőnyi in Vienna. Bringing the 1964 ISME conference to Budapest proved pivotal in raising global awareness about the Hungarian model and kickstarting the process of its worldwide promotion.¹¹ During the conference – that had Kodály as its honorary president – several Hungarian music educators like Katalin Forrai, Klára Kokas, or Gábor Friss gave highly acclaimed presentations of the “Hungarian system” to pedagogues from 36 countries.¹²



Photo 3. Booklet for the 1964 International Society for Music Education (ISME) conference organized in Budapest. Source: photo by author.



Photo 4. The venue for the conference, the headquarters of the National Association of Hungarian Construction Workers. Source: Fortepan, 158074, photograph donated to the Fortepan collection by the Preisich family.

In the months and years following the conference, Kodály and his disciples were flooded with invitations to give further presentations about the Hungarian model and also with requests to receive in Hungary educators and students interested in the method, especially from the US, but also from Japan, Canada, Australia, and the Scandinavian countries. Accordingly, the international promotion and dissemination of the Hungarian model was driven by the highly active cluster of Hungarian music educators who orbited around the figure of Kodály. They formed a tight-knit and well-defined community, dedicated to the continuation and further development of Kodály's vision in pedagogy and research. Members of this community were embedded in various state institutions, from the Academy of Music to many elementary and high schools

across the country, with some occupying influential positions in terms of instructing and mentoring the next generations of Hungarian music teachers.

It is important to note that during the first and decisive decade of this process for internationalization, the state institutions in charge of designing and implementing socialist Hungarian cultural diplomacy – *i.e.* the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Culture, and the Institute for Cultural Relations – merely tolerated the activity of this professional community without any significant top-down initiative to incorporate or guide their promotional work. Although the Hungarian press occasionally celebrated the growing foreign curiosity generated by the country's music education, top officials were generally ignorant of the details and indifferent to the implications of this newfound worldwide fame. The reasons behind this lack of official interest, while complex, were ultimately rooted in the state's ambivalent position towards the iconic figure of Kodály: while his global fame was acknowledged, and even instrumentalized, the authorities resented the fact that the successes of Hungarian music education abroad were explicitly associated with the work of an individual and not recognized as the achievements of the socialist state. Nonetheless, the authorities extended passive support to the internationalization process by allowing the mobility of Hungarian Kodály-experts and foreign music teachers at a time when such extensive travel across the Iron Curtain was still a rarity.

Given this top-down indifference, the active cluster of Hungarian music teachers took it upon themselves to devise their own practices of “bottom-up” musical diplomacy to win international adherents to the Hungarian model and to transfer their knowledge across borders and geopolitical divides. As “ambassadors” of the Kodály-method, they took advantage of the possibilities offered by détente and the relative outward openness of the Kádár regime to create and maintain a resilient and semi-autonomous transnational project.¹³ Through their efforts, Kodály-teachers aimed to carefully and purposefully orchestrate the discovery and experience of Hungarian music education by their international colleagues. They engaged in two inter-related and parallel promotional practices for winning foreign adherents and transferring knowledge across borders.

One of these practices was to showcase the Hungarian model of music education abroad. Hungarian educators accepted yearly invitations to lecture at numerous summer universities and workshops across the world,

and especially throughout the US and Canada. Central among them was the composer and music professor Erzsébet Szőnyi, one of Kodály's closest proteges-turned-colleagues who taught solfege classes at the Academy.¹⁴ Besides her activity in ISME, from the second half of the 1960s she also developed extensive professional connections bridging the Iron Curtain, contributing to the promotion of the Hungarian approach to music teaching through her multiple publications, lectures, and masterclasses.¹⁵



Photo 5. Hungarian composer and music educator Erzsébet Szőnyi (1924–2019). Source: The papers of Erzsébet Szőnyi at the Archive of the Kodály Institute, Franz Liszt Academy of Music.

The other main practice of promoting the Kodály-method was to invite all those interested to Hungary and showcase the success of the Hungarian model *in situ*. Starting with the 1964 ISME conference, the inflow of curious foreigners was channeled through the tight network of Kodály-experts and was carefully directed towards strategically selected educational displays. Opportunities to learn and hear from Kodály-experts

included the yearly “Danube Bend” University Summer Course on Arts in Esztergom (organized since 1965) and the International Kodály Seminars in Kecskemét (since 1970). For those wishing to study theoretical aspects of the method, the real-time observation of music classes could be complemented by enrolment in courses on solfege and folk music at the Academy of Music.

Viewed as a whole, the promotional discourses and practices employed by Hungarian Kodály-experts in the second half of the 1960s coalesced into a particular mode of musical diplomacy. Unlike the tightly controlled, centralized, and vertically integrated mechanism of Soviet cultural diplomacy, the “cultural show” of the Kodály-method was operated by the professional community of music educators in a semi-autonomous fashion.¹⁶ Although embedded in state institutions, these educational experts held a near complete monopoly over the means, sites, and messages of propagandistic display and were able to choose their international partners themselves, conveying a high level of agency in carrying out their work.

It was during these years that, due to the transnational professional interactions and the exchange of ideas between Hungarian teachers and their Western colleagues, the Hungarian model of music education was identified and branded as the globally marketable and transferable “Kodály-method” (along the lines of the Dalcroze-, Orff-, or Suzuki-methods). That is, the moniker was introduced by international experts recognizing the Hungarian example as a quintessential “method” on the global marketplace of educational ideas. By the end of the 1960s, the method’s identity solidified in both everyday usage and professional publications.

Accompanying this development was the gradual emergence of a wide-ranging professional and personal network that cut across the Iron Curtain and belied the divisions of the Cold War. This transnational network eschewed the competitive logic at the heart of Cold War cultural diplomacy that pitted against each other a putative “West” and “East.” Instead, their “bottom-up” musical diplomacy was non-competitive, as it functioned according to the logic of sharing and mutuality. The classrooms of Hungarian music teachers were open to all who wished to observe and learn the method, regardless of which side of the Iron Curtain they came from. The Kodály-community was interested in disseminating the method as widely as possible, guiding projects of transfer and adaptation, and forming a close-knit transnational network in the process.

2. Federal and Private Funding for the Kodály-method in Postwar America

Versions of Kodály-inspired music teaching were already used in the US during the late 1950s by Hungarian émigré musicians like Katinka Dániel and Árpád Darázs.¹⁷ Later on, US teachers discovered the method for themselves, first among them being Mary Helen Richards, a supervisor of music at Portola Valley, CA.¹⁸ She was most likely the first American pedagogue to visit Hungary with the specific purpose of seeing the Hungarian model of music education in action. After her 1962 trip – during which she met Kodály and was guided around in Budapest by professor Szőnyi – she gave an enthusiastic description of the country’s “great music education program” in *Music Educators Journal*.¹⁹ By 1964, Richards published her own adaptation of the method, *Threshold to Music*, based on the Hungarian music books by Kodály and Ádám, and her work was featured on local TV channels, prompting queries about the approach from Midwestern and Northwestern universities.²⁰

By the end of the 1960s the Kodály-method had become a well-established brand name within the US educational community through various institutional settings. At first, its implementation was attempted through disconnected projects on both coasts and the Midwest.²¹ Soon, workshops for the instruction of the method were organized in California, Wisconsin, and Indiana. Eventually, various interpretations of the method were introduced into public and private elementary school, undergraduate, and graduate curricula, and served as an organizing principle for new courses on teaching music.²² In 1974 it was estimated that “well over 100,000 schoolchildren in the US – concentrated in the Northeast, but spanning from Main and Florida to California and Washington – [were] being taught music the Kodály way.”²³ A 1979 study that focused on the states of Connecticut, Indiana, and Washington found that nearly half of the music teachers in their sample had training in the method and used it in their classes.²⁴ Concurrently, the application of the method in the US was fast becoming a topic of research in a string of MA and PhD dissertations across the country.²⁵ Finally, the method made an impact on popular culture and became part of the zeitgeist after the solfège hand signs were featured in the 1977 Steven Spielberg movie, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Such popularity and proliferation of usage shows that the informal and transnational interactions of the 1960s between Hungarian and

US educators bore fruit by the 1970s in the form of financial support, institutional setting, and wide-spread recognition. Roughly a decade after McCarthyism, with the Vietnam War and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia dominating the headlines, the Kodály-method – the educational model of a small state socialist country – was taking US education and pop culture by storm.

At the heart of this development were American music educators who became interested in the Hungarian example, traveled to Hungary to observe it, and envisioned its adaptation in the US. Most of them started from the premise that during the 1960s-70s music education in their home country was going through a deep crisis. They saw the Kodály-method – through the lens of its idealized application within Hungary – as a comprehensive solution to a national educational problem. In her 1963 article, Mary Helen Richards declared that the place of music in the Hungarian educational system “seems almost utopian” when compared to the US.²⁶ For Alexander Ringer, who witnessed a demonstration of the method in 1964, Hungary’s “comprehensive system” served as role model “wherever and whenever the question of musical literacy [was] raised.”²⁷

While their positive impressions were, no doubt, influenced by the selective showcasing arranged by their Hungarian hosts, it would be wrong to flatten the interaction of American and Hungarian pedagogues by suggesting that the former were duped by a Potemkin-village of Kodály-education. US observers were articulating exaggerated views in order to construct the Kodály-method as a viable alternative for their transformative projects targeting American music education. In these accounts, the Hungarian educational system and the musical literacy of the Hungarian people were held up as role models, with decidedly no reference to the country’s state socialist regime. At the same time, the underlying structural factors that made the method work in Hungary on a national scale – mainly, the existence of a centralized and unified educational system with minimal variation that was paradigmatically different from the decentralized and plural American one – were downplayed.

Specifically, the presentations of the Hungarian success story were meant to convince federal and private donors to fund pilot projects designed to adapt the Kodály-method in the US context. Those planning these projects were encouraged by the increased attention that music education received in the 1960s and early 1970s, and especially by the generous support given to various experimental initiatives that aimed to

improve the quality and status of music teaching in public schools and music colleges.²⁸ The high volume of support for arts education in the period created a favorable legislative, financial, and institutional context for the introduction of new and foreign approaches to music teaching, like the Orff-, Suzuki, or Kodály-methods.²⁹

Although there were several parallel and interconnected initiatives to create an institutional setting for the Kodály-method within the US during this period, I will briefly present two such programs. The first pioneering project was the Kodály Fellowship Program (KFP) created in 1966 by Alexander Ringer with funds from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The NEA pledged \$50,000 for the development of a “comprehensive model in terms of our own linguistic and cultural heritage, as a possible basis for a new approach to musical learning in the US.”³⁰ In order to realize this, the KFP offered individual grants of \$5,000 for a twelve-month study trip in Hungary for a cohort of ten young music teachers.

During the 1968-69 academic year, this group attended courses at the Ferenc Liszt Academy of Music under the guidance of Erzsébet Szőnyi, and later were assigned to observe music classes in schools in smaller Hungarian towns (Kecskemét and Székesfehérvár). The second part of the program consisted of a trial teaching year for the returned fellows, applying and adapting the newly learned method in American elementary schools. According to Ringer’s final report, almost 800 children in 7 elementary schools from 3 cities “had learned how to read and write relatively unsophisticated musical patterns, had considerably increased their powers of aural recognition, and proved capable of improvising vocally at varying levels of complexity.”³¹ Due to the lively interest in the results of the program, Ringer was able to secure funding for two more cohorts to travel to Hungary in 1971-72 and 1975-76. With the KFP, Ringer created the first comprehensive program for transferring the Hungarian model and adapting it to the US educational context. The educational experiment he envisioned and supervised launched many of the teachers who went on to define the “Kodály-movement” in the US.

Besides the federal government, the Ford Foundation also supported music education projects in this period. In particular, it provided around \$1,800,000 to various Kodály-based programs throughout the 1970s, with the purpose of creating a “cadre of music educators in the US who could adapt and apply the Kodály approach to the special features of the American musical experience.”³² One of the first projects envisioned with

this purpose in mind was the Kodály Musical Training Institute (KMTI), established in 1969 by Denise Bacon, head of the Dana Hall School of Music in Wellesley, Massachusetts. With a starting grant of \$184,000 from the Ford Foundation, the new institution aimed to prepare musical materials necessary for an adapted version of the Kodály-method, to train personnel capable of teaching this way, and to advertise this approach to music teachers in the US.³³ Following the practice pioneered by the KFP, the KMTI also offered scholarships to young teachers to study in Hungary and then teach according to the Kodály-method in elementary schools in the wider Boston area. Under Bacon's leadership, the Institute received over \$2 million in funding during its first decade of operation, \$886,658 coming from the Ford Foundation and \$784,899 raised from local foundations, family trusts, and individual donations.

While Ringer and Bacon worked on parallel projects that competed for the attention of their Hungarian partners and for the resources of American supporters, they ultimately reinforced each other's efforts in legitimizing the study and use of the Kodály-method in the US. Thanks to their work, Kodály-inspired music teaching was able to gradually consolidate in several school districts of the country, with subsequent generations of Kodály-teachers being instructed in US certificated programs modeled on these early projects. Moreover, both programs reinforced the professional collaborations that cut across the Iron Curtain, emphasizing the necessity of on-site, immersive knowledge acquisition in Hungary and the methodological-theoretical input of Hungarian experts.

Proving the vitality and dynamism of this transnational network, in the early 1970s Hungarian and American educators aimed to create an international forum for those interested in the Kodály-method globally. This marked the need to progress from an informal community to the level of a formal international organization and professional interest group that could facilitate exchange and coordinate the emergent national Kodály organizations. These plans found support from another US institution, the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), a nominally independent organization that brought together private and federal funding to facilitate cultural and educational exchanges with the Soviet bloc.³⁴ As such, IREX provided grants for the preparation and then organization of the envisioned professional forum, namely the First International Kodály Symposium, held in August 1973 at Holy Names College in Oakland, California.³⁵ Altogether, IREX offered ten grants on Kodály-projects between 1970 and 1976, amounting to approximately \$75,000.³⁶

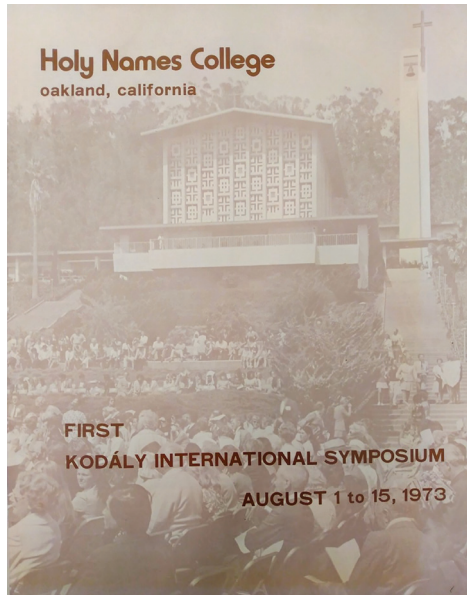
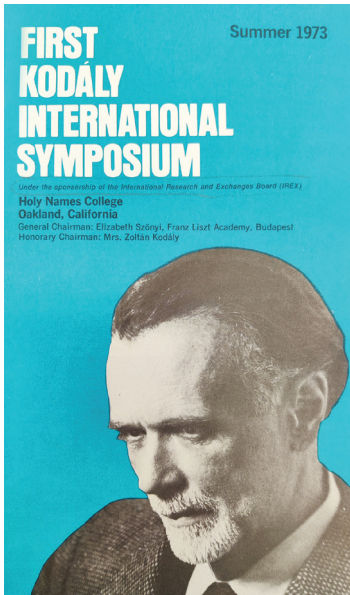


Photo 6 and 7. Booklets for the First International Kodály Symposium, held in August 1973 at Holy Names College in Oakland, California.
Source: photos by author.

The fifteen-day event in Oakland, attended by 50 delegates and approximately 300 observers from 16 countries, coming from five continents, was the joint initiative of Erzsébet Szőnyi, from Hungary, and Sister Mary Alice Hein, in charge of Kodály-teaching at Holy Names College. The Symposium's stated aim was to "encourage an exchange of ideas among Kodály authorities of the world" and to "further stimulate the interest of American educators in the Kodály concept of music education."³⁷ Besides the leadership of IREX, the event was also attended and addressed by the representatives of the US Department of Education, the Ford Foundation, and the Music Educators' National Conference. Indicative of the indifference of the Hungarian authorities, next to the educators, Kodály's home country was represented at the Symposium only by a mid-level official from the Franz Liszt Academy of Music, Mrs. Gábor Gabos.

Beyond professional interactions, this truly global forum was used to make announcements about further institutional configurations for the promotion and study of the Kodály-method. It was at the Symposium that Sarolta Kodály, the composer's widow, announced the plan to establish a Kodály Institute in Kecskemét (to be discussed in the next section), and where the Canadian delegation informed their colleagues about the creation of the Kodály Institute of Canada.³⁸ Moreover, the event also served as an occasion for the Ford Foundation to announce that it will provide Holy Names College a two-year grant for the purpose of expanding its already existing graduate Kodály-program.³⁹ The first global gathering of Kodály-teachers also led to further organizational activity, resulting in the eventual creation of the Organization of American Kodály Educators (OAKE) in 1974, and, equally important, the conceptualization and preparation of the International Kodály Society (IKS), founded in 1975 in Hungary. Consequently, the widespread and generous support for the Kodály-method in the US by federal and private entities, donated with the purpose of reforming and strengthening American music education, had a significant side-effect: the simultaneous consolidation and institutionalization of the transnational professional network of Hungarian and American Kodály-teachers. The financial assistance requested and offered for specifically domestic goals was crucial in creating the frameworks for the mobility of experts and the transcontinental transfer of ideas and practices.

3. Appropriating the Kodály-method Brand for State Socialist Cultural Diplomacy

By 1970 there were institutions dedicated solely to the teaching and promotion of the Kodály-method in the US and Japan, and special courses on the topic were popping up in many countries. Yet in Hungary there was still no institutional foundation that could address and anchor the growing international interest in Kodály-inspired music education. Foreign teachers coming to observe the Hungarian model were received and guided by the informal network of Kodály-educators. Nonetheless, these bottom-up activities of educators and musicologists were not met by any top-down plan for the coordinated promotion of the Kodály-method abroad or for the systematic reception of teachers from around the world. As illustrated by the example of the First International Kodály Symposium, the most

significant initiatives related to organizing the cross-border professional interactions involving the method originated in the transnational realm and came mostly from outside of Hungary. Although the global recognition of the newly labelled Kodály-method was covered in the Hungarian press, as mentioned earlier, up until the end of the 1960s the Hungarian authorities showed no sign of wanting to incorporate this phenomenon into their cultural diplomacy agenda.

Official attitudes began to change toward the question at the beginning of the 1970s, as authoritative figures in the ICR and the Ministry of Culture understood the extent of the financial and moral support the Kodály-method gathered in the US and Canada. In particular, the funding received by Ringer from the National Endowment for the Arts and the one that Bacon and Hein each secured from the Ford Foundation elevated the method as an international issue worth the authorities' attention. Initially, this simply meant that the influx of students and visitors was recognized as a source of hard currency for the Hungarian state. Gradually, the previously dismissive bureaucrats started to warm up to the idea that the Kodály-brand could be a veritable gift for Hungarian cultural diplomacy. With this recognition came the corresponding intention to appropriate, supervise, and monetize the method as a cultural product representing state socialist Hungary. The authorities also wanted to (re)integrate and consolidate this worryingly independent phenomenon, to refocus the attention from the iconic figure of Kodály to the supposed achievements of the socialist state.

Within the transnational professional network that was formed through the promotion and transfer of the method, Hungarian teachers, many of them former students of the famous composer, possessed unequaled cultural capital due to their direct association with the source of the Kodály-brand. Given the growing multiplicity of adaptations worldwide, the only authenticating stamp available to international Kodály-followers was the Hungarian connection: detailed knowledge of Kodály's writings complemented with in-depth observation and prolonged learning in Hungary. Furthermore, the knowledge and skills accumulated by Hungarian teachers through decades of experience in developing and applying the method could not be simply copied and reproduced in different contexts without their participation. The direct input, guidance, and legitimizing touch of Hungarian partners was crucial in starting most foreign projects based on the Kodály-method. In turn, the Hungarian authorities were aiming to appropriate exactly this local ability to bestow

a stamp of authentication on a global brand. By securing the integration of the Kodály-method into the official cultural diplomacy agenda, it was hoped that the widespread popularity of the educational model would be an asset for the country's foreign policy.

One of the early – and ultimately unsuccessful – ways in which the Hungarian authorities aimed to carry out this appropriation was by trying to instrumentalize the existing collaborative US-Hungarian projects for the purposes of state socialist propaganda. Such plans mainly targeted the KMTI created by Denise Bacon. In 1970, the attaché of the Hungarian Embassy in Washington reported back to Budapest that “with the proper assistance and influence, we [*i.e.* the Hungarian state] could develop the institution into a Hungarian ‘cultural center’ in the US”⁴⁰ The rapporteur of the ICR working on Bacon's case evaluated her project as “politically and economically beneficial” for Hungarian interests, because the KMTI “would allow us to promote our cultural values in the field of American public education with the financial and moral support of the Ford Foundation.”⁴¹ In other words, the hope was that the dissemination of socialist Hungarian discourse would be financed by US foundation money under the guise of promoting knowledge on music education.

In her relationship with the ICR and various ministries, Bacon proved to be a cooperative partner while retaining her autonomy. Her main priority was to build the pedagogical and research activity of the KMTI on the professional relationships she developed with the Kodály-community during her stay in Hungary. To make the partnership with the authorities work, Bacon was willing to nominally make concessions, like promising not to hire anyone to the KMTI who has “left [*i.e.* defected from] Hungary since 1956, at least for the first three to five years of the program.”⁴² Yet, given that the funding for the Institute came entirely from within the US, the Ministry of Culture was forced to admit that Hungarian officials had limited leverage over Bacon's plans and actions.⁴³ Despite the intention to use the KMTI for the agenda of state socialist cultural diplomacy, I found no archival evidence to indicate that the ICR or the Ministry had any identifiable influence over the institutional identity or the functioning of the American institute.

Another – more effective – step towards appropriating the Kodály-brand for the diplomatic and financial purposes of the Hungarian state was to centralize and concentrate the management of the increasing number of foreigners interested in learning the method in Hungary. To address this challenge, the already mentioned Zoltán Kodály Pedagogical Institute for

Music was founded in 1973 (on paper), opening its doors in a renovated Franciscan monastery in Kecskemét in the fall of 1975. The aim was to channel all international interest in the Kodály-method into one institution for training, research, publication, and archiving. The new institution eventually offered year-long courses in English, organized international summer seminars on the Kodály-method, and held regular workshops for Hungarian music teachers.⁴⁴ Importantly, since it was mainly targeting participants from Western countries, the Institute was seen as a source of foreign currency. Accordingly, pricing was relatively high, with tuition, room, and board costing \$2,350 for the 1975-76 academic year, plus another \$375 for local transportation and miscellaneous, as compared to an average of \$1,663 for a year in a public university in the US.⁴⁵

The official handling of the creation of the Kecskemét Institute highlighted two crucial aspects of the Hungarian authorities' approach to appropriating the Kodály-method brand. On the one hand, it revealed the state's duplicity in wanting to exploit the symbolic capital of this transnational phenomenon, but without allocating significant – or sufficient – resources and funds. Despite clear state interests in having the Kecskemét Institute up and running, the project was not handled as a priority by the various central and local authorities. Specifically, throughout 1973 and 1974 the officials of Bács-Kiskun county (where Kecskemét is located) repeatedly pushed the deadline for finalizing the renovation of the monastery building while requesting more funds for the construction budget. In the end, despite attempts from the Hungarian Kodály-community to speed things up, the facilities of the Kodály Institute were not ready to welcome the participants of the Second International Kodály Symposium organized in Kecskemét in the summer of 1975. The failure to inaugurate the intended iconic center indicated that there was a significant gap between the official recognition of the diplomatic worth of the Kodály-brand and the Hungarian state's ability to meaningfully and responsibly promote it.

On the other hand, the establishment of the Kecskemét Institute also showed the limitations of the top-down approach both in terms of conception and operation. The idea for such an institution came from one section of the transnational Kodály-community, spearheaded by the composer's widow, Mrs. Sarolta Kodály, and substantively assisted by Denise Bacon. Moreover, its implementation reflected the practices of the already existing trans-Atlantic Kodály-community. In effect, it came to serve as a partner institution to the KMTI in Hungary. For one, the

institution's direction was given to the 29-year-old Péter Erdei, freshly returned after four years in the US, assisting Bacon's Kodály-projects. Furthermore, the new Kecskemét Institute was created according to an American blueprint: its courses, scheduling, and examination followed those of the KMTI, with participants receiving letter grades instead of the number grades customary in Hungary. The summer seminars held in Kecskemét since 1970 and then hosted by the new institution were also modelled on the US and Canadian summer university courses that Hungarian Kodály-experts lectured at since the mid-1960s. Once established, the profile of the institute was entirely unprecedented in the country and for several years was not integrated into the wider Hungarian higher educational system, serving overwhelmingly foreign students.⁴⁶

At the same time, the establishment of the Institute – and the political-administrative agenda behind it – caused an internal rift within the professional community of Kodály-teachers, both in Hungary and in the US. Those Hungarian experts, like Professor Szőnyi, who facilitated the studies of international educators at the Liszt Academy, and the American experts, like Professor Ringer, who devised the training schedule for the Kodály Fellowship Program, were opposed to the top-down channeling of all activity to the new Kecskemét institution. Ringer interpreted it as a power move intending to monopolize the international interest in the Kodály-method, considering the new Institute a “Kodály ghetto in the heart of Hungary” that was “totally unsuitable for the kind of cultural immersion that has been the ultimate secret of our past successes.”⁴⁷ He suspected that the Hungarian authorities wanted to “restrict foreign students to the walled confines of a former nunnery in a small Hungarian town,” in order to “forestall regular contacts between these students and their Hungarian colleagues, not to speak of the population at large.”⁴⁸

A third and ambitious step in the effort to incorporate the Kodály-brand into state structures was to orchestrate state-led Hungarian dominance within the global professional organization of the Kodály-network, the future International Kodály Society. In their attempt, the authorities encountered similar limitations to their top-down efforts and displayed once again duplicitousness when it came to (the lack of) substantial and sustained financial support. The noted difference in this case was that in the conflict between the agenda of transnational professionals and that of the paternalistic state the abovementioned internal rift became much more pronounced and was readily exploited by the Hungarian authorities.

Hungarian officials were notified about the plan to create an international organization by Erzsébet Szőnyi, upon her return from the First International Kodály Symposium in Oakland.⁴⁹ Learning about the ongoing preparations for the IKS, it became evident to the architects of Hungarian cultural diplomacy that, unless they act promptly, the international guardianship of the Kodály-method might slip away from Hungary. The director of the ICR pleaded with the Ministry of Culture to “examine more closely the international ramifications connected to Hungarian music education” and to “take an official stance regarding the issue of the planned International Kodály Alliance (*sic!*).”⁵⁰ By March 1974, the ICR and the Ministry articulated the official Hungarian approach to this international development and submitted a proposal to the Central Committee. It started by outlining the looming threat: “governmental institutions and large private foundations in the US and Canada are eagerly interested in using [Kodály’s] pedagogical method for their educational, cultural, and even political aims,” with the planned IKS supposedly being an instrument toward these ends.⁵¹ This was a reference to the fact that IREX had sponsored the organization of the Oakland Symposium and had offered grants to pay for the travel of American and Canadian music educators to the Second Symposium to be held in Hungary.

Unsurprisingly, the document deliberately overemphasized the supposed geopolitical implications of Western sponsorship and silenced the overwhelmingly grassroots and transnational origins of the envisioned organization. The proposal went on to point out that the Hungarian state “cannot obstruct the formation of the international society, nor would that be in our interest.” Instead, the aim would be to reclaim the pedagogical method named after Kodály as “an international cultural propaganda tool” by securing Hungarian dominance over the IKS.⁵² The ultimate intention behind this appropriation was to convince the international public sphere that, while the “unquestionable merits of Kodály” should be acknowledged, the promoted method had been able to develop into an “effective pedagogical tool for the improvement of musical culture *only* because of the socialist cultural policies of the Hungarian People’s Republic.”⁵³

Importantly, the authorities’ proposal put forward a strategy on how to ensure the future hegemony of the Hungarian state over the planned IKS. The primary and non-negotiable requirement was to have the organization’s headquarters in Hungary, in order for the state to be able to “influence the functioning of the Society according to [its] political

aims and interests, and to fend off Western attempts to appropriate it.”⁵⁴ It was hoped that a Budapest office would make it possible for the ICR – and thereby the Ministry of Interior and the State Security – to supervise the organization’s operation. Incidentally, the transnational Kodály-community also envisioned an organization based in Hungary, as befitting the legacy of the famed composer, yet operating as an autonomous, non-governmental, professional body.

Next, the authorities were aiming to prepare by-laws for the IKS that were favorable to Hungarian state interests in terms of shaping the leadership and membership of the organization. The preparatory committee, following Ringer’s conception, imagined the future IKS as an elite and professional organization that limited membership to those with considerable accomplishments in the fields of music education or musicology. Moreover, they favored the idea of collective membership by national Kodály-societies, delegating representatives to an International Council within the IKS that could advise the society’s Board of Directors.⁵⁵ Interpreting this as a thinly veiled attempt to ensure American dominance, the Hungarian authorities opposed such designs, insisting on individual membership and the unchallenged leadership of the Board.⁵⁶ Furthermore, they intended to create a strong operational position for an executive secretary within the Board, stipulating that the role should be permanently held by a Hungarian, “representing the interests of the Hungarian state at board meetings.”⁵⁷ Revealing significant differences in viewpoints, no final and complete version of the statutes was produced before the beginning of the founding meeting for the IKS in August 1975.

Upon the approval of the Central Committee, the ICR assumed responsibility for coordinating arrangements for establishing the IKS, effectively turning this process into a full-fledged strategic operation run by state bureaucrats – some of whom doubled as informants for the State Security.⁵⁸ Through a Cold War rhetoric, the authorities were constructing a stark antagonism between the categories of malicious “Western” educators versus Hungarian music teachers assumed to be loyal to the socialist state, a dichotomy that had been alien to the nature of the transnational professional network of Kodály-teachers. Ringer was especially singled out and characterized as suspicious and antagonistic. A State Security report, dating from Ringer’s early visits to Hungary in 1968, described him as “untrustworthy” and a “stubborn enemy of socialism.”⁵⁹ At the same time, issuing an official commitment and devising a battle plan were only slowly and haltingly followed by actions, proving the duplicity of the

Hungarian authorities once more. Because of the complex inter-ministerial briefings and clearances that these top-level machinations necessitated, actual preparatory tasks were delayed: the approved invitations went out in January 1975 and funds were requested as late as May.⁶⁰

Because no consensus was reached on who could take part in the first plenary meeting and vote in the statutes and the Board, effectively creating the IKS, the authorities hoped to manipulate the composition and outcome of the meeting by restricting participation to those officially invited by the ICR. Yet, their room for maneuver was limited in this regard, since the ICR could not ignore the already-formed network of the Kodály-community and deny invitations to the most authoritative and active figures from the US, Canada, Japan, and Australia – all participants at the First Symposium in Oakland. Nonetheless, the authorities' plan was to outnumber these incoming "Westerners" by filling up the meeting with a high number of Hungarian delegates and with delegates from other socialist countries. The ICR leadership worked with the assumption that local and neighborly attendees were loyal and would vote unanimously according to the top-down directives. However, despite the encouraging circulars sent out to socialist embassies in Budapest, the Kodály-method was little known and scarcely adopted in most Soviet bloc countries and comradely solidarity did not materialize.⁶¹ Once again, this failure showed the limitation of state efforts: while the members of the global community of Kodály-educators, built from the bottom-up, were willing to travel to another continent, the artificially conjured transborder alliances could not be mobilized.

The internal communication between the ICR and the Ministry of Culture makes it clear that the upcoming founding meeting of the IKS was treated as a battle to be won, with plans on selecting and preparing Hungarian participants for their tactical role in the encounter. For example, an internal memo from November 1974 requested the "instruction of professor Szőnyi on what professional, political, and personnel decisions she should support during the meeting."⁶² It is highly doubtful that Szőnyi, who had been chairing the preparatory committee and was passionately involved in the organizational activity, would have accepted to follow top-down instructions, yet her further involvement was made impossible by an illness that required hospitalization and long convalescence.⁶³ Upon her request, Szőnyi's role was taken over by Ringer who then served as chairman during the proceedings. Nonetheless, the authorities found willing local partners who accepted the "us vs. them" narrative

and were ready to secure “Hungarian interests” at the founding meeting. These Hungarian delegates were not closely connected to the already existing transnational Kodály-community, evidenced by the fact that the list of their names was not made available to the preparatory committee before the meeting.

Several factors made the already challenging and conflict-laden founding event even more difficult. Although the constitutive meeting of the IKS was included into the program of the Second International Kodály Symposium, there was not enough time allocated to setting up and finalizing the procedure and the list of those eligible to participate. As such, the meeting was held at the end of the Symposium, on a Sunday evening, lasting until midnight. The issue of participants was also decided under pressure and tendentiously, resulting in a situation where the international delegates who had taken part in the Oakland Symposium were joined by a large group of Hungarian delegates nominated by the authorities. During the meeting, this contingent voted *en bloc*. The newly elected leadership of the International Kodály Society reflected a strong Hungarian dominance. Accordingly, Mrs. Zoltán Kodály was elected lifetime honorary president. For the position of president, Alexander Ringer (US) was voted out in favor of Deanna Hoermann (Australia). Péter Erdei (Hungary) and László Vikár (Hungary) were voted vice presidents, Sister Mary Alice Hein (US) as secretary treasurer, and finally, Davide Liani (Italy), Pierre Perron (Canada), and Éva Rozgonyi (Hungary) as directors. At its first meeting, this Board chose László Eöszé (Hungary), a musicologist and Kodály's biographer, for the position of the executive secretary.

According to the ICR's post-meeting evaluation, their operation “achieved its most important aims” and should be seen as a success from the perspective of the Hungarian authorities.⁶⁴ In contrast, several of the participating US educators found the proceedings disturbing and denounced the event in various ways. Stephen Jay, the head of the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music and the freshly elected president of the Organization of American Kodály Educators, adopted the inverse Cold War rhetoric and stated in an interview that Hungarians with “dubious musical credentials [...] began playing political ploys,” undermining the attempts of “Westerners to operate under parliamentary rules of order.”⁶⁵ While for most music teachers from the US or Canada, who had significant ties to Hungary through professional collaborations and friendships, such a geopolitical dichotomy was not relevant or acceptable, the conflictual meeting caused by the covert interference of the Hungarian authorities

was, in the short term, a disruptive experience that threatened the unity of the transnational Kodály-community.

Unsurprisingly, Alexander Ringer was angered by both the experience and the results of the meeting. In a letter written to John P.C. Matthews of IREX after returning from Hungary, the professor stated that the “highly political developments that culminated in the founding of the International Kodaly Society [...] exceeded even my worst expectations.”⁶⁶ According to him, the presence at the meeting of “large numbers of Hungarians previously unknown to us, acting strictly in accordance with directives received from roving superiors” produced an outcome that was “outright farcical, my frantic efforts notwithstanding.”⁶⁷ That his dismissive attitude towards the IKS remained unchanged with time was evidenced by a 1976 letter to Eöszé, in which Ringer still held that the circumstances of the founding of the IKS would have ignited the “wrath of the very man to whose life’s work it is ostensibly dedicated” and have “grievously offended not only my [i.e. Ringer’s] sense of fair play but also my lasting devotion to the memory of Kodály.”⁶⁸ He considered the organization to be nothing more than a “Hungarian society with foreign members” and refused to become a charter member.⁶⁹ No doubt it was this stance that earned him the characterization within internal ICR documents as being “extremely malevolent and antagonistic” toward the Hungarian People’s Republic.⁷⁰

Lois Choksy, the author of a widely used 1974 handbook on the Kodály-method in North America and an educator who had been active in preparing the event from the US, described the meeting later as a “power-grab from some who seemed to me far removed from the ideals Kodály espoused.”⁷¹ According to her recollection, the event was defined by a “seemingly irresolvable conflict in which one group of delegates tried to push through an agenda and slate of officers that an almost equal number of others found utterly abhorrent.” She described the end result as an “uneasy truce,” the IKS coming into a “formal, if shaky, existence” with a “compromise president and board.”⁷²

As the composition of the newly elected Board of the IKS shows, other international educators accepted leadership positions within it, yet they also had critical observations about the founding meeting and identified the crucial problems very similarly to Ringer and Choksy. Sister Lorna Zemke, a Kodály-educator at Silver Lake College, Wisconsin, who took a position in the Committee of Auditors, fully agreed with Ringer’s account transmitted to IREX, calling the proceedings of the meeting “nightmarish.”⁷³ Sister Mary Alice Hein, member of the preparatory committee and the

new Secretary-Treasurer, submitted a report on the event to IREX in which she noted that the IKS was “brought forth amid many difficulties” due to the “political situation prevailing in Hungary at the present time” and the “internal political maneuvers leading up to and including the time of the Symposium.”⁷⁴

According to Hein’s diagnosis, the difficulties were partially caused by Szőnyi’s withdrawal, leading to the “lack of organization and strong leadership during the time of the Symposium.”⁷⁵ This was worsened by the two-fold appointment of Péter Erdei, the director of the Kodály Institute in Kecskemét, as both the local leader for IKS preparations and also the Chairman of the Symposium, because his attempt to “coordinate these two undertakings [resulted in] great disorganization and confusion.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, the report stated that the abovementioned rift between those Hungarian educators who favored the establishment of the Kecskemét Institute and those who opposed it “tended to create tensions and factions among the delegates present.”⁷⁷ Importantly, Hein surmised that the “paranoiac tactics” through which the Board of the IKS came to have a “disproportionate number of Hungarians on it” was “an attempt, albeit a misguided one, to ensure that Hungarian interests would not be overridden by an outside majority.”⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the report ended on a decidedly conciliatory and optimistic tone regarding the future operation of the IKS, with Hein expressing her hope that the Board will be able to work together and that “useful dialogue will still be able to be carried on, which to me is a far better outcome than if negotiations had broken down completely.”⁷⁹

After declaring victory in the operation targeting the IKS, the Hungarian authorities went on to ignore their responsibilities towards the newly created organization. Although the ICR fought for the right to supervise the Society, for almost an entire year after its creation they were unable to allocate office space for the IKS, despite the consistent pleadings of the new executive secretary.⁸⁰ When the ICR turned to the Ministry of Culture for help, they suggested that Eősze do his secretarial tasks at his current workplace and use the ICR’s conference rooms for meetings.⁸¹

Moreover, despite the Hungarian state’s one-time pledge of 600,000 Forints (\$30,000) for the functioning of the IKS, the society was not granted a bank account until January 1976. Until then, Eősze had to finance the beginnings of a substantial international correspondence with new members and the Board of Directors out of his own pocket. By May 1976, complaining about the lack of tangible results for the sixth time, it seemed that the musicologist had had enough. “Unfortunately, it has

become obvious to me that the ICR is not willing to secure the necessary conditions for the IKS to function properly," he wrote, concluding the letter by tending his resignation.⁸² Eventually, the authorities started addressing the basic requirements of the Society and Eöszé remained in his post until 1995, but the IKS functioned as a precarious and bare-bones organization both before and after the 1989 regime change.⁸³

As the global recession of the late 1970s engulfed Hungary, and the entire region, the Hungarian state faced a dilemma regarding its appropriation of the Kodály-brand as "an international cultural propaganda tool." On the one hand, the authorities were determined to maintain their dominance over the IKS for diplomatic reasons, while on the other hand, it proved increasingly difficult to finance the organization. According to a 1979 report, the yearly cost of running the Society was 400,000 Forints (\$20,000), in addition to the state's obligation to pay the fees (\$20) for 57 Hungarian members.⁸⁴ Although the ICR repeatedly insisted that the Society become financially independent by relying on foreign membership fees, this was untenable. Membership numbers oscillated depending on the years with or without Symposia, dropping from an initial 400 to 133 and then back to 260, providing around 15% of the necessary budget.

The ICR further suggested that membership be increased by asking "friendly" socialist countries to encourage their music educators to join the Society, yet this proved as ineffective as in the case of the founding meeting in 1975.⁸⁵ This meant that, although the Hungarian state paid the bills, the majority of members were and remained "Westerners," jeopardizing the hard-won Hungarian dominance in the long run. This was proven during the next leadership elections for the IKS at the Fourth International Kodály Symposium held in August 1979 in Sydney. Since the Hungarian authorities were willing to pay for the travel expenses of only 14 delegates from Hungary, they did not constitute a decisive presence at the 80-strong plenary meeting.⁸⁶ The authorities had to accept an outcome that did not satisfy official expectations: in the new Board, only three out of eight were now Hungarians.

This internationalizing trend would intensify later as the Board aimed to represent the global diversity of Kodály-societies, having only one member from Hungary in subsequent periods. Gradually, national Kodály-societies were formed in several countries and currently there are 15 such organizations associated with the IKS.⁸⁷ Accordingly, while in the short run the circumstances surrounding the founding of the IKS were experienced as disruptive and traumatic for the transnational Kodály-community,

threatening with its fragmentation, in the long run, as the organization strengthened and integrated more and more participating countries, it became the global professional forum that it was intended to be.

4. Conclusions

Referring to his first discussions with the leadership of the ICR in 1966, Alexander Ringer recalled suggesting that “for once we forget about the so-called political realities of the day and devote ourselves to a people-to-people program.”⁸⁸ The emergent transnational Kodály-movement was indeed built according to an educator-to-educator program, even if the Hungarian authorities went on to effectively ignore the growing global popularity of the Hungarian model for music education. Hungarian music teachers devised a non-combative and bottom-up cultural diplomacy practice both at home and abroad, finding a host of willing partners across the Iron Curtain. The promotion and transfer of the Kodály-method during the 1960s and 1970s was carried out by an informal and dynamic professional community based on mutuality and sharing, and composed of Hungarians, Americans, Canadians, Japanese, Australians, etc.

The Hungarian authorities started paying attention to the international phenomenon of the Kodály-method only as a reaction, after registering the intensity of foreign interest and investment – especially those occurring within the US. Driven by the competitive logic of the Cold War, the authorities wished to appropriate the Kodály-brand and incorporate it into their official socialist cultural diplomacy framework. As presented above, this agenda of appropriation was attempted in various forms, yet yielded only partial results. Although having the entire state apparatus at their disposal, the authorities’ top-down efforts nonetheless faced several limitations.

First, this top-down ineffectiveness was caused by self-limitation: although the Hungarian state wished to exploit the global prestige and symbolic capital of the cultural product represented by the Kodály-method, it was unwilling to offer substantive financial and logistic support required for the brand’s meaningful and sustained promotion. Furthermore, the Hungarian authorities expected the active assistance of neighboring “friendly” socialist states in orchestrating dominance over the transnational network of Kodály-educators, yet no such comradely solidarity

materialized. Unlike the authentic professional and personal bonds between music teachers, built from the bottom-up, artificial top-down ideological alliances could not be mobilized.

Finally, due to the significant delay in marshaling official interest in the Kodály-movement, by the mid-1970s the Hungarian authorities were faced with a solidified transnational network with its own professional logic, its own discourse and practices, and internal dynamic. Despite its forceful intentions, the Hungarian state could not influence the operation of the KMTI in the US, the American-inspired educational profile of the Kecskemét Institute, or the engaged participation of international educators in the founding of the IKS. Ultimately, instead of managing to transform the Kodály-network and Society into an international propaganda tool for socialist Hungary, the authorities had to accept the fact that the global understanding of the Kodály-method and the Hungarian system of music education could not be disentangled anymore from the existing transnational community. Moreover, by offering official support to the institutional dimension of this professional community, state socialist officials effectively legitimized the trans-Atlantic project of Hungarian and American pedagogues as culturally valuable and salient.

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Photo 1. Hungarian composer and musicologist Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967). Source: Fortepan, 210928, by Kutas Anna, 1952.

Photo 2. School children learning music through the Kodály-method in 1962. Source: Fortepan, 135793, photograph donated to the Fortepan collection by the Sütő family.

Photo 3. Booklet for the 1964 International Society for Music Education (ISME) conference organized in Budapest. Source: photo by author.

Photo 4. The venue for the conference, the headquarters of the National Association of Hungarian Construction Workers. Source: Fortepan, 158074, photograph donated to the Fortepan collection by the Preisich family.

Photo 5. Hungarian composer and music educator Erzsébet Szőnyi (1924–2019). Source: The papers of Erzsébet Szőnyi at the Archive of the Kodály Institute, Franz Liszt Academy of Music.

Photo 6 and 7. Booklets for the First International Kodály Symposium, held in August 1973 at Holy Names College in Oakland, California. Source: photos by author.

Endnotes

- ¹ Alexander Ringer, letter to Endre Rosta, March 26, 1974, XIX-A-33-a, Box 1128, National Archives of Hungary.
- ² For a detailed history of the establishment and operation of the International Kodály Society, see Zsuzsanna Polyák, „A Nemzetközi Kodály Társaság története 1975-től napjainkig” [The history of the International Kodály Society from 1975 until today] (Eötvös Loránd University, PhD dissertation, 2023).
- ³ See Szabolcs László, “Promoting the Kodály Method during the Cold War: Hungarian Cultural Diplomacy and the Transnational Network of Music Educators in the 1960s and 1970s,” *Múltunk (Special Issue: Openness and Closedness: Culture and Science in Hungary and the Soviet Bloc after Helsinki)*, (2019): 107-140.
- ⁴ On the Institute of Cultural Relations, see Szabolcs László, “Az új kalandozások kora”: A Kulturális Kapcsolatok Intézetének működése az 1960–70-es években” [The age of new adventures: the Institute of Cultural Relations in the 1960s–1970s], in *Felsőoktatási intézményeink külföldi kapcsolatai a 20. században: A 2020. november 12-én tartott konferencia előadásai* [Foreign relations of institutions of higher education in the twentieth century: presentations of the conference held on November 12, 2020], ed. István Lengvári, Egyetem és társadalom [University and society] 3 (Pécs: PTE Egyetemi Levéltár), 63–85.
- ⁵ Solfège (also called sol-fa, solfa, solfeo) is a music education method used to teach aural skills, pitch, and sight-reading of Western music. There are two ways of applying solfège: one is by using fixed do, where the syllables assigned to the notes of the scale are always tied to specific pitches; and another by using the movable do, where the syllables are assigned to scale degrees, with “do” always being the first degree of the major scale.
- ⁶ For approaches to the Kodály-method in Hungarian scholarship, see László Doboszay, *Kodály után. Tűnődések a zenepedagógiáról* (Kodály Intézet, Kecskemét, 1991); László Gönczy, “Kodály-koncepció: a megértés és alkalmazás nehézségei Magyarországon,” *Magyar Pedagógia*, 109. 2. sz. (2009): 169–185. For a general overview of the Kodály scholarship, see Michael Houlahan and Philip Tacka, *Zoltán Kodály: A Guide to Research* (New York: Garland Pub., 1998).
- ⁷ The situation of music education at the high school level was even worse, with general gymnasiums having music classes only in their first three years, yet professional and vocational high schools having none. There were only a few high schools which included specialized “singing” classes based on the Kodály concept (e.g. in 1975-76 there were only 9 in the country).
- ⁸ For a summary of this process, see Gábor Bodnár and Zsuzsanna Polyák, “International dissemination of Zoltán Kodály’s concept of musical

- education,” *Educació i Història: Revista d’Història de l’Educació*, no. 37 (2021), 165-194.
- ⁹ In the context of internationalization during détente, Kodály enjoyed a new wave of recognition: in 1960 he received an honorary doctorate from Oxford University; in 1963 he was elected as an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Literature; in 1964 he got an honorary degree from Humboldt University of Berlin; and in 1965 he received the Herder Prize.
- ¹⁰ ISME was created in 1953 as affiliated to UNESCO and the International Music Council. See Marie McCarthy, *Toward a Global Community: The International Society for Music Education, 1953-2003* (Nedlands: ISME, 2004).
- ¹¹ For more on the 1964 ISME conference, see Szabolcs László, “Világköri útra indul a Kodály-módszer: Két nemzetközi konferencia a kádári Magyarországon” [The Kodály-method goes global: two international conferences in Kádárist Hungary], *Ujkor.hu*, July 27.
- ¹² See Breuer János, “Az ISME tanácskozásai és hangversenyei,” *Népszabadság*, June 1964; “Beszámoló az ISME 6. konferenciájáról,” *Parlando* 7-8., (1964): 1-16; Vikár László, „Zenei világtalálkozó – Budapest, 1964,” *Család és Iskola*, nr. 12, 1964; Vanett Lawler, “Sixth International Conference ISME, Budapest, 1964,” *International Music Educator*, 10 (October 1964), 347.
- ¹³ On détente, see Csaba Békés, *Hungary’s Cold War: International Relations from the End of World War II to the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2022).
- ¹⁴ On her career, see Jerry-Louis Jaccard, *A Tear in the Curtain: The Musical Diplomacy of Erzsébet Szőnyi: Musician, Composer, Teacher of Teachers* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2014).
- ¹⁵ See, for example, Erzsébet Szőnyi, *Musical Reading and Writing*, translated by Lili Halápy; revised by Geoffry Russell-Smith (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1972).
- ¹⁶ On Soviet cultural diplomacy, see Michael David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- ¹⁷ Katinka Dániel (1913-2010) and Árpád Darázs (1922-1986). See Jeri W. Bonnin, “Katinka Dániel and Her Contributions to Kodály Pedagogy in the United States,” *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Oct., 2005): 49-64; Árpád Darázs, “Comprehensive sight-singing and ear-training: Based on the Method of Zoltán Kodály,” *The Choral Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 6 (1964): 18-21.
- ¹⁸ See Trudi Lee Richards, *“Wake up Singing!” My Life with Mary Helen Richards and Education Through Music* (Pangea Press, 2007).
- ¹⁹ Mary Helen Richards, “The Legacy from Kodály,” *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 6 (Jun. - Jul. 1963): 27-30.

- 20 Norman E. Weeks, "Hungarian School Report of April – May 1967." Katalin Forrai papers, box 1, Kodály Institute Archive, Kecskemét, Hungary.
- 21 Significant among pioneers of adaptation was Mary Alice Hein, who started the Kodály Center for Music Education at Holy Names University (then Holy Names College) in Oakland, CA in 1969. Also, Sr. Lorna Zemke founded the summer Kodály Training Program at Silver Lake College of the Holy Family in Manitowoc, Wisconsin in 1973.
- 22 During the 1970s, Kodály courses were offered at the New England Conservatory, at Yale, the Catholic University in the East, Duquesne University, Silver Lake College, and Holy Names College.
- 23 Gail Miller, "Learning Music the Kodály Way," *The Christian Science Monitor* 28, January 1974.
- 24 See Charles R. Hoffer, "The Big KO: How Widely Are Kodály and Orff Approaches Used?" *Music Educators Journal* 6 (Feb. 1981): 46–47.
- 25 See, for example, Lorna Zemke, "The Kodály Music Education Method and its Application to Primary Grades in the U.S." (University of Southern California, MA thesis, 1968), transformed into a full-length book *The Kodály Concept: Its History, Philosophy, and Development* (Champaign, IL: M. Foster Music Co., 1977); Árpád Darázs, "A study of the Zoltán Kodály approach to music reading and its application to the high school selective choral organization" (Columbia University, PhD dissertation, 1973); Sara Baker Bidner, "A Folk Song Approach to Music Reading for Upper Elementary Levels Based on the Kodály-method," (Louisiana State University, PhD dissertation, 1978).
- 26 Richards, "The Legacy," 29.
- 27 Ringer, "Passing of Music's Elder Statesman," *Jerusalem Post*, April 7, 1967.
- 28 See D. R. Gauthier, "The arts and the government: the Camelot years, 1959-1968," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education*, 24, (2003): 143-63. According to Gauthier, the term "Camelot years" came from the report of Harlan Hoffa. See Harlan Hoffa, *An Analysis of Recent Research Conferences in Art Education* (Washington: Bureau of Research, Office of Education, U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, 1970).
- 29 Florence Caylor, "A Critical Analysis of Contemporary Schools of Thought in Public School Elementary Music Education," in *Music Education in the Modern World*, ed. Kabalevsky et al. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), 311. Published in the U.S. as "On the Trendmill of Elementary Music Education: Twenty years of evolving thought have led us to," *Music Educators Journal*, 58(7), 33–37.
- 30 Fan Taylor, letter to Vanet Lawler, Executive Secretary, Music Educators National Conference, June 10, 1966. Alexander L. Ringer Papers, box 1, The Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
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- emphasis on the potential impact of Kodály-inspired musical education," October 1970. Final report submitted to the Office of Education (DHEW), D.C. Bureau of Research, 39. Alexander L. Ringer Papers, box 4, The Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- 32 Leslie Gottlieb, "Kodály: The Signs and Sounds of Music," *Music Journal*. Jan 1, (1979): 25-27.
- 33 "Development of a Kodály musical training center in the United States," Ford Foundation grant description, September 9, 1969, XIX-A-33-a, box 221, National Archives of Hungary.
- 34 On the Cold War cultural exchange programs between the US and Eastern Europe, see Robert F. Byrnes, *Soviet-American Academic Exchanges, 1958–1975* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (Penn State University Press, 2004), Szabolcs László, "Trans-Systemic Mobility, Travel Reports and Knowledge Acquisition in Cold War Hungary in the 1960s and 1970s," *European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire* 30, no. 2 (2023): 204–33.
- 35 Delegates represented Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Japan, Poland, Romania, the United States, and the Virgin Islands.
- 36 John P.C. Matthews, letter from to William G. Messner, December 6, 1979, RC 072, IREX Records, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- 37 Lois Choksy, "Kodály Symposium," *Music Educators Journal* 60(5) (1974): 76-77.
- 38 The Kodály Institute of Canada changed its name to the Kodály Society of Canada in 1986.
- 39 The Master of Music Education with Kodály Emphasis at Holy Names College was the first higher learning institution in North America to offer a graduate degree in Kodály pedagogy. The program had an international cast of teachers, including Lois Choksy, Mária Farkas, Dame Margaret Holden, Eleanor Locke, Pierre Perron, Emma Serényi, and László Vikar. The Ford Foundation contributed \$606,696 between 1973 and 1979, when the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation took over as sponsors. Sadly, due to financial difficulties following the Covid pandemic, Holy Names University was shut down in 2023.
- 40 Report from the Hungarian embassy in Washington, D.C., January 7, 1970. XIX-A-33-a, box 221, National Archives of Hungary.
- 41 Note by Gábor Vígh, ICR, February 27, 1970, XIX-A-33-a, box 221, National Archives of Hungary.
- 42 Denise Bacon, letter to Róbert Boros, January 14, 1970, XIX-A-33-a, box 221, National Archives of Hungary. This letter is the only time that this significant request from the Hungarian side appears in Bacon's records, as

- she might have spelled out something that was meant to be kept implicit and hidden. However, she picked up the topic in 1974, reassuring a Hungarian embassy attaché that she firmly keeps to this policy and hires only experts from Hungary. Report from the Hungarian embassy in Washington, D.C., November 27, 1974, XIX-i-7-z, box 1, National Archives of Hungary.
- 43 Note, Ministry of Culture, January 6, 1970, XIX-A-33-a, box 221, National Archives of Hungary.
- 44 Katalin Zsitva "The New Kodály Institute of Music Pedagogy," *Hungarian Review* 4 (1976).
- 45 See National Center for Education Statistics, Table 330.10. Average undergraduate tuition and fees and room and board rates charged for full-time students in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution: 1963-64 through 2012-13. Accessed July 16, 2022. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d13/tables/dt13_330.10.asp?fbclid=IwAR3Q9x0u-3nl73lxsduglDXUqukf2uhUiy81yWOvwxnFSL5AJhKV8oSBFGA
- 46 See Laura Kéri, "A Kodály Zoltán Zenepedagógiai Intézet megalakulása és története (1973-2005)" [The establishment and history of the Zoltán Kodály Institute for Music Pedagogy] (Eötvös Loránd University, PhD dissertation, 2008). According to its 1975-76 brochure, a full academic year course at the Kecskemét Institute could be applied toward a U.S. Master's degree in music education through the affiliation of the KMTI with the New England Conservatory of Music, Hartt College of Music, University of Connecticut at Storrs, American University in Washington, Catholic University.
- 47 Memorandum by Ringer to all Kodály Fellows, August 28, 1975, Alexander L. Ringer Papers, box 7, The Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- 48 Alexander Ringer, letter to John P.C. Matthews, August 28, 1975, RC 074, IREX Records, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- 49 Erzsébet Szőnyi, letter by to Endre Rosta, November 28, 1973, XIX-A-33-a, box 11, National Archives of Hungary.
- 50 Endre Rosta, letter to Jenő Simó, December 18, 1973. MNL OL, XIX-A-33-a, box 11, National Archives of Hungary.
- 51 Endre Rosta, letter to György Aczél, March 4, 1974, XIX-A-33-a, box 1128, National Archives of Hungary.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 Ibid. (Emphasis mine)
- 54 Mihály Kornidesz, "Proposal to the Political Committee for the establishment of the International Kodály Society," March 12, 1974, 288. f. 5/632. ő. e., National Archives of Hungary.
- 55 Alexander Ringer, "Preliminary Draft of Statutes, IKS," February 5, 1974, MNL OL, XIX-A-33-a, box 1128, National Archives of Hungary.

- 56 Notes by György Kalmár, June 12, 1974, XIX-A-33-a, box 1128, National Archives of Hungary.
- 57 Memorandum, June 30, 1975, XIX-A-33-a, box 1128, National Archives of Hungary.
- 58 Concretely, the ICR rapporteur charged with handling the preparations and the negotiations over the by-laws, and who then took part in the founding meeting of the IKS was a trusted and long-time informant of the State Security. For the relationship between ICR and the State Security, see László, "Az új kalandozások."
- 59 ÁBTL, Mt-106, Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security.
- 60 Endre Rosta, letter to György Aczél, May 21, 1975, XIX-A-33-a, box 1128, National Archives of Hungary.
- 61 Ibid. The Soviet delegation canceled its visit at the last minute.
- 62 Note, November 6, 1974, XIX-A-33-a, box 1128, National Archives of Hungary.
- 63 Erzsébet Szőnyi, letter to ICR, November 24, 1974, XIX-A-33-a, box 1128, National Archives of Hungary.
- 64 Note on the establishment of the IKS, August 14, 1975, XIX-A-33-a, box 1128, National Archives of Hungary.
- 65 Jay Joslyn, "Even Music Succumbs to Politics in Hungary" *Milwaukee Journal*, 1975.
- 66 Ringer to Matthews, August 28, 1975, RC 074, IREX Records, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Alexander Ringer, letter to László Eősze, March 31, 1976, Alexander L. Ringer Papers, box 16, The Sousa Archives and Center for American Music, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- 69 Notes on the meeting between Alexander Ringer and László Eősze, October 27, 1975, XIX-A-33-a, box 1128, National Archives of Hungary.
- 70 Note from January 20, 1977, XIX-A-33-a, box 252, National Archives of Hungary.
- 71 Jaccard, *A Tear*, 201. See Lois Choksy, *The Kodály Method: Comprehensive Music Education From Infant to Adult* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974).
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Sister Lorna Zemke, letter to Alexander Ringer, September 3, 1975, RC 074, IREX Records, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- 74 Sister Mary Alice Hein, "Report on the Second International Kodaly Symposium," October 23, 1975, RC 074, IREX Records, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Ibid.

- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Sister Mary Alice Hein, "Report to IREX on the Board Meeting of the International Kodaly Society," January 19, 1976, RC 074, IREX Records, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
- 79 Hein, "Report on the Second."
- 80 László Eősze, letter to Miklós Nagy, May 20, 1976, XIX-i-7-bb, box 5, National Archives of Hungary.
- 81 László Eősze, letter to ICR, December 5 and 18, 1975, XIX-i-7-bb, box 5, National Archives of Hungary.
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 According to Eősze, „up until 1990, we used to meet with political difficulties, but after that time, we had to face economic ones. So, the change of regime did not make our efforts any easier.” Quoted in Jaccard, *A Tear*, 203.
- 84 László Eősze, Report of the executive secretary, XIX-A-33-a, box 1244, National Archives of Hungary. This budget excluded the cost of the biannual Symposia that was covered by the host countries.
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- 86 László Eősze, Report on the trip to Australia, August 22, 1979, XIX-A-33-a, box 1244, National Archives of Hungary.
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FROM POLITICAL INSTITUTIONALIZATION TO THE STRUCTURING OF RESISTANCE: THE TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE FROM YUGOSLAVIAN TO ALBANIAN COMMUNISTS DURING THE YEARS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Markenc Lorenci

Abstract

This article aims to reconstruct and reflect on the contribution in terms of knowledge given by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije*) to the Albanian Communist Party (*Partia Komuniste Shqiptare* – PKSh) both in its organization and structuring and in that of the Albanian partisan movement led by it, in a period extending from the eve of the foundation of the PKSh in 1941 to its seizure of power in 1944. In the study of the transfer of this knowledge, importance will also be given to the analysis of the repercussions that this action had on the relations between the two parties. The ultimate objective of this article is to attempt to give the PKSh, and with it the Albanian partisan movement, a transnational dimension, thus breaking it out of the rigidly national framework in which it has been seen and continues to be seen to the present day.

Keywords: Albania, Second World War, Albanian Communist Party, Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Transfer of knowledge.

1. Introduction

The relationship between the Albanian Communist Party (*Partia Komuniste Shqiptare* – PKSh) and the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (*Komunistička partija Jugoslavije* – KPJ) during the years of the Second World War, and in particular the role that the Yugoslav communists played in the period from the foundation of the PKSh to its seizure of power (1941-1944), is a topic that has aroused continuous interest and debate. Albanian historians

during the communist regime and the PKSh leader Enver Hoxha himself, in his memoirs, always tended to minimize the role of the KPJ while simultaneously accusing it of aggressive imperialism.¹ Outside Albania's borders, however, official Yugoslav historiography emphasized the fundamental role of the KPJ in the foundation and organization of the PKSh, in particular (but not only) through its two emissaries, Miladin Popović and Dušan Mugoša, present at the founding session of the new PKSh and during its first years of life.² Some Albanian scholars and those of Albanian origin who have published works on Albania in the West have also been of the same opinion, in particular Stavro Skendi, Tajar Zavalani, Stephen Peters and Nicholas C. Pano, who have attributed a decisive role not only in the foundation of the PKSh but also in its direction during the war to the two Yugoslav emissaries mentioned above and to the KPJ in general.³

With the collapse of the Albanian communist regime and the end of censorship, vigorous debates on the dynamics that led to the victory of the PKSh and the role played by the KPJ emerged in Albania. Yet today there is still little scholarly attention given to this topic and in particular to one of its crucial aspects, namely the transfer of knowledge from the Yugoslav communists to the Albanian communists, an aspect on which the present article aims to shed light. In fact, if in some general works on the events that characterized Albania during the Second World War, the role of the members of the KPJ has been allocated limited and superficial space,⁴ in those works that instead have tried to reconstruct the dynamics that characterized the Albanian communist movement in its early years of existence, attention has been focused on what has been defined as a tendency of the KPJ to dominate the PKSh.⁵ The same deficit can also be seen in those few monographic works which have emphasized political dynamics in the reconstruction of the relations between the two parties, leaving little space for knowledge transfer on the ground.⁶

Consequently, this article aims to reconstruct and reflect on the contribution in terms of knowledge given by the KPJ to the PKSh both in its organization and structuring and in that of the Albanian partisan movement led by it, in a period extending from the eve of the foundation of the Albanian Communist Party in 1941 to its seizure of power in 1944. In the study of the transfer of this knowledge, much importance will also be given to the analysis of the repercussions that this action had on the relations between the two parties. The ultimate objective of this article is to attempt to give the PKSh, and with it the Albanian partisan movement, a transnational dimension, thus breaking it out of the rigidly national

framework that has characterized it and continues to characterize it to the present day.

2. Establishment of a bond

The Albanian communist movement, unlike the others in the Balkan area, emerged very late and was characterized by great internal division. During the interwar period and preceding the founding of the Party in November 1941, a series of communist groups operated in Albania. Among them, the most important were the Korçë Communist Group, the Shkodër Communist Group, and the so-called Youth Communist Group, this last based in Tirana.⁷ In addition to personal frictions between the leaders of these groups, the main division was that concerning in particular the acceptance of the new policy of popular fronts outlined in 1935 during the VII Congress of the Comintern, according to which the communist parties had to join the other anti-fascist political forces in a broad front to fight the main enemy, namely fascist imperialisms.⁸ While the Korçë Communist Group immediately accepted this political line, the Shkodër Communist Group and the Youth Group proved more reserved. In order to overcome such difficulties, in 1936, the Comintern commissioned one of the best-known Albanian communists, namely Koço Tashko, to return to his country and work for the union of local communists in a single party, forged according to the new political line produced by the VII Congress.⁹ However, Tashko's mission came to nothing, precisely because of the continuing hostility between the groups and their continuing differences in political views. Subsequently, the fascist occupation of Albania in April 1939, and above all the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in August of the same year, created a situation of disorientation and stalemate among the Albanian communists which served only to further delay the formation of a single party.

This situation only ended with the attack on the Soviet Union by Hitler's Germany in June 1941. This event made it a matter of urgency for the Albanian communists to overcome their disagreements, to form a single party and proceed to armed struggle. To this end they began to move, searching again for the help of the Comintern to overcome their disagreements. However, the defection from the communist movement of Lazar Fundo, one of the pioneers of Albanian communism, who had been appointed in 1936 to settle in Paris and from there to act as an intermediary

between the Comintern and the communists of his country, together with the outbreak of the War had cut direct connections with the Communist International. To get around this difficulty, Tashko, who still played the role of representative of the Comintern, undertook a trip to Italy with the aim of getting in touch with the Communist Party of Italy and through this with Moscow. Unlike Tashko, who was unsuccessful in his mission,¹⁰ the Youth Communist Group, which had had the same intuition, managed to get in touch with the Italian communist Rutilio Reali through some Albanians interned on the Tremiti islands in Italy. News arrived from Italy that the Comintern, in the situation in which it found itself, considered it impossible to send one of its delegates to Albania to resolve the situation of the Albanian communists once and for all. The Italian communist Reali recommended turning to the KPJ because, according to him, the Balkans belonged to this party.¹¹

Reali's affirmation was most likely due to the fact that during the period 1939-1941 the KPJ had assumed a crucial role in the affairs of the Comintern. In fact, in January 1940, the Comintern had installed a radio transmitter in Zagreb, managed by the Slovenian communist Josip Kopinič, which was used to maintain contact with the Italian, Swiss, Austrian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Greek, Slovak, and of course Yugoslavian communist parties. As with previous operations, for example support for the Spanish republicans via the French Communist Party, the "host" communist party, the KPJ, was expected to provide support structures and to help implement Comintern decisions. Thus, small groups of KPJ members were made available to the Communist International to act as couriers to the other parties. Providing in this way the expected support in terms of personnel but also printed material, the KPJ acquired great prestige in the international communist movement, finding itself at the time of the German attack on the USSR *primus inter pares* among the communist parties.¹²

Simultaneously with the attempts made by Tashko and the members of the Youth Communist Group, the Shkodër Communist Group had instead thought of asking for help directly from the KPJ and precisely from the KPJ Regional Committee for Kosovo and Metohija with which it maintained contacts through two Kosovar former students of the local state high school, Fadil Hoxha and Emin Duraku. According to the Yugoslav historian Vladimir Dedijer, already in mid-1939 the Secretary of the KPJ, Josip Broz Tito, had sent Miladin Popović, secretary of the Regional Committee of the KPJ for Kosovo and Metohija, to Shkodër with the task

of studying what support to provide to the Albanian communists in order to arrive at the foundation of a party.¹³

To the request for help from the Shkodër communists, the KPJ Regional Committee for Kosovo and Metohija responded positively by instructing one of its members, Dušan Mugoša, to go to Albania in the absence of its secretary, Miladin Popović, who had been arrested and interned in a concentration camp at Peqin in Albania.¹⁴ Mugoša went to Albania in September 1941 and stayed there for ten days. He was well received by the Shkodër Communist Group and also made contact with the Korçë Communist Group and the Youth Group, who, however, refused to accept Mugoša as a leader in the fusion of the different factions into a single party. In particular, Tashko and members of the Korçë Communist Group considered that Mugoša lacked the credentials necessary to represent the Comintern. Offended by the poor consideration he received, Mugoša put an end to his mission. However, before returning to his headquarters, he made sure to ask the local communists to commit themselves to achieving Popović's release, indicating that he was the most suitable person to help in the foundation of a party.¹⁵

Shortly after Mugoša's departure, Koço Tashko, most likely driven by the lack of alternatives now available and the important role acquired in that period by the KPJ, went to Kosovo accompanied by the Kosovars Xhevdet Doda and Elami Nimani, both members of the Youth Communist Group. They reached the village of Vitomiricë near Peja (Peć in Serbian), home of the KPJ Regional Committee for Kosovo and Metohija,¹⁶ where on 11 October a meeting was held during which the Albanian delegation accepted the role of the KPJ Regional Committee for Kosovo and Metohija in the foundation of the Albanian Communist Party.¹⁷ In the meantime, some Albanian communists had freed Popović from the Peqin camp and had taken him to Tirana, where he met Mugoša when the latter returned to Albania for the second time as an envoy of the KPJ. Consequently, with the actual availability of the three main communist groups, namely the Shkodër, Korçë and Youth groups, and with the recognition of the authority of the KPJ members, all that remained was to organize the long-awaited meeting of the communist groups, known as the founding meeting, to create a single party.

Before the founding meeting, however, Popović and Mugoša, who had then taken the reins of the situation, held a series of meetings with the groups present to get a vision of the real situation facing the Albanian communists. Among the problems they noticed, prominent was the strong

feeling of belonging to a group, often based on personal ties, which in addition to hindering the formation of a single party had also led to a neglect of activity among young people and a failure to approach other sympathizers with communist ideas.¹⁸ Furthermore, the presence of personal ambitions in some exponents was highlighted, accompanied by considerable confusion in the interpretation of Marxist theories.¹⁹ Following this series of meetings, the two Yugoslav emissaries established that representatives of the three main groups should participate in the founding meeting, five for each group, together with Koço Tashko as an extraordinary representative, given that since 1936 he had represented the Comintern, though he had long since lost contact with it.

3. Foundation of the Albanian Communist Party: initiation into a new mentality?

The meeting of the three communist groups began on 8 November 1941 in total secrecy in a house in Tirana. As mentioned above, representatives of the three communist groups participated, together with Tashko as an extraordinary representative and Popović and Mugoša as representatives of the Comintern. Popović opened the meeting and directed it, energetically assisted by Mugoša, who spoke Albanian and acted as interpreter, together with one of the delegates of the Youth Communist Group, the Kosovar Ramadan Çitaku, who spoke Serbian. However, regarding this aspect, which is fundamental for communication and knowledge transfer, some clarifications are essential. It has often been argued that unlike Mugoša, who spoke Albanian, Popović only spoke Serbian and French. This is doubtful because given that Popović had grown up in Kosovo in contact with Albanians, it is very plausible that he already spoke a little Albanian in his early days in Albania, or at least understood it.²⁰ It certainly appears that during the three years he spent in Albania he learned and began to speak Albanian.²¹ That said, at least in the early days Popović communicated in Serbo-Croatian with Çitaku and some other members of the groups who knew that language, and in French with the future party leader Enver Hoxha and Koço Tashko himself.

Having proclaimed the foundation of the Albanian Communist Party (*Partia Komuniste Shqiptare* – PKSh), already during the first session on 8 November, Popović gave the first speech, in which he stated that the first task of the members of the PKSh was to form a monolithic party, a

Bolshevik party that was to lead the Albanian people in the war for their national liberation.²² There then followed criticism of the conflicts that had arisen between the groups and of the lack of contact with the masses. In order to overcome these problems Popović stated the need to:

liquidate all the wars that have taken place up to now between groups, between factions [...] liquidate philistinism and useless theories, limitations in work, liberalism and opportunist manifestations. [...] All elements, without group distinction, who will continue in the previous spirit, must be expelled without mercy, because there is no place for such elements in the revolutionary workers' movement.²³

The Yugoslav emissary also did not fail to emphasize self-criticism as a fundamental criterion in the elevation of communist cadres, and the iron discipline that had to be enforced among them: 'No longer will anyone dare not to implement the directives of the Steering Committees. When such manifestations are discovered, they must be crushed with energy, and this is discipline. For this reason, you must submit to the Party's discipline.'²⁴

Once Popović's speech was over, the work of the meeting itself began. Each group wrote an overview of the work carried out up to that point and at the same time offered self-criticism regarding their own group and criticism of the work carried out by the other groups. After each overview, self-criticism, and criticism, a series of heated discussions followed, which lasted for at least four days.²⁵ Unfortunately we do not know precisely the topics of these discussions, since the minutes in three notebooks drawn up during the meeting seem to have been lost, or at least are untraceable. However, some details have been provided by the historian Kristo Frashëri, at the time a member of the Youth Communist Group who was an indirect witness of the meeting, and by Sadik Premte and Ramadan Çitaku, members of the same group, who actually participated at the meeting. According to these witnesses, in addition to the clashes over the mutual faults of the groups, some points presented by Popović and supported by Mugoša also aroused doubts and debates. Among these, of considerable importance for understanding the new mentality that they were trying to instill among the members of the PKSh, was the debate around the conduct of the war and in particular the question of establishing which Albanian institutions were to be considered collaborators with fascism. Regarding this point, Popović proposed that the list of collaborators should include

not only conscious collaborators with the occupier, such as espionage agents and gendarmes who had committed crimes, but also the units of the Albanian army who had been mobilized according to the law. However, many of the participants contested this proposal, considering it incompatible with local political morality that those who had been recruited and mobilized without having committed crimes should also be condemned. Mugoša forcefully lashed out against these objections, accusing the Albanian communists of being micro-bourgeois “pacifists” and “pietists”, and considering their “humanity” a Christian humanity. Heated debates followed, which for the moment concluded in agreement to the death penalty, by assassination, only for those agents whose activity had led to significant damage to the communist movement.²⁶

Another aspect that raised many doubts was the procedure for the election of the Central Committee (CC) of the PKSh, which was to be considered provisional until its future First National Conference. It was again Popović who proposed the procedure, supported by Mugoša. The two Yugoslavs asked first of all that, in consideration of the responsibility that the leaders of the groups had for previous struggles and to avoid such conflicts dragging on into the future governing body of the PKSh, they were excluded from the elective procedure.²⁷ Anastas Lula for the Youth group, Vasil Shanto for the Shkodër group, and Koço Tashko for the Korçë group were consequently ousted, despite the latter having insisted on being considered an extraordinary representative and not linked to any of the communist groups.²⁸ They were then asked to propose three names among the members of their groups, worthy in their opinion of being elected to the provisional CC. However, on the list designated for voting, the candidates, nine in total, were not registered with their respective names and surnames but with the characteristics of each one. The descriptions were vague and therefore it was difficult to guess to whom they applied. This election procedure was highly contested, arousing much tension, as it was considered devoid of any transparency.²⁹ In fact, this election was in all probability reduced to a simple co-optation of the candidates by Popović. The candidates selected were not proclaimed immediately but were informed later, one by one, by the Yugoslav emissaries. They were Qemal Stafa, Koçi Xoxe, Tuk Jakova, Ramadan Çitaku, Enver Hoxha, Kristo Themelko, and, to everyone’s amazement, Gjin Marku, a member of the Shkodër group who had not been included in the list of nine candidates as he was not present at the meeting.³⁰ Regarding this procedure, Ramadan Çitaku himself in his memoirs claimed that the election had not taken

place in a democratic manner, due, in his opinion, to the war between the communist groups, which left no alternative course of action.³¹ Consequently, it seems that the designation of the provisional CC by Popović, assisted by Mugoša, was the result of his own desire to form a CC with elements, in his opinion, as little involved as possible with the previous events and less permeated by the spirit of group.

Before the end of the meeting, the PKSh Resolution was also approved. It had been drafted as a project by Popović and Qemal Stafa,³² and in fact it very much reflected the contents of the opening speech delivered by Popović himself. The Resolution once again stated the need to mobilize the masses of the cities and countryside in national liberation and to unite with all nationalists who loved the country in what was to be the Popular Front. It was obviously specified that the communists had the task of being in the lead in this war.³³ Also in the Resolution, among the errors that were recognized and listed, the largest was considered the non-acceptance and non-implementation of the new line of the VII Congress of the Comintern.³⁴ From an organizational standpoint, localism was condemned, with particular reference to the Korçë Communist Group, and also fractionalism in general, regarding all groups. There was strong criticism of the lack of action to combat factionalism and to remove harmful elements from the organization. Finally, the Resolution also assigned a series of tasks such as: the need to create new cells with selected elements, which were to constitute the basis of the party; the need for the theoretical and political advancement of party members, through the study of Marxist-Leninist theories to be carried out by means of courses on the "History of the Communist Party of the USSR"; the need to establish an iron discipline, which would entail the submission of all members to the party's directives and the removal from its ranks of any undisciplined persons, and the need to work seriously with women, allowing women workers to join the party and helping them in their work of mobilizing the female masses in the war of liberation.³⁵

In this way the meeting of the groups ended with the foundation of the PKSh: a party, however, led by a provisional CC made up of elements who, as some of them later acknowledged, did not have the slightest organizational experience.³⁶

4. Organization and structuring of the PKSh

Once the meeting that gave life to the PKSh was concluded, the next step was to organize its structures, from the reorganization of the cells to the creation of the district committees and other party organizations, such as the Communist Youth Organization. Popović and Tuk Jakova were responsible for the organization of the cells in Tirana and of the district committee of the capital itself, while Koçi Xoxe, Kristo Themelko, and Jakova again, assisted by Mugoša, worked for the organization of the cells and district committees in the other cities.³⁷ It must immediately be specified that in the work of structuring the PKSh on the ground, and as will be seen later also in that of the organization of the partisan resistance, Mugoša stood out for his great mobility, traveling throughout the country, as at least during the first period he was not followed by the police, unlike Popović, who was listed.

For the election both of the various district committees and of the provisional CC of the Communist Youth Organization, the same methods followed during the election of the provisional CC of the PKSh were applied. They were not truly transparent and democratic. For the election of the provisional CC of the Communist Youth, one of the participants, Nexhmije Xhuglini, who became Hoxha following her marriage to Enver Hoxha, recalls that the nominations had been proposed by the provisional CC of the PKSh, and once submitted, once again by the characteristics of the candidates and not by names, they were simply approved unanimously by the participants.³⁸

Furthermore, in the structuring of the party, the creation of two further organizational rings with particular functions was also established, namely a “technical cell” dedicated to the production and reproduction of educational and propaganda material and a “military cell”, which had the task of dealing with the establishment of guerrilla units. In both of these cells, although they were officially led by members of the provisional CC, the role of the two Yugoslav emissaries was important. Mugoša, in addition to his constant movements to create guerrilla units, appears to have contributed together with other members of the party also to the translation of the “History of the Communist Party of the USSR”,³⁹ translated into Albanian and used in the courses for the training and ideological formation of PKSh members.⁴⁰ Popović, on the other hand, appears to have written, at least in the first months, the political manifestos which were subsequently translated by Stafa and Tashko.⁴¹

The fact that Mugoša and most of the members of the provisional CC had been sent throughout the country for the structuring of the party meant that Popović and Enver Hoxha, who had been put in charge of financial affairs, remained in the centre, in Tirana. In addition to a rapprochement between Popović and Hoxha, who was becoming more and more friendly towards the Yugoslav emissary, this also meant that all the directives that came from the provisional CC were nothing more than directives issued by Popović. And precisely in order to affirm the incontestability of these directives and strict discipline, an extraordinary conference was held on Popović's initiative in June 1942, on which occasion the first purge within the PKSh took place. The two leaders of the former Youth Communist Group, Anastas Lula and Sadik Premte, together with other former members of that group, were expelled on the grounds of having contested the directives of the PKSh and of still being animated by a fractionalist attitude.⁴² Furthermore, the first death sentence was also passed against a former member, Ludovik Nikaj, who had been arrested a month before by the police and had revealed information about the party under interrogation which had led to the arrest of a number of PKSh members.⁴³

In the meantime, at the end of May 1942, once the structuring of the party had been completed, Mugoša had been sent to Bosnia, where the KPJ leadership and the headquarters of the Yugoslav partisan movement were located, with the task of reporting on the situation in Albania and exploiting the direct connection of the KPJ with the Comintern to obtain the latter's recognition of the PKSh. Mugoša spent several weeks in Bosnia, meeting Tito several times and informing him about the situation in the country and the foundation of the PKSh.⁴⁴ While waiting for the Comintern's response, Mugoša received instructions, familiarized himself with the structure of the Yugoslav liberation movement, and frequented the First Proletarian Brigade and other units of the People's Liberation Army of Yugoslavia (*Narodnooslobodilačka vojska i partizanski odredi Jugoslavije* - NOV i POJ).⁴⁵ Having received the approval of the Comintern, in October 1942 he left for Albania accompanied by Blažo Jovanović and Vojo Todorović, both members of the KPJ, the former having the task of helping in the organization of the First National Conference of the PKSh and the latter of helping in the organization of partisan units.⁴⁶ Returning to Albania, they brought with them, in addition to certain written materials on how the partisan military structure and power in the territories that would be liberated should be organized, also a letter

from Tito addressed to the CC of the PKSh and to Popović. According to this letter, the secretary of the KPJ stated that “Djeda”, the code name of Georgi Dimitrov, General Secretary of the Comintern at the time, had given his approval for a National Conference to be held in Albania and a permanent CC to be elected.⁴⁷ Also in this letter, Tito proposed a series of recommendations for the PKSh, such as: the need to purge the so-called anti-party elements; the need to connect and work more with the peasants, on whom it was necessary to rely for the establishment of partisan bands, given the lack of large industries and a working class in Albania; the need to rely on the Yugoslav model and on the Yugoslav experience in structuring partisan and voluntary units; and finally, the need to proceed with the organization of popular power in the liberated territories.⁴⁸ In addition to these recommendations, Tito delegated Jovanović to participate in the National Conference of PKSh as a representative of the KPJ and as an advisor,⁴⁹ thus officially consolidating the KPJ’s guardianship and leadership role in relation to the PKSh.

Once they arrived in Albania towards the end of December, the Yugoslav delegates together with the local communists began preparations for the conference. During this period, it appears that Jovanović also wrote the manual *The Work of Party Organs in the Army*, which was then translated into Albanian and used for the education of political commissars in partisan formations.⁵⁰ Once the preparations were completed, the First National Conference of the PKSh was held from 17 to 21 March 1943 in Labinot, near Elbasan.⁵¹ From the minutes drawn up during the days of this conference, Jovanović’s prestige as an official delegate of the KPJ clearly emerges, as does the authority of Popović and, to a lesser degree, also that of Mugoša. The discussions that followed each point presented were in fact all concluded by the three Yugoslavians, moderating the discussions in a certain way and giving their final judgment.⁵² Even in the content of the speeches held and in the approved Resolution itself, we may note the acceptance and appropriation of all the directives sent in Tito’s letter.⁵³ Eventually, the election of the definitive CC followed, which once again took place in a less than democratic manner, with the compilation of a list of candidates and the establishment of a commission responsible for electing the members of the CC from this list. The final CC that emerged was made up of fifteen members; in addition, a Politburo made up of six members was also elected. Enver Hoxha was appointed political secretary and Koçi Xoxe, in prison at the time, organizational secretary.⁵⁴ From subsequent testimonies, in particular that of Hoxha,

it repeatedly emerges that both the new governing bodies and his own election as political secretary had been the work of Popović.⁵⁵

Once the First Conference was concluded, Jovanović together with Todorović returned to Yugoslavia, leaving the PKSh again under the leadership of Popović and Mugoša. In this regard, it is important to note that the definitive CC from its election until the end of the war was convened only twice, during the First Plenum of the PKSh, which was held in May 1944 in Helmes (Skrapar), and during the Second Plenum, held in November of the same year in the city of Berat, which had come under the control of the partisan forces. Since most of the members of the CC continued to operate in different parts of the country, Popović almost always remained with Hoxha in the various movements to represent effectively the CC and therefore the party. While Hoxha and Popović sent all directives in the name of the CC, Mugoša continued to devote himself to military actions during this period. Despite his commitments in the field, in March 1944 Mugoša together with Ramadan Çitaku and Liri Gega (also part of the definitive CC) held the first political course for the training of future leaders of the PKSh in the village of Panarit (Korçë), at which 33 young people who had joined the party after its foundation participated.⁵⁶ Once the course was completed, Mugoša was recalled by the KPJ to Yugoslavia, thus ending his mission in Albania. A series of letters were sent to him with notes of affection and gratitude from the leaders of the PKSh.⁵⁷ While Mugoša's Albanian experience was ending, Popović continued his mission for a few more months until September 1944, when he was called by the KPJ to work in Kosovo with the local partisan resistance.

To replace Popović, at the beginning of September the KPJ sent another member to Albania as an instructor at the CC of the PKSh, Colonel Velimir Stojnić accompanied by Nijaz Dizdarević, with the role of his assistant and representative of the Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia (*Savez komunističke omladine Jugoslavije* - SKOJ).⁵⁸ However, upon arriving in Albania, Stojnić and Dizdarević immediately noticed a certain coldness on the part of Hoxha and his circle, particularly Gega and Çitaku, who had been very close to Popović and hoped for his return. In this climate of distrust, the Second Plenum of the PKSh was held in Berat between 23 and 27 November 1944. This was also the last meeting of the Albanian communists before the triumphal entry of the partisan forces into Tirana and the seizure of power. During the speeches, discussions, and self-criticisms held in this Plenum, the dominant role played over those

three years by Popović and Mugoša, the lack of vision and disorientation of the CC members, and their total dependence on the instructions coming from the KPJ emerged blatantly. However, although the fundamental role of Popović and Mugoša in the foundation of the PKSh was effectively recognized, the harshest critics attributed to them, and in particular to Popović, the blame for having monopolized the CC, and thus the PKSh, and for “not having let it rise up and be strengthened”.⁵⁹ In fact, a part of the members of the CC, led by Koçi Xoxe and Nako Spiro complained several times that the CC and the Politburo itself had not met, resulting in all political decisions being taken by Popović and Hoxha.⁶⁰ In response to such criticisms, Hoxha had to argue that despite the fundamental help received in the early days from the two Yugoslav emissaries, their presence had later been harmful since they lacked the political and organizational preparation necessary to make the party grow.⁶¹ In stating this, however, the political secretary of the PKSh did not fail to underline, as did the other members present, the crucial importance of the help provided by the KPJ both in sending directives and in the experience provided through others of its members, including the new delegate Stojnić.⁶² Finally, Stojnić himself, in reiterating the support of the KPJ, also spoke about the future political prospects for the Albanian communists, who in his opinion could survive and maintain power only by binding themselves to the KPJ in what could be defined as a confederation. Until then, still according to Stojnić, they should popularize the name of Tito, the Yugoslavia, and its national liberation army.⁶³

5. Structuring of the partisan movement and seizure of power

If the contribution of the Yugoslav communists to the transfer of knowledge was very important for the structuring of the PKSh, it was no less important in the foundation and organization of the Albanian partisan movement and in guiding the latter towards the seizure of power. Thus, once the PKSh was founded and after the first months in which its members had dedicated themselves to attacks against collaborationists and other acts of sabotage,⁶⁴ in September 1942, following an appeal by the communists to some nationalists and military men, a conference was held in the village of Peza, a few kilometers from Tirana, which ended with the formation of the provisional General National Liberation Council (*Këshilli i Përgjithshëm Nacional-Çlirimtar* – KPNÇ), which in turn sanctioned the birth of the

Albanian National Liberation Movement (*Lëvizja Nacional-Çlirimtare* - LNÇ).⁶⁵ In this way, a popular front structure, so desired by the VII Congress of the Comintern, was created, albeit to a somewhat limited extent, since the presence of non-communists within it was small.⁶⁶

Regarding the Peza Conference, it has been argued that Popović was against the idea of forming a popular front with some nationalist representatives, as he considered these to be simply criminals who would soon turn against the PKSh.⁶⁷ Rather than being against the conference itself, however, Popović seems rather to have been against it's being held in Peza, for fear of the presence of one of the most influential local figures, namely Shyqyri Peza, who was in contact with the collaborationist authorities and was known for the fact that he had no sympathy with communist ideas.⁶⁸ From a letter sent by Tashko to the Comintern, though it never reached its destination,⁶⁹ it appears that Popović had insisted that he also be present in Peza, and that at a meeting of PKSh delegates held one day before the conference, he had expressed the opinion that nationalists should be kept tied to the party as individuals in order to prevent them from developing their own organized political personality and fighting the communists in the future as Dragoljub "Draža" Mihailović, leader of the pro-monarchist resistance,⁷⁰ had done in Yugoslavia. In fact, it would seem that Popović was obsessed with the possibility that the events that had taken place in Yugoslavia in the autumn of 1941, namely the breakdown of agreements reached between Tito's partisans and Mihailović's Chetniks and the consequent mutual attacks, might be reproduced in Albania.⁷¹

Once the LNÇ was established, the formation and coordination of the first partisan bands began. Their action, concentrated in particular in the south of the country, gave life in this space to the first territories liberated and brought under their control. For the management of public power in these territories, the so-called national liberation councils (*këshillat nacional-çlirimtar* – KNÇs) were erected, which, inspired by the Yugoslav national liberation committees (*narodno-oslobodilački odbori*), were to take the place of the ousted collaborationist authorities. However, in their organization and functions the KNÇs showed themselves to be rather weak during the first months and in many cases only a façade structure, also due in part to the unclear delineation of the directives to be followed, set in a superficial manner in the Resolution of the Peza Conference formulated previously by Popović and members of the PKSh.⁷²

Despite the start of a national liberation movement, the beginning of armed resistance and the establishment of the first local civil bodies,

however, it was with the arrival of Mugoša from Yugoslavia in December 1942, accompanied by Jovanović and Todorović, who brought with them a letter from Tito containing instructions and other organizational material, that gave impetus to the structuring of the partisan movement. In fact, while Jovanović worked on writing the manual *The Work of Party Organs in the Army* and Todorović dedicated himself to assisting the partisan bands, Mugoša took to the field again for the establishment of further KNÇs and for the expansion of those already existing.⁷³ Furthermore, in order to give life to a partisan army that was to be inspired by that already existing in Yugoslavia, a few days after the First National Conference of the PKSh, held in March 1943, Tito's special envoy for the Balkan area, Svetozar Vukmanović, alias Tempo, arrived in Labinot, where the headquarters of the CC of the PKSh and the provisional KPNÇ were located, and worked on the details for the establishment of the General Staff and the related organization of the local partisan bands.⁷⁴ With the foundation in July 1943 of the General Staff, which in turn began the structuring of the Albanian National Liberation Army (*Ushtria Nacional-Çlirimtare Shqiptare* – UNÇSh), the 22-page manual *Regulations on the formation of partisan-volunteer groups of the National Liberation Army* (*Rregullore mbi formimin e grupeve partizane-vullnetare t'Ushtris Nacional-Çlirimtare*) was also printed and distributed: in fact it was nothing more than a translation of the Yugoslav version, with only some small changes at the end.⁷⁵ Shortly after, in the month of August, the First Partisan Brigade of the UNÇSh was also founded, commanded by the communist and former member of the XII International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War Mehmet Shehu, and to which Mugoša was also assigned with the mandate to participate in all decisions taken by it.⁷⁶

In September 1943, during the Second Conference of the KPNÇ, in consideration of the weak role that the KNÇs had initially had, the *Statute and Regulations of the National Liberation Councils* (*Statuti dhe Rregullorja e Këshillavet Nacional Çlirimtar*) was also approved. This attempted to outline in an articulated and clear manner the guidelines that all local councils would henceforth have to follow.⁷⁷ From a careful reading of the *Statute and Regulations*, which was essential for the better organization of these bodies and for their development, it appears that it likewise reproduced in many points the Foča Regulations (*Fočanski propisi*) approved in February 1942 in Yugoslavia by the General Staff of the NOV i POJ.⁷⁸

In the context of the transfer of knowledge, no less relevant were the directives sent by the KPJ regarding the attitude to be taken towards the British officers who entered Albania starting from April 1943 to support the local resistance.⁷⁹ In a letter sent to Popović in October 1943 Tito, on the basis of his experience, recommended caution: taking advantage of their presence to receive aid in materials, weapons etc., but at the same time preventing them from coming to know about internal military matters and in particular not giving them details about the partisan forces.⁸⁰

Also in this letter, given that there was no Albanian government in exile recognized by the Allies, Tito recommended proceeding with the formation of a People's National Liberation Council, which would carry out all the functions of a government until the time came for the establishment of a true popular government.⁸¹ Based on these directives and after the end of the winter of 1943-1944, which had seen the great German offensive against the partisan forces, the Anti-Fascist Congress of National Liberation was held in May 1944 in the city of Përmet. During the work of this Congress, an Anti-Fascist National Liberation Council (*Këshilli Antifashist Nacional-Çlirimtar* – KANÇ) composed of 115 members was elected, which was to have legislative and executive attributes, and an Anti-Fascist National Liberation Committee was appointed, endowed with all the attributes of a provisional government.⁸² Enver Hoxha was placed at the head of this Committee as President and in charge of matters of war and national defence, supported in other roles by members and sympathizers of the PKSh.⁸³ At the end of October, towards the now imminent end of the war in favour of the Allies and when a large part of the southern territories and part of those of central Albania had passed under the control of the partisan forces, the Second Meeting of KANÇ took place in the city of Berat.⁸⁴ Again according to Yugoslav directives, this meeting resolved the transformation of the KANÇ Committee into the Democratic Government of Albania with Hoxha as Prime Minister and the other members as ministers.⁸⁵ In addition to the transformation of the Committee into a real government, the Second Meeting of KANÇ also approved a series of measures, including the "Declaration on Citizens' Rights", according to which everyone should be guaranteed equal rights before the law.⁸⁶ Even in this case, however, the document appeared to have been delivered ready-drafted by the above-mentioned Velimir Stojnić and simply approved by KANÇ.⁸⁷

From its proclamation and until the taking of Tirana by the partisan forces, the self-styled Democratic Government of the LNÇ established itself

in Berat and from here operated in opposition to the last collaborationist government led by Ibrahim Biçakçiu. A few days after the taking of Tirana, on 28 November 1944, the Democratic Government of the LNÇ led by Enver Hoxha made its triumphal entry into the capital and established itself as the only legitimate government.

6. Conclusions

As I have tried to show in this paper, contrary to what Albanian communist historiography and Hoxha himself in his memoirs stated for years, the KPJ had a very important role in the foundation of the PKSh, in its organization and structuring, and in guiding it towards the seizure of power. In terms of knowledge transfer, on which this paper tries to shed light, while the contribution of Popović and Mugoša was fundamental for the foundation of the PKSh and for its initial structuring, nevertheless, as also claimed by Hoxha himself during the Second Plenum of the PKSh, they, and in particular Popović, who really led the party, showed certain shortcomings, especially in a later phase, when the party needed to structure and articulate the partisan resistance. However, the sending of directives by Tito himself, of material containing instructions on how to structure the partisan movement both in the armed struggle and in the management of its rear areas, together with the contribution given directly on the ground by the other members of the PKJ, contributed to fill this gap.

Having said this, however, I do not want to imply that the KPJ had an absolute role, since in fact, in addition to the abovementioned contribution of the Yugoslav emissaries, the same British missions that were sent to Albania on several occasions starting from April 1943 made an important contribution in the supply of weapons and gold and also in the training of partisan forces, as, for example, in the case of Captain David Smiley, who starting from July 1943 began to instruct partisan bands in the use of heavy caliber weapons and mines.⁸⁸ In addition to the British, important help in instructing the partisan forces to use artillery weapons and in their technical and medical training was also provided by the many Italian soldiers and officers who joined the partisan resistance following the Italian capitulation in September 1943.

In the help provided by the KPJ in terms of knowledge transfer, however, one cannot fail to notice a gradual tendency for it to dominate the PKSh. If Popović immediately established himself as the true leader of

the PKSh, making Albania a sort of fiefdom of his, following his departure the KPJ began to assert its hegemony from an institutional point of view, in particular through its last envoy, Stojnić. The propensity shown in those years by both Popović and the other Yugoslav emissaries to continually criticize the actions of the members of the PKSh appears as a clear attempt to subordinate the new neighbouring communist party. Stojnić's statements, during the Second Plenum of the PKSh, on the impossibility of the Albanian communists surviving and maintaining power on their own and on the need to connect to Yugoslavia, also hinting at the possibility of a confederation in which obviously the KPJ was to have hegemony, seem to all intents and purposes to be an attempt to prepare the ground for the entry of the future communist Albania into the orbit of Tito's Yugoslavia. As shown among other things by the historian Leonid Gibianskii, Tito in his contacts with the USSR, particularly during the first year after the end of the war, clearly showed his aspirations to incorporate Albania into the Yugoslav federation.⁸⁹

Finally, despite gratitude for all the help provided in the structuring of the party and the partisan resistance, these aims of the KPJ, which had already been resented by the members of the PKSh during the war years, were subsequently behind the rupture between the two parties, which took place a few years later, in 1948.

Endnotes

- ¹ Instituti i studimeve Marxiste-Leniniste pranë KQ të PPSH, *Historia e Partisë së Punës të Shqipërisë* (Tiranë: Naim Frashëri, 1968, Botim i dytë 1981); Instituti i studimeve Marxiste-Leniniste pranë KQ të P.P.SH, *Historia e Luftës Antifashiste NacionalÇlirimtare të popullit shqiptar: prill 1939 - nëntor 1944* (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1984); Xhelal Gjeçovi, *Marrëdhëniet shqiptaro-jugosllave në vitet e Luftës Antifashiste-NacionalÇlirimtare: nëntor 1941 – 1944* (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave, 1986); Enver Hoxha, *Kur lindi Partia* (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1981); Enver Hoxha, *Titistët* (Tiranë: 8 Nëntori, 1982).
- ² Vladimir Dedijer, *Marredhanjet Jugosllavo-Shqiptare (1939-1948)* (Beograd: Prosveta, 1949). Over the years, some memorial works by Yugoslav actors who operated in Albania in the period examined here have also been added to this historiography. See: Dušan Mugoša, *Na zadatku* (Beograd: Četvrti jul, 1973); Blažo Jovanović, *Narodnooslobodilački rat i revolucija, Izabrani radovi I* (Titograd: Pobjeda, 1963); Nijaz Dizdarević, *Albanski dnevnik* (Zagreb: Globus, 1988).
- ³ Stavro Skendi, "Albania within the Slav Orbit: Advent to Power of the Communist Party", *Political Science Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1948): 257-274; Stavro Skendi, *Albania* (Praeger: New York, 1956); Tajar Zavalani, *Historia e Shqipërisë* (London: Drini Publications, 1966), Stephen Peters, "Ingredients of the Communist Takeover in Albania," in *The anatomy of Communist takeovers*, ed. Thomas T. Hammond (New Haven – London: Yale university press, 1975), 273-292; Nicholas C. Pano, "Albania," in *Communism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 213 - 237.
- ⁴ Muharrem Dezhgiu, *Shqipëria nën pushtimin italian (1939-1943)* (Tiranë: Eneas, 2015); Paskal Milo, *Shqiptarët në luftën e Dytë Botërore I (1939-1943)* (Tiranë: Toena, 2014); Hubert Neuwirth, *Qëndresë dhe bashkëpunim në Shqipëri (1939-1944). Një analizë historike e gjedhes kulturore të mikut dhe armikut* (Tiranë: Instituti i Dialogut & Komunikimit, 2006); Bernd. J. Fischer, *Shqipëria gjatë Luftës, 1939-1945* (Tiranë: Cabej, 2004).
- ⁵ Kristo Frashëri, *Historia e lëvizjes së majte në Shqipëri dhe e themelimit të PKSH 1878-1941* (Tiranë: Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2006); Kastriot Dervishi, *Lëvizja Komuniste në vitet 1924-1944 dhe formimi i PKSH-së* (Tiranë: Shtëpia botuese 55, 2016).
- ⁶ Jurij Hadalin, *Boj za Albanijo: propad jugoslovsanske širitve na Balkan* (Ljubljana: Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, 2011); Milorad Komatina, *Enver Hodža i jugoslovensko-albanski odnosi* (Beograd: Službeni list SRJ, 1995).
- ⁷ Besides these three main groups, also noteworthy were the Tirana Communist Group, the Officers' Communist Group, the Kuçovë Communist Group, and the "Zjarri" (Fire) Communist Group. On the presence of these groups, see:

- Frashëri, *Historia e lëvizjes së majte*, 63-76 and 112-133; Dervishi, *Lëvizja Komuniste në vitet 1924-1944*, 95-108 and 139-176.
- 8 Silvio Pons, *La rivoluzione globale. Storia del comunismo internazionale 1917-1991* (Torino: Einaudi, 2012); Edward H. Carr, *The Twilight of the Comintern* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1982).
- 9 Frashëri, *Historia e lëvizjes së majte*, 106-111.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Dervishi, *Lëvizja Komuniste në vitet 1924-1944*, 182-183.
- 12 Geoffrey Swain, "The Comintern and southern Europe, 1938-1943," in *Resistance and revolution in Mediterranean Europe 1939-1948*, ed. Tony Judt (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 38-39.
- 13 Vladimir Dedijer, *Marredhanjet Jugosllavo-Shqiptare*, 10.
- 14 Ibid., 11; Arkivi Qëndror i Shtetit Shqipëtar (Central State Archives of Albania) hereinafter AQSh, Arkivi i Partisë - Lufta (Party Archives - War), hereinafter APL, Fondi Kujtime, Dosja 26, Kujtime të "Komisionit", undated, 58.
- 15 Dervishi, *Lëvizja Komuniste në vitet 1924-1944*, 187.
- 16 Dedijer, *Marredhanjet Jugosllavo-Shqiptare*, 12.
- 17 Hadalin, *Boj za Albanijo*, 44.
- 18 Agjencia Shtetërore e Arkivave të Kosovës (State Archives Agency of Kosovo) hereinafter ASHAK, Fondi Komiteti Krahinor i L.K të Kosovës, Njësia organ Milladin Popoviçi, nr. i Kutis 2, Letter signed Milo (Miladin Popović) to the KPJ Regional Committee for Kosovo and Metohija, 30 October 1941.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Son of a Montenegrin officer, who since 1922 had been assigned to serve in Peja in Kosovo, Popović had spent part of his childhood and youth in Peja and Prizren, in continuous contact with Albanians. See: ASHAK, Fondi Komiteti Krahinor i L.K të Kosovës, Njësia organ Milladin Popoviçi, viti 1933-1945, nr. i Kutis 2.
- 21 Hadalin, *Boj za Albanijo*, 45.
- 22 AQSh, APL, Fondi 14, Dosja 3, 2, Copy of Popović's speech at the opening of the founding meeting, 8 November 1941.
- 23 Ibid., 3.
- 24 Ibid., 4.
- 25 Sadik Premte, "Stalinism and Communism in Albania," *Fourth International* 10, 1 (whole no 91), (January 1949), 22-28.
- 26 Frashëri, *Historia e lëvizjes së majte*, 253-254.
- 27 Premte, *Stalinism and Communism*, 22-28.
- 28 This objection was not taken into consideration by Popović and Mugoša due to the strong ties that Tashko had with the Korçë Communist Group and his responsibility for the attitude and decisions taken by this group.
- 29 Frashëri, *Historia e lëvizjes së majte*, 266.

- 30 AQSh, APL, Fondi *Kujtime të Ramadan Çitaku*, Dosja R/4, Konferenca
per formimin e partisë dhe disa vendime ma më rëndësi të Kom. qëndror
31 provizor të P.K.SH deri me 16-IX-1942, 1.
Ibid.
- 32 Frashëri, *Historia e lëvizjes së majte*, 268.
- 33 AQSh, APL, Fondi 14, Dosja 1, Rezolucion i mbledhjes së parë të grupeve
(Resolution of the first meeting of the groups), 8.
34 Ibid., 18-21.
35 Ibid., 26.
- 36 See the statements of Hoxha and Çitaku during the Second Plenum of the
PKSh. Ndreçi Plasari and Luan Malltezi, *Enver Hoxha dhe katër ditët e*
Beratit. Plenumi i 2-të i KQ të PKSH, Berat, 23-27 nëntor 1944 (Tiranë:
Shtëpia botuese 55, 2007), 31 and 113-114.
- 37 Frashëri, *Historia e lëvizjes së majte*, 201.
- 38 Nexhmije Hoxha, *Jeta ime me Enverin* (Tiranë: “Lira”, 1998), 18-19.
- 39 Precisely “History of the Communist Party of the USSR (Bolsheviks): Short
Course” was approved by the Central Committee of the USSR and published
in 1938.
- 40 Dedijer, *Marredhanjet Jugoslavo-Shqiptare*, 21-22; AQSh, APL, Fondi 14,
Dosja 3, Circular sent to all the district committees, signed by the “Technician
(i.e. the person in charge of press and propaganda) of the CC of the PKSh”,
undated.
- 41 Plasari and Malltezi, *Enver Hoxha dhe katër ditët e Beratit*, 114.
- 42 Instituti i Studimeve Marxiste-Leniniste pranë KQ të PPSH, *Historia e Partisë*
së Punës, 87- 90; Instituti i Studimeve Marxiste-Leniniste pranë KQ të PPSH,
Dokumenta kryesore të PPSH, vëll. I, (Tiranë, 8 Nëntori, 1971), 82-88.
- 43 Instituti i Studimeve Marxiste-Leniniste pranë KQ të PPSH, *Dokumenta*
kryesore të PPSH, 88.
- 44 Hadalin, *Boj za Albanijo*, 52.
- 45 Peters, “Ingredients of the Communist Takeover,” 276.
- 46 Hadalin, *Boj za Albanijo*, 52; Hoxha, *Jeta ime me Enverin*, 88; Peters,
“Ingredients of the Communist Takeover”, 276.
- 47 AQSh, APL, Fondi 14, Dosja 7/1, 1-2, Letter from the Central Committee of
the KPJ signed Tito, 22/IX/1942.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 AQSh, APL, Fondi 14, Dosja 7/1, Authorization of Tito, 23.10.1942, 3.
- 50 With the Albanian title: “Puna e organizatave të partisë n’ushtri”, see: AQSh,
APL, Fondi 14, viti 1943, Dosja 9.
- 51 Instituti i studimeve Marxiste-Leniniste pranë KQ të PPSH, *Historia e Partisë*
së Punës, 106.
- 52 See: AQSh, APL, Fondi 14, viti 1943, Dosja 10, Minutes of the First National
Conference of the PKSh.

- 53 Ibid., Intervention by Doktor (Ymer Dishnica), 49-50; AQSh, APL, Fondi 14,
viti 1943, Dosja 9, Resolution of the National Conference of the PKSh, 29-30.
- 54 Dervishi, *Lëvizja Komuniste në vitet 1924-1944*, 238.
- 55 Plasari and Malltezi, *Enver Hoxha dhe katër ditët e Beratit*, 75 and 171.
- 56 Dervishi, *Lëvizja Komuniste në vitet 1924-1944*, 276.
- 57 See: Arhiv Jugoslavije (Archive of Yugoslavia), hereafter AJ, Fond 507-IX,
1/I-3, Kutije 1.
- 58 Hadalin, *Boj za Albanijo*, 86.
- 59 AJ, Fond 507-IX, 1/II-37, Kutije 6, Speech by Sejfulla Malëshova, 1.
- 60 Plasari and Malltezi, *Enver Hoxha dhe katër ditët e Beratit*, 74, 77 and 81.
- 61 Ibid., 32-33.
- 62 Ibid., 37-38.
- 63 Ibid., 148-165.
- 64 On the first attacks and acts of sabotage, see: Alberto Basciani, *L'impero
nei Balcani. L'occupazione italiana dell'Albania (1939-1943)* (Roma: Viella,
2022), 205-206 and 223; Markenc Lorenci, "Comunisti senza proletariato:
il Partito comunista albanese dalla fondazione alla presa del potere (1941-
1944)" (PhD diss., Roma Tre University, 2021), 85-91.
- 65 AQSh, APL, Fondi 40, Dosja 1, Minutes of the Peza Conference, 16.09.1942.
- 66 Among the truly important non-communist exponents were only Ndoc Çoba,
former finance minister during the interwar period and the pro-monarchist
Abaz Kupi, former commander of the gendarmerie.
- 67 Fischer, *Shqipëria gjatë Luftës*, 181.
- 68 AQSh, APL, Fondi 14, Dosja 5, Letter from Popović to Koço Tashko, undated,
6.
- 69 This letter ended up in the hands of Popović, who seems to have prevented
it from being sent to Moscow.
- 70 AQSh, APL, Fondi 14, Dosja 5, Koço Tashko's Report to the Comintern,
October 1942, 12.
- 71 On the agreements and then the rupture that occurred between the Yugoslav
resistance forces, see: Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Hitler's New Disorder: The
Second World War in Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst, 2020), 60-63.
- 72 AQSh, APL, Fondi 40, Dosja 1, Resolution of the Peza Conference, 09.1942,
7-9; Enver Hoxha, *Kur u hodhën themelet e Shqipërisë së re* (Tiranë: 8
Nëntori, 1984), 87.
- 73 Hadalin, *Boj za Albanijo*, 56.
- 74 Peters, "Ingredients of the Communist Takeover", 277.
- 75 See: AQSh, APL, Fondi 41, Lista 1, Dosja 5, Rregullore mbi formimin e
grupeve partizane-vullnetare t'Ushtrisë Nacional-Çlirimtare (Regulations on
the formation of partisan-volunteer groups of the National Liberation Army);
AQSh, APL, Fondi 41, Lista 1, Dosja 6, Formacionet e Arradhes Partizane
(The formations of the Partisan Army).

- 76 Dedijer, *Marredhanjet Jugosllavo-Shqiptare*, 67-68.
- 77 AQSh, APL, Fondi 40, Dosja 5, Statuti dhe Rregullorja e Këshillavet Nacional
Çlirimtar (Statute and Regulations of the National Liberation Councils).
- 78 On the Foča Regulations and their directives see: Xavier Bougarel, *Chez
les partisans de Tito: Communistes et paysans dans la Yougoslavie en
guerre (1941-1945)*, (Paris: Non Lieu, 2023), 87-88 and 166-167; Ahmed
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- 79 On the operation of the British missions sent to Albania during the war
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'I'M NOT A CONSPIRACIST, BUT...' CONSPIRACIES, DISINFORMATION, FAKE NEWS, AND LONELINESS IN BUCHAREST*

Răzvan Nicolescu

[T]he more literally we believe in the axiom, "To see is to know," the more haunted we are by what hovers beyond the edges of the visible. (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003: 288)

Abstract

The paper reports the results of a long-term ethnographic research on fake news, disinformation, and conspiracies in Bucharest, Romania. Most participants in the research tend to engage with alternative explanations to make sense of the contradictions and inconsistencies in their lives. Such explanations are commonly labeled and dismissed as conspiracy theories. In contrast, research participants believe that the world is controlled by globalist powers who plot to control and limit population and their general welfare. They believe that mainstream politics and media are the main perpetrators of such tendencies. In this context, research participants objectify alternative explanations into online social relations that are based on a common effort to navigate a complex environment dominated by fake news and disinformation. They aim to uncover the 'truth' that they seen as hidden or restricted in terms of access and governance. But this process comes at the expense of close personal relationships and leads to various forms of

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marginalization. The quest for 'real truth' represents a continuing critique of the state of the world, which participants hope will fill an important social breach, including an existential sense of loneliness and exclusion.

Keywords: fake news, disinformation, conspiracy theories, ethnography, social media

This paper reports the results of an ethnography of the consumption of disinformation and conspiracies, of what is commonly described as fake news in Bucharest, Romania. The initial research questions aimed to understand how people make sense of what is commonly known as 'fake news.' How do people distinguish between fake and genuine, between real and false, and between intention and inadvertence? How can people believe in what is generally proved as false or unreliable information? Most of the relevant literature on fake news and disinformation comes from media and communication studies and explores such issues in terms of production, distribution, and audience. In contrast, my own research looks at individuals and their social relations and the kind of communities they establish in relation to a shared understanding and consumption of what is commonly known as 'fake news.'

But this investigation soon led to bigger questions and claims regarding the sources of truth, trust, understanding, and representation. Most people in my research were not necessarily concerned with whether a particular news item was fake or not, but with a broader process of disinformation they sensed. Many research participants shared that they have been living for some time in an information environment that is unreliable, often paradoxical, and constantly saturated with news items that cannot be checked for authenticity and provenance. In such an environment, many people believed that 'fake news' is merely a tool in the hands of those who try to manipulate and distort reality, one expression of the ongoing and systematic disinformation process present in mainstream media, both online and offline.

This brings us to the third and more profound level of my research findings, represented by high-level conspiracies. A few months into my research, I discovered a clear link between people's belief in various conspiracies and their reluctance to trust mainstream media reports on

fake news. Beliefs in global conspiracies are both deeply personal and inherently social, as they are shared and trusted within communities. Most of the conspiracies I encountered offer non-mainstream explanations that help people make sense of the contradictions and instability they face, as well as the lack of perspective they experience. At the same time, these conspiracies converge towards a high-level, secret, and sophisticated conspiracy against humanity. The following sections explore the way people tend to objectify these conspiracies into practices and social relations.

1. Methodology

The ethnographic research took place between November 2023 and July 2024, with some data collected before this period. The research was both qualitative and quantitative, combining offline and online methods. Most of the participant observation, discussions, and interviews were conducted offline. The key questions in my research were: ‘Where do you get your information from?’; ‘How do you determine if it is genuine or not?’; ‘Who are the people you usually discuss news with?’ A couple of months into my fieldwork, I realized that those most engaged with ‘fake news’ were individuals who had little to very little trust in mainstream media and were actively looking for alternative sources to trust.

A total of 39 research participants took part in my study, most of whom lived in Bucharest, while four lived in London, UK. There were 21 women and 18 men. Their age varied between 34 and 71 years old and one research participant was 26 years old. I could not find people in their 20s or younger who were interested in fake news, disinformation and who had a strong adherence to some sort of conspiracies. This is an interesting finding in itself, which I will discuss later in this paper. With a third of the research participants, I met more than once on different occasions and had multiple discussions on several themes related to the project, including fake news, disinformation, trust, conspiracies, geopolitics, and consumption. In 28 cases, I conducted semi-structured interviews. 27 interviews were face-to-face and one interview with a Romanian living abroad was conducted via webcam. Interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 42 minutes and 3 hours and 20 minutes. All interviews except one were audio recorded. In 13 cases, interviews were followed-up by subsequent interactions and in-depth

discussions with research participants. I knew around one third of the research participants from the period I prepared for research, which was roughly November 2022 – October 2023, or from before that period. Many agreed to put me in contact with at least one other person, including members of their families, work colleagues, and friends, who emerged from the interview as potentially relevant to, and interested in, my research. This snowball method assured coherence to the study and opportunities to cross-check and follow-up information in different contexts. Therefore, the research was not limited to some places, time periods and individuals, but it unfolded organically as it progressed.

I preferred to open discussions starting from a news item, a controversy, or a question the research participants had recently. This question and the method selected was particularly successful as it made people feel safe and in control rather than vulnerable and targeted. Typically, all discussions and interviews had a strong online component. All research participants used their smartphone to access their preferred news outlets and to conduct research on various news items, including to establish if some news were fake or not. Most participants used to share the results of their research via social media with people they knew they shared their views. Many considered social media is a trusted environment to navigate a world saturated with fake news and disinformation. Most people used to have a relatively small circle of online friends who shared their views regarding fake news and disinformation and who were seen as whistleblowers on major controversies, such as the alleged frauds in local elections, the disinformation behind the major armed conflicts in Ukraine and in Palestine, and the criminal cases against Donald Trump. Research participants shared such materials with me during the interviews and, in some cases, several months after we first met. We used such materials to discuss their content, their aesthetic and communication qualities and sometimes check their claims.

I tried to follow the process research participants used when they wanted to find out if a particular news item was true or not. This process could mean anything from a simple Google search followed by a systematic selection of the information sources and engagement with the respective contexts to fact-checking particular news outlets like personal and collective blogs, Facebook pages, and Telegram channels that research participants were considering relatively reliable and independent. We also looked for alternative sources of information and compared the facts and the ways in which facts were presented in such sources with

their counterparts in typical sources of information. In each interview, I challenged several assumptions and concepts people had, providing alternative ideas that came from me or from other research participants. This method proved to be particularly effective as it opened new directions to explore, arguments, evidence to support these arguments and insightful discussions on the different consequences to research participants' personal and social life.

Conducting interviews with couples or romantic partners was particularly rewarding, and I had the opportunity to do so on seven occasions. In most cases, life partners disagreed on most of the themes of my research. In five cases, one member of the couple agreed that could be seen as a conspiracist while her partner stated that he would not be considered one. Alternatively, one member of the couple felt strongly that fake news was dangerous, misleading, and purposefully promoted by the higher levels of the political economy, while his partner considered that fake news was not that bad - for example, it just represented a typical consequence of the proliferation of data and digital communication. In two cases, life partners mostly agreed that we are living in a world that is manipulated by global powers that use mainstream media to control public opinion and impose their secret agendas. But there were major differences in the way in which the two partners expressed their views. For example, a 35-year-old man was actively searching for evidence of how this manipulation takes place and tried to identify the main forces behind it. He followed tens of Telegram channels of individuals from all over the world, which were renown for constantly trying to unmask global conspiracies. Meanwhile, his wife was not interested at all in following, gathering evidence, and trying to understand why the world is in a very bad shape.

An important aspect of my research was focusing on the daily routines of the research participants. I tried to understand their work, their domestic lives, social relations and how their routines and practices related to their consumption of media, news, and conspiracy theories. When do people access different news outlets? On what devices? When and how do they discuss, comment, and share news items within their families and with peers? Responses to such questions helped me understand better the everyday context in which people consumed, analysed, classified, and distributed information.

2. The problem of fake news

A comprehensive definition of fake news is proposed by philosopher Axel Gelfert, “Fake news is the deliberate presentation of manipulative and misleading content as news, where the content is manipulative and misleading by design” (2021: 320). Gelfert uses the phrase “by design” to draw attention to the strategic intentionality behind fake news, which “manifests itself as the result of a specific convergence of ongoing social, political, and technological developments” (idem). But fake news itself is not recent phenomenon. Historians have long documented instances of fake news, misinformation, and propaganda dating back to ancient times. What is new is the proliferation of the internet, social media, and peer-to-peer distribution, which have dramatically amplified the risks posed by fake news, disinformation, and hoaxes (e.g. Posetti and Matthews 2018: 1). In a relatively short period, people have discovered that they share a vast and unfamiliar media ecosystem with others who hold very different worldviews, social positions, cultural backgrounds, and deeply rooted beliefs. This growing awareness of differences within a shared space can easily foster strong partisan and polarized positions (Marwick, 2018: 509-510). Thus, fake news can easily be associated with notions such as post-truth era (Lindquist, 2021), the rapid proliferation of digital technologies and platform economies (Pangrazio, 2018; Marwick, 2019), and technological affordances and information abundance (Molina and Sundar, 2019; Apuke, 2021).

At the same time, there is strong evidence that fake news content is produced to be monetized. For example, between August and November 2016, several unemployed teenagers from Veles, Macedonia, earned several tens of thousands of USD designing and curating around one hundred pro-Trump sites (Subramanian, 2017)¹. They created the sites and published regularly fake news content as clickbait to generate enough Internet traffic to be rewarded by Google’s AdSense – Google’s automatic advertising engine. But this can be brought to another level. US entrepreneurs can own several fake news outlets and earn anywhere between USD 10,000-30,000 a month (e.g. Sydell 2016). Jestin Coler, the founder and CEO of a company called Disinfomedia argued that he started his business because he wanted to build a site to “infiltrate the echo chambers of the alt-right, publish blatantly or fictional stories and then be able to publicly denounce those stories and point out the fact that they were fiction.” But he admitted that this kind of gaming with

false information used to bring him at least USD 100,000 a year. Finally, we can find fake news and disinformation campaigns at the highest level of political economy. A 2019 Facebook internal report obtained by MIT Technology Review showed that before the highly contested US 2020 elections, troll farms reached 140 million Americans a month on Facebook only (Hao, 2021). This figure was reached not through user choice but primarily as a direct result of Facebook's own platform design and algorithm that stimulates user engagement. The most popular pages for Christian and Black American content on this platform were being run by Eastern European troll farms. But troll farms that implement state and private interests can be found in almost any global place (e.g. Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, 2022; Ong and Cabañes, 2019; Ayeb and Bonini, 2024).

Fake news, therefore, poses a fundamental problem. It rides on a huge public-facing algorithm-led infrastructure to reach a much wider audience than it ever did. Production, distribution, and consumption of fake news require a certain authority, resources, and knowledge. In this sense, fake news is similar with disinformation that can be described as a culture of production that exposes broader systems and cultures of practice existing in different parts of the society (Ong and Cabañes, 2019: 5772).

"But while disinformation is a process, fake news is just one product of such process. Disinformation concerns an international process of collaboration and competition involving hierarchical and distributed labor" (idem). For example, the target of a disinformation orchestrated campaign is represented by disjointed audiences for whom the psychological impact of ambiguous and misleading information, false and violent allegations, techniques to constantly and uncomfortably put someone in the spotlight, and viral spread of fake news items is rather immediate and has a sense of urgency with important long-term consequences (Polage, 2012). Then, emotions expressed on social media can lead to massive contagion (Kramer *et al.*, 2014) and rapid polarization (Del Vicario *et al.*, 2017: 7; Spohr, 2017).

My point here is that while disinformation is about the production of fake news, among other things, fake news items are objects that tend to become semi-autonomous and with a life of their own during the process of consumption. Consumption means that people understand and engage with such objects in very personal ways that often have strong social components. This is where my ethnographic inquiry comes in. How do people make sense of what is fake news and what is not? What significance

does this awareness have in their lives? How and why do their social relations, practices, ideas of normativity, and perceptions of the broader political economy and the state change with the rise of pervasive fake news and disinformation? This paper offers an ethnographic response to such questions.

3. The problem of truth. 'Real truth'

Most participants do not consider themselves conspiracists, but rather seekers of truth and meaning. Some believe that it is the mainstream media that invented and has been promoting the term 'conspiracy theories' to hide, deliberately or not, the 'real truth.' Many research participants believe that mainstream media and the mainstream exponents of the higher level of the dominant political economy label alternative views as fake news. Participants acknowledge that fake news items exist, and they have a significant impact on the world. But they argue that powerful people and institutions from all over the world have an interest to place alternative views in the same category with items that are simply false or misleading. However, many participants in my research feel that it is their responsibility to dig out and reveal the truth hidden in the midst of the overabundant and misleading information around us. They believe that knowing the truth, people can do something to solve the problems of our times. They objectify their quest for truth in a particularly conspicuous consumption of non-mainstream media outlets and a use of social media and online networks to trace and analyse any kind of information and connection they believe has a potential to lead to such ultimate truth.

Eugen invited me to explain all these over a cup of herbal tea in his large office in one national institution in Romania. He has been working there for several years. He does enjoy his work intellectually but also because it gives him enough autonomy and free time. Eugen defines conspiracies as those truths that are not yet revealed. But most of the times, these truths would emerge as truths, he believes. Eugen is looking for that kind of information that gives him the possibility 'to see' the truth [*discernământ*]. He believes that only 0.5% of the information available is true, while the rest is propaganda. He goes on to explain that a few large media corporations set the tone for communication [*dau tonul*] across the globe.

For Eugen, the pandemic was a turning point. He believes the pandemic was a lie that produced a global mass hysteria and it helped different affluent people and corporations, such as big pharma and big data companies, to consolidate their power. With his office in a state institution closed during pandemic, Eugen spent a lot of time reading about Covid-19 and the conditions that led to the pandemic. Eugen is 41 years old and lives by himself so he had a lot of free time during the pandemic. He points to a series of books that expose the ‘real truth’ about the pandemic. These includes quite popular books, such as *The contagion myth. Why viruses (including “coronavirus”) are not the cause of disease* (2020) written by Thomas S. Cowan and Sally Fallon, and Amazon and New York Times bestseller *The Real Anthony Fauci: Bill Gates, Big Pharma, and the Global War on Democracy and Public Health* (2021) by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. The first book questions Pasteur’s ‘germ theory’ to suggest that electromagnetic waves, from the old telegraph to modern WiFi systems and 5G, are responsible for the rapid spread of diseases, including the Covid-19. The second book puts Dr. Anthony Fauci, who became the face of the US response to Covid-19 pandemic, at the center of a global conspiracy designed together with Big Pharma and Bill Gates to control a multi-billion global vaccine enterprise with controversial results. Like in the case of multinational elite organisations, claims presented in these books are supported by academic work that reported that electromagnetic fields can lead to severe health deterioration, (e.g. Pall, 2013; 2018).

Eugen told me that the mainstream global response to pandemic made him realise how essential it is for him to understand whether people are on the side of truth or not. “If so, we resonate, if not, we do not talk,” he adds. Many participants in my research share Eugen’s view on the Covid-19 pandemic and the worsening state of the world. Many believe that the pandemic brought to the surface many issues that used to be hidden or unknown. They believe the pandemic was a large-scale experiment to test the world population’s level of tolerability. But who conducted the test and what exactly has been tested for tolerability?

4. The global plot

Most stories that I gathered converge towards a bigger, meta-theory of a high-end, secret, and sophisticated conspiracy against humanity. The main narrative is that there are a few extremely rich and powerful people –

mainly based in the US, but also in other places like China and the Middle East – who have a secret plan to subdue or suppress humanity as we know it, to reduce and engineer population, and to drastically limit freedom and autonomy. The most obvious public manifestations of this plot are the World Economic Forum (WEF) and public figures like its founder and president Klaus Schwab, together with high-profile figures such as Bill Gates and Yuval Noah Harari. But Eugen explains to me that most current political leaders, including Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Emmanuel Macron, and Joe Biden went to WEF meetings one way or another to implement different phases of a globalist master plan.

“Now, they do not hide themselves anymore. Probably they are in the final lap. Schwab is good friends with Xi and he particularly likes the social credit system in China. He intends to implement this in Europe. But everything is done in small steps, so that people would not have a strong reaction against these changes. With small steps you get where you want.” (Eugen, 41 yo)

The WEF grew over a few decades from the summer school of Davos to a place where future world leaders come to affirm themselves as future leaders. Eugen claims these leaders have always been local dictators [vātafi] who implemented locally what they were told at the center. What holds all these people together is their extreme wealth, freemasonry, and the US – the fact that most of them live in the US and deposit their money in US banks. He argues that the entire US is built on masonry and the layout and patterned streets of Washington DC seen from above represent one clear evidence of this claim.

There have been claims that the Washington street plan represents a Masonic message, particularly a pentagram located above the White House. Apparently, this idea gained traction after Dan Brown launched his second bestseller titled *The Lost Symbol* (2009), a thriller set in Washington D.C. that focusses on freemasonry and attempts made to decipher the symbols hidden in the city.

But there is no evidence of a Masonic message in the city's street plans. The street map was designed by painter-turned-architect Pierre L'Enfant in 1791, who was not a mason. L'Enfant was a graduate of the Art School in Paris. He worked with mathematical concepts that were used in ancient Rome, Greece, and in the construction of the Egyptian Pyramids and the Temple of Solomon.

One significant consequence for people who believe in conspiracy theories is the perception that news items from mainstream media are fake. Many research participants cited the Great Reset initiative as a common example of a global conspiracy being dismissed as fake news in mainstream media. This proposal consists of a 280 pages book and a Great Reset podcast that were launched in June 2020 by members of the WEF, among which the then Prince of Wales and Klaus Schwab. The proposal, characterized by the BBC as “a vague set of proposals” (Robinson *et al*, 2021), argued that the post-pandemic period represented “an incredible opportunity to create entirely new sustainable industries.” The proposal got traction as a global conspiracy throughout 2020 and went viral by the end of the year after Canadian Prime Minister allegedly said at a UN meeting in September that year that the pandemic provided an opportunity for a global ‘reset.’ However, it is unclear whether he was actually referring to the WEF plan (Robinson *et al*, 2021). On the 15th of November, a video showing Canadian Prime Minister addressing the UN in these terms went viral. Posts on X and Facebook argued in different ways that the Canadian Government failed the Canadian population and it knelt to the WEF and that the Great Reset is just the most recent chapter, after the Covid-19 pandemic, of a global conspiracy staged by the global elite. More sophisticated accounts were elaborated for different audiences. For example, books titled like *Great Reset and the Struggle for Liberty: Unraveling the Global Agenda* (Rectenwald, 2023) argue that the Great Reset is a clear milestone in an enduring race towards population control ran by the WEF and related globalist organizations, climate change scaremongers, and transhumanist ideals. Elsewhere, Rectenwald argues that “the goals of the Great Reset depend on the obliteration not only of free markets, but of individual liberty and free will” (2021: 7).

The Great Reset document circulates in different formats on the internet, including memes, short videos, and longer comments by public figures. A woman in her 70s promised me a copy of the real Great Reset document, as this is something I cannot find on the internet.

But many participants in my research believe the WEF does not work by itself. They bring examples of other organisations, including the Bilderberg Group (established in 1954), The Trilateral Commission (established in 1973 by David Rockefeller), and the The Club of Rome (established in 1968). What these organisations have in common is they were established in the post-WWII era to promote free market Western capitalism and its interests around the globe. Iustin, a man in his mid-thirties thinks these are

elite organisations with a restricted number of members – between 100 and a few hundred members in each case – who set agendas and conduct discussions in ways that are not transparent. For Justin, this is evidence that the organisations have something to hide. I suggest this kind of suspicion represents a more popular response to neo-Marxist inspired reports of the organisation of transnational capitalist class (e.g. van Apeldoorn, 2000; 2014; Kantor 2017), practices of favoritism and political upholding in global organisations (e.g. Kantor, 2023), and the raise of ‘shadow elites’ as power-brokers in the recent political economy (Wedel, 2011).

Other participants see the High-frequency Active Auroral Research Program (HAARP) as a major technology developed to control the world. Officially, the HAARP was a program managed by the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy that took place between 1993 and 2014 in the rather remote area of Gakona, Alaska. In 2015, the ownership of the facility was transferred to the University of Alaska Fairbanks and is now a public facility. The program’s goal initially was to provide an ionospheric research facility.² The Ionospheric Research Instrument (IRI) is the world’s most powerful high-frequency radio transmitter – a network of 180 radio antennas disposed in an array of 12x15 units spread over an area of 13 hectares.

A couple of research participants read a book titled *Chemtrails, HAARP, and the full spectrum dominance of planet* (2014) written by a US-based researcher Elana Freeland, which basically argues that the HAARP instrument controls weather. Such claims are supported by online videos showing the former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez saying that the HAARP was used to cause the devastating 2010 Haiti earthquake. A former governor of Minnesota, Jesse Ventura, claimed that HAARP is a mind-control device. Eugen believes that the HAARP does not only use radio waves, but also a laser beam that is launched into the ionosphere and it is then reflected uncontrollably onto Earth’s surface. Here, the laser beam can interfere with tectonic plates and produce earthquakes, tsunamis, devastating floods, areas of extreme drought, and violent ice storms. He believes that the US army have deployed such facilities across the world – in military bases, including in Romania. He invokes a Pentagon document written in early 1990s, which estimated that the US Army would completely control weather by 2025. The scope, he says, is to allow the US to govern the climatic chaos and bring solutions to extreme weather conditions.

Conspiracy theories are often complex, and people frequently invest significant amounts of time reading about them and searching for materials

to support their beliefs. In contrast, individuals who believe in such conspiracies often perceive news items published by mainstream media to counter these theories as shallow, unconvincing, or outright false.

5. 'The problem' with mainstream media

Many research participants believe that the root cause of the difficulty in revealing the 'real truth' is revealed is that mainstream media presents information that is simply misleading or false. So, many actively look for alternative sources of information, such as blogs and social media channels run by independent journalists. Marina is a teaching assistant in her mid-thirties who has been living in England for several years with her family. Marina rarely watches mainstream media. She believes most media outlets follow some secret plans to present information to confuse people. A confused person is easier to manipulate, she says. Therefore, Marina does her own research online on the topics she considers really important, such as the truth behind the insistence for vaccination, the truth behind the 'obsession' with climate change, the truth behind research in nanotechnology, the truth behind the anticipated demise of cash and the introduction of the Universal Income, and so forth. These topics are not necessary up to date and do not follow a chronological order. Rather, Marina sees them as constant key topics that try to be pushed by different stakeholders especially when the citizens' attention is directed elsewhere, as it was the case during the Covid-19 pandemic and as it is now because of the deeply upsetting wars in Ukraine and between Israel and Hamas. So, watching mainstream news outlets is not only useless, but also dangerous because being 'bombarded' with everyday problems can be overwhelming and can put citizen vigilance to sleep. She considers that being up to date with manipulated content is not worthwhile. Marina prefers to be 'conscious' and select her own ways to look at the world. She believes humanity is facing a decisive culture war. She attended with great expectations the launch of the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC) that took place at the O2 Arena at the end of 2023. She believes this alliance has the courage and resources to speak 'the truth' in the face of disinformation and manipulation and to restore trust in each other as citizens and in institutions if they are freed from obscure interests.

But non-mainstream media is not always seen as holding the truth. One man told me he is aware that even alternative news outlets cannot

be trusted. He can tell from the content of the news itself and from the way a news item is presented. For example, he questions the items with big dramatic titles, the texts that are overly polished, the high-quality and impactful images that appear to be professionally edited. “But I prefer to be informed 2% by such a media than 98% by the others [mainstream media outlets]”, he adds.

Now, it is important to mention that the main source of information is the personal smartphone, namely the news feed provided by Google or social media platforms. This poses multiple problems. First, it has been argued that algorithms and recommender systems are designed to function as ‘hooks’ that entice people into frequent and enduring usage (Seaver, 2019).

Second, there is an important distinction between how people perceive algorithms and recommender systems and the people and news stimulated by these algorithms. For example, people may not necessarily trust a social media algorithm, but ‘they may trust opinion leaders and leader-seekers who are incentivized by those algorithms’ (Dubois *et al.*, 2020: 11).

Thirdly, while online news feeds seem to be diverse, they are actually generated by one platform at a time. It is rare that people consult more news feeds at the same time. Most people have their own preferences and convenience in choosing one particular news feed at a time. For example, a woman in her late 40s uses the Google news feed while commuting to work and during work but uses the Facebook news feed when she returns home in the evening and checks in on her online friends. Therefore, despite the diversity of media infrastructures, most people in my research have one preferred way to use each platform and rarely check news items across multiple platforms.

This results in a fourth problem. News feeds are fueled by personal data, including personal browsing history and social media behavior. This can lead to what has been coined as the ‘filter bubble,’ that is the mechanism that keeps individuals intellectually trapped together with fellow individuals with rather similar ideas. The term was proposed by activist and entrepreneur Eli Pariser (2011) who argued that filter bubbles can lead to intellectual isolation and social fragmentation. ‘Echo chambers,’ the cognates of filter bubbles, have been described as online mechanisms that reinforce individuals’ own views. Both filter bubbles and echo chambers have been criticized on the grounds of lack of empirical evidence for their existence (e.g. Bruns, 2019a). Then, these rather ambiguous but appealing concepts can be instrumentalized in political

and social arguments, potentially leading to moral panics that “point to the persistence of a simplistic and naïve understanding of media effects both amongst the general public and amongst media and political actors” (Bruns 2019a: 8; see also Bruns, 2019b).

Research participants had very precise views on each of the points discussed above. For example, they have different mechanisms to solve the repetition and the captive audience feeling set out by algorithms and recommender systems. The most popular mechanism is to conduct individual research to check the integrity of a news item. They search for relevant keywords on Google and social media platforms or verify the information through trusted alternative sites, blogs of independent journalists, and whistleblowers. Often, people share online news items that look suspicious, not because they believe they are valuable, but because they want to see if their online friends share similar doubts or if they can comment on or validate the news.

6. The problem of authority

Most of my research participants pointed to a clear hierarchy of authority: who holds the truth versus who lies or has an interest in lying. The point is that with the advent of social media, a lot of social life has become relatively anonymous and challenges previous notions of authority, such as those coming from the state, a public intellectual, or a medical doctor. So, there is a relatively new understanding of anonymity that many people see as opposing the rather unfit and corrupt conventional hierarchies.

But this new anonymity produces its own hierarchy. At the very top, we have anti-mainstream public intellectuals, whistleblowers, and radical politicians, like sovereigntist politicians, who enjoy a relatively recent popularity. Further down the hierarchy, there are influencers and pundits who can work as new agents of knowledge, including in areas such as economic, environmental, cultural, political, and parenting (e.g. Beuckels and De Wolf 2024). Then, among research participants I found a strong sense of authority regarding the kind of special knowledge they believe they have. This authority is expressed especially by means of a strongly negative discourse:

“You know the present, but we know the future! (...) OK, leave it, you do not understand” (Mara, 70 yo)

"We are led by Securitate (...) We don't have anything left. And our faith is sealed." (Paul, 71 yo)

"Where do you think the world is heading to?" (Valentina, 37 yo)

"I look with fear in all directions... I don't know what to believe and where to take [this belief] from." (Iustin, 38 yo)

In a further section I suggest this kind of authority expressed negatively can be seen as similar to witchcraft understood both as a very personal belief and a magical way to phrase and use words. Witchcraft implies talking about witchcraft – that is not very visible – spreading rumors, blaming, and jinxing [*a cobî*]. Similarly, believing in global conspiracies implies talking about major things that are not very visible, spreading news that are considered fake by non-believers – including mainstream media – constantly blaming different daunting forces and an expert vocabulary.

Let us consider the example of a relatively new person at the top of such a hierarchy of authority. Diana Șoșoacă is quite popular among the research participants. A mainstream politician typically appears on talk shows, in public spaces, or on TV and other mainstream media outlets and usually delivers polished speeches. Diana is different. Diana is how most of her sympathizers – including my research participants – call her. She would travel all night by car, sleep in the car, and wake up early morning in a remote village in Oltenia (south Romania), enter a local shop to have a cup of coffee – then sip it in the company of a handful of supporters who bring their relatives and neighbors to an apparently impromptu discussion about anything: from peoples' everyday problems, memories, *manele* (a genre of pan-balkan music), to Christianity, the war in Ukraine, the EU, and the global elites. Then, the discussion goes back to personal issues, prospects of marriage young people have, and so on.

Diana creates an electric attraction among her followers. They can spend hours in front of their smartphones, watching her talk. Paul, a retired mechanical engineer is one of them. He has been living in London for several years where he works on different construction sites on a temporary basis. Paul is divorced and decided to emigrate to earn extra money to pay some important debts. After having paid these debts, Paul decided to continue living and working in London. He feels he has no important reasons to return to Romania too soon. In Romania, he would live by himself as well and he would probably live a sedentary life as he believes he would not find a good job at his age. Paul is 71 years old. He shares a house in a city north of London with other six people, five of

them Romanians. But they are much younger than him and he does not find many reasons to spend time with them. Paul lives a predictable life. He wakes each morning at 5:30, has a quick breakfast and a coffee and goes to work. He returns after 5pm. He enjoys cooking, but cooks only twice a week for himself. Paul feels extremely lonely in the evenings and especially at weekends.

Especially during the local election campaign in May and June 2024, Paul used to watch live sessions streamed on the Facebook account of Diana Țoșoacă for a few hours each afternoon. Paul's daughter visited him for a few days in May 2024. She told me she was very concerned when she found her dad one early morning sitting in the middle of his kitchen in his pyjamas listening loudly to a video of Diana Țoșoacă on his smartphone. She said that Paul was stiff, seemed distant, and just stood there for almost one hour holding his smartphone close to his ear. Paul was convinced that "Diana is our last hope as a people," "a true patriot that has not knelt to the Western forces." Paul invited me to vote for Diana, and if I want to convince myself to follow her live streams. Paul also explained to me where I can find each morning short clips that highlight the main moments in the live streams that happened the day before. These clips are edited by Diana's followers or volunteers in her campaign. Much shorter versions of such clips, five to 20 seconds long, circulate on TikTok and Facebook in the weeks following the live stream itself. Paul was fascinated by such video materials especially because they condensed some key messages he completely agreed with, such as opposition to implementing EU policies on a number of themes, including environment, agriculture, and immigration, and support for Ukraine. Paul considers Diana is one of the very few politicians who speak out the truth.

In *The Internet Imaginaire* (2007), French sociologist Patrice Flichy argues that the internet is basically a collection of visions of different users, including creators and promoters of the internet, as to what such a medium should be. The "imaginaire" is the materialisation of individual and collective visions, desires, and search for community. In his solitude, Paul does look online for a community that would share his visions and desires. Nobody in his family shares his political preferences. Each time he tries to tell them what the dangers of the current political establishment in Europe and Romania are, his family do not listen to him or challenge him. So, Paul finds an online environment that resonates with his own ideas and where he finds himself included and safe.

There is a good body of literature that argues that with the proliferation of technology, social media and Big Data, people are overwhelmed by paradoxes, such as opacity in the age of transparency, and pervasive surveillance in the age of autonomy and free movement. For example, writer and computer scientist James Bridle (2018) argues that the proliferation of data has not led to better and fairer governance but rather to a raise in fundamentalism and paradoxes that ultimately undermine public trust in the current political economy and its promoters. Investigating the implementation of automatic systems in public systems in the US, investigative reporter and political scientist Virginia Eubanks (2018) argues that automation did not bring fairness or transparency, but rather increased surveillance and punitive control over the poor.

In this context, most research participants claim they cannot follow, organize, and make sense of the sheer quantity of available information that is often paradoxical and contradictory. In other words, they accuse a general problem identified above – Information is not organized into accessible narratives that make sense to different categories of people. I suggest that what Paul needs – and politicians like Diana Șoșoacă deliver – is a constant translation of big questions of our time into simple and legible narratives that can be followed by the general public in ways they feel comfortable with. Diana and many far-right politicians simplify and stereotype complex political economy ideas and paradoxes in ways that seem frank and spontaneous. Paul feels he can actually talk to Diana, spend time with her, and engage in a conversation. But this is not happening with other mainstream politicians and with members of his own family.

7. Trust and loneliness

We have seen that people form ad-hoc online communities where they feel safe to share their ideas, allowing communication to persist as society changes. However, outside these online spaces, their version of ‘truth’ is often vehemently rejected or mocked, particularly when it comes from mainstream outlets. Individuals who live alone, are less socially active, and feel isolated particularly resent this as an additional form of marginalization. These individuals express a deep mistrust of ideas presented by mainstream outlets.

For example, we have seen that, among people I interviewed, there is a quite popular literature which claims a long tradition to create

viruses in labs, release them, accidentally or not, and in relation with communication technology. In *The Invisible Rainbow A History of Electricity and Life* (2020), Arthur Firstenberg argues that electricity has been from the early eighteenth century to the present the root cause of numerous environmental problems and diseases. For example, Firstenberg argues that the Spanish Flu from 1918 was caused by the proliferation of radio technology, rather than by a virus, that modified the electromagnetic environment of the Earth. The flu began on U.S. military bases where soldiers were being trained in wireless telegraphy. It spread throughout the world on ten thousand U.S. Navy ships equipped with state-of-the-art wireless stations. The flu was not contagious and did not spread by direct human-to-human contact.

Such theories are very popular among participants in my research. They do not see these theories discussed at all in mass media. They believe mass media censors such theories as they censor the public appearances of far-right politicians like Diana Șoșoacă. Therefore, many people told me they have lost trust in mass media. One consequence is the polarization of trust. People reported very high to extremely high trust in people who reveal or defend the hidden 'truth' and little to very little trust in everyone else.

We have seen that people are psychologically impacted by fake and alarmist news items that are presented with a sense of urgency (Polage, 2012). There is a whole discussion here of the impact of mass media and the monetisation of such an impact. Dramatic soundscapes and impactful images and lines are presented to a public that is not necessarily trained to critically reflect on the meanings of these forms. Attention economies do not incentivise critical thinking, but rather immediate responses. This creates situations in which psychological mechanisms simply take precedence over the wider cultural context and social relations that are the premises for critical reflection and awareness. In this context, it is difficult to create opportunities for more stable and predictable notions of trust. While trust in fake news items, and exposure to these, can be transitory in nature and work over relatively short periods of time, trust in social mechanisms is more transcendental in nature, needs constant and reciprocal effort, and work over much longer periods of time.

In my ethnography in southeast Italy (Nicolescu 2016), people used to search for a similar kind of 'truth,' but in a very different way. There were severe misunderstandings, conflated with political divisions, controversies about environment, the building of a Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) oil

terminal in the region, the use of solar power plants in the agricultural fields, and so on.

In Italy, in different communities and contexts, people used to work out the news received from the internet, TV and local journals, as well as rumors and gossip. This was a continuous process in which people gradually filtered out massive amounts of information both online and offline. So, establishing truth was a process, a genuine part of the social fabric.

Now, the situation is quite different in my current ethnography in Bucharest, Romania. Here, research participants feel much lonelier and less connected to the offline social fabric, while craving to connect online with like-minded peers. Because people cannot rely on close and personal relationships to reveal the ‘real truth,’ they tend to look elsewhere. So, they form distant relationships with ‘people like us,’ which are based on a common goal to establish the ‘truth.’ A common way to express such distinction is to say ‘we don’t go with the sheep’ – where sheep are people who are easy to manipulate, naive upholders of mainstream propaganda. Sheep either do not think or do not care much about the ‘situation we are living’ and who will find themselves at some point lined up to the slaughterhouse. The problem almost all participants in my study reported is that most of their close friends and family do not share their non-mainstream views. So, they have to find online communities and occasional offline encounters with like-minded people to discuss their concerns. These communities are founded on a belief in the existence of a concealed truth – definitely non-mainstream, if not outright anti-mainstream – and a shared effort to uncover it. These communities are not necessarily stable, they change in time, but they provide permanent psychological and social support in a setting of a constant feeling of marginality and relative loneliness.

There is some good literature on how kinship and friendship have changed with the advent of social media in the last 15 years. The key element of this change, it has been argued, is a “shifting balance from the obligations represented by kinship to the choices idealized as friendship” (Miller 2017: 381). This balance relies on sharing some sort of ideal. If kinship implies the ideal of common ancestry and substance and ideal behavior, the ideal of friendship has centered increasingly on notions of “autonomy, voluntarism, sentiment and freedom” (Bell and Coleman 1999b: 10, cited in Miller 2017: 381; see also Paine 1999: 41 in the same volume).

All these four elements can be found in the new distant relationships that are based on a shared notion of trust in non-mainstream explanations, which my research participants establish and try to maintain. Most people crave for each of these values. They express the need for autonomy by tending to reduce their reliance on the state, the mainstream media, or the sheep. Autonomy and a desire for 'freedom' will be discussed in the next section. But now, it is important to mention that such attitudes range from choosing to not watch TV, to systematically check alternative news sites and to spending a few years searching the Subcarpathian area to find a good piece of land with a stream running on it, in order to build a house and move there with your young family – to be self-sufficient, to have no bills and taxes to pay, except the property tax.

Most research participants express voluntarism as an urge to use these distant relationships to do good. They share online materials that are considered 'fake news' by the majority not because they have to or because they have an interest to do so, but rather because they have volunteered in a risky and derided quest to reveal 'the truth' to an 'ignorant' or 'cowardice' world.

"From here, from my gut [she points her fist to her stomach]. If it [the news item] hits me in the gut, I ask myself why? (...) And I told you, first my feeling of trust in news items comes first from here [she points to her stomach] and then from here [she points to her head]." (Mara, 70 yo)

Finally, sentiment is expressed by a shared emotion to being close to finding the secrets of all evils, to be united against the mainstream beliefs and propaganda, to have some sort of courage as opposed to the sheep-like attitude. Many research participants feel they can trust someone. They told me they have a gut feeling, an urge to follow their intuition, some even reported seeing trustworthy people in a positive, bright, and calm light. At the same time, many research participants have a genuine and deep feeling they have to rescue other people, including the closest ones, such as their own families and friends, from ignorance and complacency with a state of the world that is controlled by globalist elites.

This sentiment is most of the time expressed in some sort of frustration. Many research participants feel frustrated because they cannot do much to change the world, because they are constantly challenged and sometimes ridiculed by the loved ones and by the mainstream media, and because they often feel marginal and disenfranchised. I suggest the negative

discourse among my research participants is a direct manifestation of such frustrations. As we have seen, public figures can seize this kind of frustration and channel it to achieve different political or economic goals.

To conclude, trust is an essential part of the social fabric that most of the times cannot simply be attributed to an external source, be that a technology or a successful tech company. For example, trust itself is not an issue if you can rely on a close-knit community as a basic repository of trust and confidence, as it is probably the case in smaller communities and in rural areas. However, in a large city like Bucharest where most people you meet and talk to on a daily basis do not share your world views, people turn to the online environment to find like-minded individuals who apparently share their views and understand them. People with limited digital skills and those who are relatively isolated or feel lonely, such as the older individuals in my study, find their own ways to connect with such communities, for instance, by consuming and sharing non-mainstream content via social media and regularly accessing alternative news outlets.

8. Freedom vs. restricting liberties

Freedom is a central aspect of my research. Most people I interviewed believed their democratic freedoms have been increasingly restricted, with the lockdown measures during the Covid-19 pandemic being the most evident example. Research participants admire public figures or members of the public who have refused to comply with rules they feel have been imposed in unjust or authoritarian ways. Cash objectifies ideas of freedom. For example, many research participants believe that the unrestricted circulation of cash is essential for individual autonomy, helping people avoid surveillance and control by banks, other financial institutions, and potential oppressive states. The 15-min urbanistic concept, the disappearance of cash, the EU minimum wage – and the UK's Universal Credit that is already in place in the UK, vaccines, lockdown, EU interventions – all are seen as possible deadly threats to freedom and should be resisted.

Eugen believes the time of censorship is closer. He talks extensively about censorship promoted by the EU. He is convinced that websites will be closed and even TV channels “if it will be the case.” He cites the EU legislation to combat fake news – which resulted in the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) adopted in October 2022 – as his main argument. The

Digital Services Act provides a framework for cooperation between the Commission, EU and national authorities to ensure platforms meet their obligations. But October 2022 was the time EU adopted the DSA. Some member states then took nearly two years to implement and enforce the Act within their national legislation.

Eugen explained to me that the EU used the Digital Services Act to create the grounds for a small army of censorship workers – the Fact Checkers – who together with AI read all sites and information on the internet, tag them, and then recommend the closure of those who promote Fake News. This is how he reads this initiative.

“We are reduced to the level of children who don’t know how to judge [important matters] and [instead, they are] taught by their parents how to judge (...) We won’t be able to judge with our own minds and background, but they will tell us what to think, like during communism. This worries me a lot. It will affect us all (...) It should not be called fake news, but [rather] propaganda and manipulation.” (Eugen, 41 yo)

Now, we have to agree that the EU response to Fake News is slow and pretty much ineffective. From the start, the DSA has been criticized because it does not set out the ways in which digital platforms, yet alone big platforms, should handle disinformation. Disinformation tactics change rapidly, disinformation campaigns tend to be coordinated and more localised and targeted – which requires fast and flexible responses, so tackling disinformation by regulation is seen at least as inadequate. For people like Eugen, this looks highly suspicious.

Many research participants believe the fight against ‘fake news’ is part of a larger plan. He talks about Freemasonry who has been ruling the world for centuries. Iustin tells me a detailed history of Freemasonry and how its ideas penetrated in aspects of life that we now take for granted, including science, arts, and popular culture. For example, Iustin explains how a thread of ideas that started from biologist and anthropologist Thomas Henry Huxley³ went through his nephew Julian Huxley, an important member of the British Eugenics Society,⁴ then to people like H.G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, and Yevgeny Zamyat who inspired the *Brave New World* (2007 [1932]) written by the famous English writer Aldous Leonard Huxley⁵ and a series of superheroes comic books that inspired George Lucas’ Star Wars series and a good part of the contemporary entertainment industry. Such genealogy, Iustin argues, shows that much of the Western popular

culture is not casual but is imbued with key philosophical ideas about how people should live their lives. Justin believes that these top-down ideas are powerful and imposed through both obvious and subtle mechanisms, leaving him little room to find and follow his own voice.

Eugen is more pragmatic. He argues that when some individuals thrive economically or intellectually, the Freemasons recruit them. He sees social welfare tools such as the Universal Income as mechanisms to make people, especially the vulnerable, dependent on their governments. The next step in this process, he argues, is to make people so used with this social welfare system and so dependent on it they would be easier to manipulate by their governments. For example, they would be happier to 'obey' the rules imposed by governments, such as, having a clear vaccination record and agreeing to have a chip implanted. Then, Eugen argues, cash will disappear, credit cards will disappear, 'it will be Game Over.'

"There is a slow war," he tells me. "When changes happen slowly in their societies, people do not see where they lead to. But when changes are fast, more people realize where the world leaders want to bring them. The objective is to make people poorer and poorer, which is realized by decimating the middle class. The lower classes depend on the state, while the higher classes are theirs [*ai lor*]." (Eugen, 41 yo)

Eugen and several other participants in my research believe that 'they' invest a lot of money in digitalization and in the construction of an immense, trans-national, power grid to extend the control of wider populations. A few people told me that the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (part of the EU initiative of EUR 724 billion to boost economies in the wake of Coronavirus pandemic) is kept secret because most money in this plan goes to surveillance, control, and digitalization. Many research participants tell me they have lost trust in the EU because they believe it fails to address citizens' problems and instead seeks to implement a globalist agenda aimed to control and reduce welfare. Some participants believe that such attempts are possible because there is a common practice of favoritism and cronyism inside the EU. Academic research has reported such practices, including fraud, nepotism and cronyism in EU (Shore, 2005) and fraud and corruption in the UN (Beigbeder, 2021).

Now, many people I interviewed believe the restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic were designed to impose centralized control over the

world population and to assess the level of tolerability of such measures. So, they felt the need to fight back.

“During the Covid period, when there was the protest here in University Square, I was the only one to show up among all the people I knew. All my friends said to me, ‘You’re crazy! What are you doing there?’ (...) I prepared a note [a document required by the authorities, stating the reason for leaving home during lockdown] saying I was going to see my mother in the Militari district. Then, I stayed there [at the protest] until morning. I wanted to go home at some point, but I had to stay until morning.” (Nina, 49 yo)

This is a story of Nina joining an anti-mask protest during Covid. A friend of her husband came to their house just before she was about to leave. He told them he would like to go to the meeting. Her husband told him: ‘Well, take my mad wife and go!’ But then, her husband decided to join them at the protest, although not because he shared her ‘principles and values.’ When they got to Victoria Square, where the protest started, the two men decided to stay out of the protest area. Police officers were photographing and filming everything and they preferred to stay out. They sat on a bench in front of the Natural History Museum for half an hour before heading home. Nina commented they were not brave enough to join the protest.

Nina took photos and posted them on Facebook, but they received relatively few reactions. At the protest, she only made friends with a man of her age. He was a neighbour she vaguely knew, who happened to work for the Romanian Intelligence Service. She used the word *Securitate*. He was dressed in civil clothes, probably under cover. He told her not to get out of the protest area, so she wouldn’t be fined for not respecting the lockdown. He advised her to stay at the protest and he would then drive her home after 5am in the morning. Which happened. The neighbour had his car parked very close, at the back of the University of Bucharest, and no one stopped them on their way home.

Nina is a childminder. She wakes early morning during workdays and travels by tube to a central neighborhood where the family who employed her lives. She has to be there at 7:15 sharp, to prepare their two children for school and walk them to school. Nina then does some domestic chores, including washing, ironing and sometimes cooking something light. She is always free for at least a couple of hours before 1:30pm when she has

to collect the two kids from school. Nina then has lunch with the kids, supervises their homework, and cleans after them. She usually finishes work before 5pm, when one of the parents comes home. She then takes the tube back home and gets there around 6pm. Nina finds her routine rather relaxed and her work undemanding. She is free for a few hours during work, which is not enough to attend personal chores in the center of the city where there are no services or shops she would need. Therefore, she spends most of this free time browsing her smartphone. She mainly uses the news feed recommended by Google and Facebook. But then, she does her own research on the matters that intrigue her. On returning home, Nina knows so many things about what has happened during the day. But she has no one to discuss the 'true' reasons behind the news. Her husband is not interested in her claims that all point to the declining state of the world. So, she turns her TV on and watches news and live debates on several TV channels, especially non-mainstream ones. She also follows ad-hoc live streams on important topics, such as the wars in Ukraine, in Israel and Palestine, controversies around climate change, and the big hoax of electric vehicles. Again, her husband is not interested. He watches films and other commercial programmes in the other room of their flat. They do not have children, and most of her energy goes into this constant effort to dig out the truth about the world we live in.

The two stories presented in this section point to a deep sense of freedom that almost all research participants crave in different ways. It is not an absolute craving for freedom, but rather, as anthropologist Johannes Fabian (1998) describes, as 'moments of freedom' that can dialectically appear as part of more popular political praxis. Reflecting on the way people from mining towns in southeast Democratic Republic of Congo understood and engaged with 'popular culture' between the 1960s and 1980s, Fabian suggests that popular culture is more a praxis than a system (1998: 32). This praxis consists not only of a whole set of beliefs and practices but also of an assemblage of discursive strategies that sometimes conflict with each other. Popular practices and discursive strategies often oppose both elitist and hierarchical thinking and integrative models of culture (1998: 33).

Indeed, all my research participants agree in different ways that mainstream media is dominated by elite globalist groups attempting to impose their cultural and political agenda. Participants' quest for freedom should be seen as key moments to express their opposition to what they perceive as assertive attempts to impose models of culture they see unfit,

misleading, and dangerous. Some of my research informants believe the effects of the restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic were not that bad in Romania simply because Romanians are ‘backwards,’ ‘know how to get by,’ and that ‘laws do not function like they do in Germany.’ For example, some people view the relatively underdeveloped transport infrastructure in Romania, especially the lack of major highways, as a positive aspect. Slow and narrow roads hinder the spread of dangerous globalist ideas. The slow adoption of globalist ideas gives Romanians a certain autonomy and more time to resist, and hopefully fight back against, restrictions on personal liberties.

9. Rationality and coherence

A few months into my field research I found myself often struggling to follow the logical flow of my research participants. Almost every time they tried to explain why they believed in different non-mainstream explanations, I felt I can only follow them up to a point. Then, their explanations seemed to not make sense anymore. I was expecting some sort of logical flow, but, from a certain point onward, I could detect a break in the arguments presented. I was expecting a coherent flow of arguments. But most participants gave me a large number of arguments that seemed disjointed one from another. People would jump from one train of thought to another without any apparent relation between the two, no matter how much I tried to follow. This was a pattern that kept repeating itself in different ways.

This points to a classical debate in anthropology about alternative forms of reasoning – the expectation that people can reason in ways that our own reason finds unreasonable. In a famous essay on rationality and coherence, Peter Winch (1964) argued that we need to avoid using science and our understanding of objective reality as a benchmark to understand other beliefs and practices. His critique was actually mainly addressed to Evans-Pritchard ([1937] 1976), and to his understanding of witchcraft among the Zande in South Sudan. Evans-Pritchard understood the system of belief as a ‘closed system,’ meaning that believers cannot step outside this system of thought and be agnostic.

Instead, Winch argues that this kind of explanation is an epistemological matter related to very concrete forms of exercising power and authority – namely colonial power. Winch observes that since “we do not initially

have a category that looks at all like the Zande category of magic," and because it is 'we' who want to understand the Zande category, it should be us to extend our understanding to make room for the Zande category, rather than insisting to see this category "in terms of our own ready-made distinction between science and non-science" (1964: 319).

In a recent essay, Stanley J. Tambiah argues that we should look at ritual acts not in the idiom of 'Western science' and 'rationality' but in terms of convention and normative judgement, and as valid solutions to existential problems and intellectual puzzles.

Following this line of thought, I suggest that a similar clash happens within the 'West' itself, when, for example, rationality is often seen at odds with other modes of thinking and living. What is often seen as 'conspiracy' can be an accessible way to explain the inaccessible, or simply a social commentary on a central authority that is seen distant and exclusive.

In a thoughtful ethnography of alien abductions and UFO experiences, anthropologist Susan Lepselter (2016) describes how people come to believe in what most of us would dismiss as 'weird' stuff. Lepselter explores the stories and experiences of UFO believers and the associated aspects, including stories of alien abductions, military experiments, government secrets, and popular conspiracies, to account for the feeling and structure of the American uncanny. This sentiment has nationalist accents and is characterized by a permanent oscillation between two opposed feelings: freedom and captivity.

Lepselter uses the term 'resonance' to account for the way different signs and uncanny discourses overlap or seem to complete each other. Resonance is not a repetition or a confirmation, but rather "it's something that strikes a chord, that inexplicably rings true" (2016: 4). Resonance is the mechanism that reassures people that all the different pieces of information and signs compose a story that makes sense.

Non-mainstream, 'conspiratorial' explanations, I suggest, create a similar sense of familiarity with something that is far from familiar, ultimately with that version of 'truth' that is revealed only to those who make an effort to decipher it and connect with like-minded people in order to reveal and protect it. For most research participants, the feeling of being on the verge of discovering the ultimate secrets of all evils and the eagerness to share this knowledge whenever possible seem to outweigh the importance of maintaining a rational flow of thought. Feelings are deeply personal but also socially shared within safe circles. Research participants often view shared feelings as reassuring and comforting in the face of

massive disinformation and conflicting claims. In contrast, they believe that rationality can be easily deceived, misinformed, and misdirected.

A similar account can be found in the way Buryat villagers explained the devastation of the Buddhist temple by the Soviet Russia in the 1930s. Anthropologist Caroline Humphrey (2003) accounts that Buryat villagers saw the destruction of the temple and the larger campaign of terror they witnessed in sacred terms. Buryat villagers believed that Stalin was the third and the last reincarnation of the Blue Elephant, who according to the legend, had built a Buddhist pagoda in ancient times in India. In a sinful access of rage towards the high lama, the Blue Elephant vowed to destroy Buddhism three times in its future rebirths. Humphrey describes how Buryat Buddhists have always read the historical events of their lifetime through the Buddhist lens of reincarnation beliefs rather than through the Soviet and then post-Soviet values. Therefore, she suggests that Buryat found themselves caught in the “seemingly objective and transparent, yet deeply irrational, persecutions” (Humphrey 2003: 174) of the Soviet Communist Party that considered local people as primitive and imbued with superstitious beliefs. In consequence, Buryat people did not embrace the bright and modernist narrative of the Communist Party, but “[r]ather they reproblematicize[d] through metaphor and allegory the issue of what it is to be an actor in history understood metahistorically” (Humphrey 2003: 174).

10. Transparency and oversaturation in a post-socialist context

Anthropologists remarked that throughout history, during periods of oversaturation in terms of diagnoses of social change, people tend to turn to conspiratorial thinking. For example, in the United States at the end of the 19th century numerous conspiracies emerged in response to assassinations, general elections, and scientific discoveries (e.g. McKenzie-McHarg 2018). In Europe, the end of 19th century saw an overabundance of descriptions, diagnoses, and analyses of social change that led to multiple possible explanations of the same events (Marcus 1999: 4). George Marcus argues that overwhelming information combined with abrupt changes can lead to moral panics and ‘paranoid styles.’ Such genres can range from extreme and violent responses to social change to professionalized rhetoric of ‘paranoia within reason’ (1999: 8). Caroline Humphrey argues that post-socialist countries experienced

an oversaturation of explanations for the abrupt social and economic decline and the emerging volatile state, contrasting with the certainties of the socialist era (2003: 183).

Another issue is accountability. In many post-totalitarian regimes, people are nostalgic about the possibility to localize blame, such as in hereditary rule or single-party systems (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003: 294). In contrast, in post-totalitarian, multi-party regimes, many people are baffled by the fact that blame is far too generalized, difficult to identify, and relatively easy to avoid. In his ethnography of the politics of memory in Germany, anthropologist Dominic Boyer argues that conspiracy theories serve as a therapeutic mode of protecting a positive sense of selfhood in the shadow of a dread historical burden (2006: 332), in a context long associated with the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust.

Anthropologists Susan Harding and Kathleen Stewart suggest that conspiracy theories can be seen as a 'metacultural discourse' that dwells on "fundamental, abstract dilemmas of ideal and real, good and evil, creation and destruction, hope and dejection, purity and pollution, mystery and minutiae" (2003: 282) with the aim to actively interrogate the state of the world in search of its cures. Anthropologists Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff suggest that conspiracy is rooted in the problem of transparency (2003: 288). They follow Žižek's observation that Western thought has been obsessed with transparency, which has been a problem in modern times characterized by numerous technical breakthrough and social and political changes. The problem rests in the fact that with each change, the pattern of illumination changes, which casts new shadows on many aspects around us. These new shadows intrigue and require explanation. But explanation is not always easy to offer and to accept. In this context, Comaroff and Comaroff argue that we live a contradictory era of "significant historical discontinuities amid the continuities" (2003: 190), which leads to a tide of claims to recognize the true meaning of multiple occurring events. Harry West and Todd Sanders follow this line of thought, suggesting that contemporary conspiracy theories represent the ways in which ordinary people manage "the relationship of the visible and the invisible, the knowable and the unknowable" (2003: 7) while sanctioning those in power for their lack of transparency and comprehensible explanations.

We have seen that in Romania, people often feel that much of what is promoted as transparent is actually opaque and not unintelligible, sometimes due to an overload of paradoxical information. For example,

the impressive construction of the HAARP offers more shadows than explanations, despite the vast literature existing on the internet. The problem seems to be rooted in the way partial and restricted knowledge interacts with a form of social imagination fueled by a strong desire to access information that is perceived as essential yet concealed. The persistent feeling that mainstream forces continuously deny and obscure the truth often leads to frustration and overflow into ad-hoc communities and tense conversations. Individuals who suspect something is false or misleading organize themselves in online communities to work out the truth or be closer to it. Different actors then exploit this urge to question the mainstream and look for alternative answers for political, ideological, or economic gains.

11. Final remarks

This essay explores different ways in which people try to make sense of the contradictions and paradoxes in their lives. One typical approach is to seek out and engage with alternative narratives. Throughout this process, people tend to gradually lose trust in formal authority and in what they perceive as its agents, including life partners, siblings, children, neighbours, and close friends. As a result, they turn to rely on their own senses and ‘think with their own minds,’ as many participants described. But we have seen that this is not an individual cognitive process that is somehow socially isolated. Rather, ‘this mind’ is distributed throughout society and converges within various social communities that share a common sense of annoyance and disappointment with the current political economy. In this process, they view ‘fake news’ as merely a tool used by those in power and mainstream media use to obscure the truth. While disinformation is something they have to live with, many feel they can immunize themselves against it as long as they do not ‘go with the sheep’ and continue to ‘think with their own minds.’

Most research participants accuse the Romanian state of being chaotic, weak, and incoherent in designing and implementing public policies and, above all, completely subordinated to Western powers, especially the ‘Americans.’ This narrative arises from the juxtaposition of two ideals. The first ideal is represented by Socialist Romania when the state was viewed as strong, imposing discipline, and respected internationally.

The second ideal is represented by a set of ideas about what Romania could have become after the collapse of communism, had it not been the malevolent influence from the West – if Romania had known how ‘to stand on its own feet,’ as one man in his 70s noted. Most research participants have proposed solutions for escaping the current impasse, including increasing budgets for education and healthcare, restricting emigration and immigration, stopping the sale of agricultural land to foreign investors, providing state funding for Romanian industry, and declaring neutrality in the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The problem lies in the fact that people find it difficult to attain both types of ideals, and many feel too marginal and weak to even attempt to do so. This results in a clear and sometimes violent rupture with the mainstream political economy of the state and its communication. As a result, people feel entitled to withdraw from close relationships that do not share their radical views and look for alternative communities and actions.

There are a few ways in which disenfranchised people manifest their opposition to mainstream ideas, which represent the key takeaways of this study. First, people accused of upholding conspiracy theories simplify complexity and attempt to resist the dominant and celebrated liberal transparency that they perceive as overwhelming, flawed, and opaque.

Second, people attempt to piece together their own alternative puzzles using the fragments they have at hand. They rely on one or a few widely shared meta-theories, to which they attach a constant stream of smaller pieces of alternative information. In doing so, they create both online and offline communities based on a shared search for a deeper, concealed ‘truth.’ The shared trust in alternative theories is critical to this process.

Third, many point in different ways to the difficult transition from socialism to a free market in Romania, where they struggled to connect with the dominant discourses and lifestyles. The free market promises fulfillment but requires constant effort to align oneself with its principles. However, most of the research participants feel they have fallen through the cracks of this transition—many feel lonely, marginalized, and unheard. As a result, they create alternative hierarchies of authority and retreat from the existing social relations that challenge these hierarchies. The sense of disenfranchisement is particularly strong for those who were once at the center of public life during socialism.

Fourth, people tend to heavily blame those who have been promoting – they would say imposing – dangerous changes. They view mainstream politicians and the media as the main promoters of such changes. They

fear the worst, believing global conspiracies are just around the corner. On the other hand, new politicians who promise to free people from the burdens of constantly being misled quickly gain popularity and support.

Finally, most people believe that the current world order is about to collapse, and everyone will feel it someday, despite isolated efforts to challenge the dominant political economy. People feel angst and suspicion because powerful forces manage to keep their views on the margins of society. They avoid discussing their feelings and actions with close family and friends who do not share their views, which deepens their sense of isolation and sometimes anger. They feel marginalized and predict that we will all be marginalized soon, at which point we will understand how they feel.

Endnotes

- ¹ At the time, the average monthly salary in Macedonia was less than USD 400.
- ² Ionosphere begins at about 50 kilometers above the Earth's surface and contains atoms and molecules that are ionized by the Sun's ultraviolet light.
- ³ Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–1895) was a biologist and anthropologist and one of the biggest supporters of Charles Darwin's evolutionism.
- ⁴ Julian Huxley was the vice-president of the British Eugenics Society between 1937–1944 and its President between 1959–1962.
- ⁵ Aldous Leonard Huxley (1894–1963) was a famous English writer and social satirist who was nominated nine times for the Nobel prize in literature.

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COMING FROM RUSSIA, BECOMING A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL: POLITICS, EDUCATION AND STATE PUBLIC SCHOOL FOR GIRLS IN MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY WALLACHIA*

Nicoleta Roman

Abstract

Foreign teachers are transnational intercultural educators that participate in shaping educational systems in the receiving countries. This study explores the immersion of foreign female teachers into local structures and communities in Wallachia, a principality in the southern part of present-day Romania. It discusses the state school for girls established in Bucharest in mid-nineteenth century and its principals, two Russian ladies. The paper argues for entanglements between politics and education, its first principals being embedded in Russian imperial policies and practices, and their presence being both an act of power and a negotiation with the Romanian local elites. Ultimately it demonstrates the attempt through such educational institutions to transform the principality of Wallachia in a client state and to forge a similar bourgeois elite.

Keywords: education, politics, Russia, Wallachia, Romania, secondary schools for girls, client states

1. Introduction

The organisation of the [Romanian] Principalities is a necessary issue for the wellbeing of some neighbouring regions of our empire and also as a measure that will tighten the foundation of our political influence over the Orient. (General Pavel Kiseleff to Tsar Nicholas I in 1831)

The lines written by General Pavel Kiseleff to Tsar Nicholas I in 1831 as newly appointed governor of the Romanian Principalities of Moldavia

* The author gratefully thanks to James Christian Brown for the translation of the text.

and Wallachia represent a colonial perspective on these territories that had just entered under the protection of the Russian Empire. They also highlight a continuation in the Russian imperial geopolitical strategy of expansion to the detriment of the Ottoman Empire, here labeled as the Orient. The 'tightening' refers to what had already been done up to that moment through previous military confrontations and diplomatic treaties. This benevolent mask that the Russians take hides a superior and authoritarian perspective on the principalities that would at times be at odds with the tendencies in European politics, more liberal and democratic by the mid-nineteenth century.

The end of the premodern age brought important geopolitical changes which would be mirrored at the societal level. The reign of Peter the Great is perceived in historiography as the moment when Russia started to become more visible politically and to empower itself through the use of Western European knowledge and specialists. His aim was to transform Russia into an empire that would stand on an equal footing with those already in existence. However, in the eighteenth century the great number of Austro-Russian-Turkish wars shows the instability of the region, the inter-imperial rivalry, and the reluctance to accept Russia as a power on the imperial arena. Russia realized that it could not enter into such a dialogue, especially with the West, other than through military actions. Within this context, in strategic terms, the emergence of imperial Russia as a power could be seen in 'its expansion on a southerly axis from the Rivers Dniester and Bug in the quest to build a Black Sea littoral extension of the Russian Eurasian Europe' (Wess Mitchell 2018, 36). This meant a continuous conflict with both the Austrian and the Ottoman Empires, and with the national aims of the natives; in our case, the Romanians. In the nineteenth century, Western Europe (mainly France and Britain) gave diplomatic assistance to the emancipation of the nationalities in order to avoid a power imbalance in South-eastern Europe. Within this geopolitical clash of imperial agendas I analyse the aim of Russia to transform Wallachia into a client state and the resistance of the Western-educated native bourgeoisie in connection with the establishment of state education for girls.

As the title shows, the present paper brings into discussion the manner in which the school principals were chosen, their connection with Russia and local elite that was favourable to this neighbour from the Eastern border. The paper does not refer to curricula, pupils or the school building – separate topics that need an analysis for themselves – but stays focused on the profile of the school principals. As the state school

for girls was aimed at in 1832 it is relevant to say why it was established only twenty years later, in 1852. The main reason is that while there was a Russophile elite in Wallachia, there was also an opposition to it.

2. Navigating through neighbouring imperial agendas: Wallachia in the middle of the nineteenth century and the road towards decolonization

In the eighteenth century, Russia struggled to impose itself as a power in Southeastern Europe and temporarily succeeded in doing so by instrumentalizing the role of the Orthodox faith. Romanians, Serbs, Greeks, and others in the region shared the same Orthodox faith as the Russians and in this commonality lay the opportunity to interfere in other empires' internal policies. Through the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca (1774), the Russian Empire acquired access to the Black Sea and the right of protection over Christians in the Ottoman Empire, including those of Wallachia. This overlapped with its interest in regional influence (similar to that of the Austrian Empire), which can be traced in the establishment of consulates. Russia opened a consulate in Wallachia in 1781, and in Austria in 1783. France (1797) and Britain (1803) followed. Following the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), Wallachia and Moldavia came under the umbrella of a Russian protectorate. This meant that the principalities were under a dual political and administrative supervision (Ottoman and Russian).

The government of Russian general Pavel Kiseleff issued the first laws serving as constitutions in the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, the *Regulamente Organice* (Organic Statutes) of 1831/2. These were publicly presented as reforming acts and issued after discussions between the Romanian elite, the representatives of the Church, and the Russians, and with the approval of the Ottomans. After these documents were adopted by the two Romanian Principalities came the surprise: additional acts through which Russia could intervene in the internal affairs of these Ottoman provinces. While in Moldavia the additional act was accepted, this idea was highly contested in Wallachia (Mihuț 2023).

Three major events need to be highlighted as they represent a public form of protest against the interference of Russia in the internal affairs of Wallachia – and by extension – of those of the Ottoman Empire. We mention them to (re)familiarize the reader with the local actors and their struggle, part of their leaders being cultural figures.

The first is the creation by Ion Cămpineanu (1798-1863) of the *National* party (Partida Națională), an ancestor of today National Liberal Party in Romania. In November 1838, two documents were issued publicly by Cămpineanu and his group: *Act de unire și independentă* and *Osebitul act de numire a suveranului rumânilor*. Together these acts can be considered an alternative constitution to the *Organic Statute* issued under Russian pressure. Cămpineanu went to Constantinople, Paris, and London to seek diplomatic help but with no success. On his way back to Wallachia, he was arrested in Transylvania by the Austrian imperial authorities (as they collaborated with the Russians and the Ottomans) and imprisoned in Wallachian monasteries (Mărgineni, Plumbuita) to be re-educated. After two years of imprisonment, he was released in 1841, forced to retract and to stay away from politics. However, his actions inspired others. (For a monograph see Vladut 1973.)

The second, coming in response to Cămpineanu's action, was the so-called 'conspiracy' of Dimitrie (Mitiță) Filipescu (1808-1843) in 1840. A Wallachian prosecutor, with a doctorate in law, he established a secret society through which he campaigned for the creation of a democratic republic, for independence, and for the equality of people in front of the justice system. He was joined in this society by such cultural figures as Nicolae Bălcescu (1819-1852) and Cezar Bolliac (1813-1881). Filipescu was also arrested and imprisoned in a Wallachian monastery (Snagov), where he died at 35 years of age (in 1843).

The third was the Revolution of 1848, led by young Romanian intellectuals educated in Western Europe, who admired Cămpineanu's actions and ideas of liberty and equality among citizens and looked for a detachment from foreign intervention in internal political affairs. The connection between these anti-Russian movements (and others) can clearly be seen in the Islaz Proclamation (9 June, 1848), the political and social programme of the Wallachian forty-eighters. Its 22 points can be resumed to the following ideas:

- independence of the administration and legislature.
- separation of powers.
- a Romanian country representative at Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, the suzerain power.
- equal rights of the people.
- emancipation of Jews (Israelites) and political equality of all citizens irrespective of religion.

- emancipation of Gypsy (Roma) slaves of the State, the Church, and individuals
- equal instruction for all Romanians of both sexes.
- freedom of the press.
- election of a responsible Ruling Prince (Ro. *domnitor*) for a period of five years.
- creation of a system of prisons and a national guard.
- land reform.

These points from the Wallachian 1848 programme show the discrepancy between the reality and the proclaimed reforms introduced by the Russians through the *Organic Statute*. In fact, the suzerain and protective imperial powers were not interested in solving the social and political issues and in dismantling the entanglements that were in force between the legislative, administrative, and executive branches.

The burning of the *Organic Statutes* in the centre of Bucharest on 25 September 1848, during the Revolution of that year, a symbolic act by which the younger generation of intellectuals sought an end to Russian political influence and the privileges acquired by the elite that this influence promoted, reflects the constraints on Romanian society under the Russian protectorate. The gesture showed a distancing from the past and a resistance towards a *Russophile party* (to use a term from the period) in the presence of the people gathered in the square and a Church represented by the metropolitan looking down from a balcony.

While in the neighbouring principality of Moldavia, the Revolution of '48 lasted only a few days before being rapidly crushed on the orders of the Russophile ruling prince, Mihail Sturdza, in Wallachia the event went on for longer. This was due partly to the history of anti-Russian movements recalled here and to the collaboration of the Church and the army (members of which formed part of the provisional government),¹ partly due to good organization, and, not least, also due to connections with similar movements in the Austrian Empire. The Romanian forty-eighters of Wallachia conceived federalist projects, projects that would keep them in the empires, but would change the centres of power and eliminate the regional political influence of Russia, placing them under the protection either of Austria, of Prussia, or of Turkey. These proposals and negotiations led nowhere, as the imperial centres mentioned were not yet ready to solve the problem of nationalities and to stand up to a conflict with

Russia. Consequently, as a final response to the scale of the forty-eighter movements, the three neighbouring empires collaborated in suppressing them.

Nevertheless, the 1848 revolution brought to light the extent of Russian interference in the affairs of the neighbouring imperial provinces. In exchange for armed assistance offered to the Austrians and the Turks, Russia acquired even greater understanding on their part, and the ruling princes subsequently nominated in Wallachia belonged to the *Russophile Party*. When Russia exceeded the limits tacitly agreed in international politics regarding regional spheres of influence and occupied the territory of the Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, one of the reasons for the outbreak of the Crimean War, the European powers no longer showed the same understanding as in the case of the 1848 revolutions. The defeat of Russia in this war was the beginning of the end of its political influence and, at the same time, marked the return of the exiled forty-eighters and a new working political concept: the *collective guarantee* of the European powers with regard to the Romanian principalities. A nuance is necessary. In spite of these political changes that were ultimately beneficial for the course of events in Wallachia, Russia remained a threat at its border. Conscious of all this, the Romanian elite sought a permanent equilibrium in foreign policy and also in relation to various internal groupings. It is significant that the founding of a girls' school under state patronage and in a time when the geopolitical context was dominated by Russia took place after the 1848 Revolution and was the manifestation of an act of power and of negotiation with the local elite. The alternation between moments of confrontation, persecutions, and violence with times of passive benevolence was a feature that distinguished Russian policy towards the 'nationality' problem in its sphere of influence (Weeks 2006, 27).

This geopolitical context is important because there are entanglements with the cultural and educational arenas in Wallachia. From the forty-eighters a significant number were schoolteachers and professors (for an analysis see Pârnuță 1976) and their leaders (Nicolae Bălcescu, Ioan Maiorescu, Ion Heliade Rădulescu etc.) were cultural figures.

3. Politics influences education: discussions, debates, postponements. Re-taking the project of the State School for Girls

The quotation with which I started this paper shows the intentions the Russian Empire had in the Romanian principalities. These intentions were known to the Romanian elite, both old and young, of boyar origin or from the emerging bourgeoisie; and each reacted according to their class interests. An element of continuity in Russian imperial policy towards their newly acquired provinces was the desire to maintain the native language in education and administration together with the privileges of the local elite and thus create loyalties that could be beneficial for the imperial agenda. This strategy can be traced back to Peter the Great and his conquest of the Baltic provinces and the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth during Catherine the Great's reign (Weeks 2006, 29-30). An important link between Poles and Romanians (among others) existed that justified their collaboration against the Russian Empire. Adam Jerzy Czartoryski (1770-1861), after being a foreign minister and a chairman of the Council of the Russian Empire (1804-1806), became involved in the Polish national movement and his Polish exile organisation were in contact with the similar anti-Russian movements in Wallachia and Moldavia. In 1838 his envoy helped Câmpineanu draw up a national programme 'that included unification of Moldavia and Wallachia under a hereditary monarchy, independence from the Ottoman Empire, and an end to interference by the Russian protectorate' (Maier 2008, 191). The Polish emigres in Paris also collaborated with the Serbs on the same lines. This understanding between Poles, Serbs, and Romanians was due to the fact that besides being partitioned, Poland also knew the extent of Russian censorship and interference in its internal affairs. In 1832 'Polish autonomy was replaced by an "organic statute" emphasizing the territory's status as a part of the Russian Empire' (Weeks, 34). Thus, these laws (Organic Statutes) became legislative acts through which the Russians advanced the colonization process.

Although the existence of a school for girls under state patronage was provided for in the *Organic Statute* introduced in Wallachia by Russia in 1832, during its protectorate, its achievement was delayed by the political events mentioned above. They had consequences in the field of education, as the young generation of Romanian intellectuals, formed in Western capitals (Paris, Vienna, Berlin), saw in Russia's policy a form of cultural expansion aimed at holding back a national emancipation

that would be to its disadvantage. Among those who participated in the drafting of the 48-er programme (the *Islaz Proclamation*), which in principle favoured the abolition of class privileges, Ioan Maiorescu and Nicolae Bălcescu, both the products of European university centres, played a role in the denunciation of the Russian danger at the level of education: two leading Romanian 48-ers, one moderate and the other radical, the former coming from the Austrian Empire to Wallachia and the other a native of the principality, but both aware of imperial realities through their travels and studies. Both considered that in fact, Russia did not wish for a democratization of education in the true sense of the word. Ioan Maiorescu had raised the issue as early as 1838 through articles published in the gazette of Braşov, over the border in the Austrian Empire, but he was quickly dismissed from his post and blackmailed into retraction on the basis of his situation as an immigrant from Transylvania; if he wanted to be reintegrated in the teaching profession in Wallachia and to have an income with which to maintain his family, he had no choice. Having witnessed what had happened to Ion Câmpineanu and the masked censorship that existed in Wallachia, Maiorescu complied (Roman 2023).

The Romanians were learning, under pressure, to keep quiet and to learn to live, one way or another, with the Russians, who had the first say in the imposition of decisions in relation to the suzerain power, Turkey, which was in a process of ‘reinvention’ of its position on the international political scene: a reinvention that was only partial, and unsuccessful, given that the other powers would come to describe it as the ‘sick man of Europe’.

Within these socio-political contexts that maintained a conflictual relationship between national and imperial agendas, an interesting development took place in Wallachia: private schools for girls emerged and developed both in the capital and in the provinces before the actual establishment of the Bucharest state school. The rejection of the additional act to the Organic Statute, the Romanian elite’s awareness of the colonizing aim of Russia through education, and the existence of an embryonic culture of public political resistance made possible such an outcome. To these factors should be added the mobility of foreign women who saw in private schools a business or a commercial venture that could empower them on the educational labour market. To keep these schools running meant to remain competitive, to collaborate with the funding bodies, and to find strategies to remain relevant for the receiving community. For these women, as teachers and especially as principals, this could be achieved only through developing managerial skills and proving their

competence in terms of knowledge in different areas (foreign languages, mathematics, geography and history, etc.). French was the language of the elite that showed that a young lady was refined in manners and properly educated, ready to make her debut in society. But to teach it to the local people in an institution one also had to know basic Romanian, prove adaptability to local norms, and respond to parents' demands and needs. Those disciplines were part of the curricula.

While the establishment of the state school for girls in Bucharest was postponed until 1852, the locals used the model from the *Organic Statute* to empower themselves and create similar institutions even in the counties. In Craiova, one of the largest cities in Wallachia, we find the example of the Lazaro-Otetelesanu school for girls. Between 1837 and 1864, this private school had at least five principals, of different nationalities and cultural backgrounds: Mrs. Grulie; Wilhelmina Dahlen, a German lady; Italian-born Marietta Massenza; and finally French teachers Marie Villeneuve and Antonine Bergman (née Colet, and married in Craiova to a Romanian teacher) (Roman 2017, 375). Across the Romanian principality of Wallachia, such private schools for girls flourished although they had a more or less ephemeral existence. They experienced a fluctuation in the number of pupils. One could have – as the example of Caroline Kuhn's school shows – nine pupils in 1849 while in 1854 to reach twenty-six (Roman 2020, 47). These establishments depended on the geopolitical and economic stability of the region and on the skills of the headmistress.

The main aim of these schools was to provide girls with the necessary knowledge to become good mothers and good citizens (Alpern Engel 1983, 52) as the morality of women was linked to the 'foundation of social cohesion' in the community and in the society at large (Michaud 2000, 121). Morality is defined through religion and through a tacit code of ethics that would eventually transform a young lady into a virtuous and a respectable woman. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman argues that 'a pervasive 'anti-sensualism'' characterized the Victorian age and the Western bourgeois model of femininity. In this sense, 'virtue was a quality men should strive for, but many writers considered it the defining essence of femininity. Belief in a coherent female nature produced the familiar binary of angel and whore: either a woman was wholly pure or she was another being altogether' (Rosenman 2013, 49). Things were not so simple and the differentiation 'between the public and the private spheres was consistently contested throughout the [nineteenth] century' (Rosenman 2013, 50). Women had (limited) access to public roles and in

these situations they had to detach from personal and family matters and remark themselves in society through their own skills and capabilities. This is how a headmistress of a state school for girls was supposed to be. However, in a Romanian society marked by geopolitical and economic instability, by the constraints coming from the suzerain and the protective powers (the Ottoman and the Russian Empires) and with still an incipient native bourgeoisie, the above-mentioned model was a utopia. If for men the appointment to high public offices was a negotiation between various boyar groupings, the two above-mentioned powers and in connection with prestige, wealth, class and political loyalty, things should not be expected to be different for women.

Although egalitarian education programmes had existed since the seventeenth century and in Wallachia there was a reinforcement of the idea through the immigration of intellectuals of the 'Transylvanian School', the Wallachian 1848 revolution highlighted it. All the 1848 revolutions in Europe had in their programmes the demand for an egalitarian education as such an education 'was understood as an important instrument in national emancipation and the forming of a collective identity'. However, imperial agendas did not agree with such an aim without a sociopolitical control of it (Tenorth 2008, 738). Irrespective of the situation, the 1848 moment should be understood as a start in political activism for women in France (Schor 2022), a political model for young Romanian intellectuals and their families. Romanian forty-eighters considered that they had multiple identities and that one could have Romanian national consciousness while at the same time being both an Ottoman subject and a European (Morris 2021).

With the 1848 Revolution defeated, its leaders and influential participants either exiled or under internal surveillance, Russia acquired an even greater influence in the region thanks to the military aid it had given to the Ottoman Empire. The first ruling prince after 1849 appointed from Constantinople with the Tsar's approval, was Barbu D. Știrbei, a Russophile who had been General Pavel Kiseleff's secretary at the time of the drafting of the *Organic Statute*, a skilled player on the political stage. Until 1851, he stood up to dual Turkish-Russian supervision, with the presence of Ottoman and Russian armies on Wallachian territory, and tried to revive a local economy that had been badly hit by armed conflict. It was only in 1851 that he re-opened the discussion, abandoned for almost twenty years, of a school for girls, and requested a report on the subject from the education ministry of the time (*Eforia Școlilor*, the

Ephorate of Schools). In its report to the ruler, the institution recognized that such a school, though projected in 1832, had neither been established then nor on the occasion of the reorganization of public instruction in 1847. It is true that in 1847, a step forward had been taken, and it had been decided that the Church, using the income of the monastery of St. Spyridon New in Bucharest, would provide almost half the funding and a place (or a room) in the yard of the monastery's church (ANIC, *Ministerul Cultelor si Instructiunii Publice*, 154/1851, f. 33). Without specifying the reasons for the stopping of the project for a state girls' school, the Ephorate suggested that the idea should be taken up again, as 'the founding of a girls' school is a need of the highest importance.' As the economy was still in a poor state, the budget was reduced, and such a school could not be 'maintained at the expense of the state'; nor would it be possible to fund 100 scholarships, as had initially been intended, but only twenty. The solution was partial funding by the Church (also from the income of the monastery of St. Spyridon New) and the finding of a person 'who will have given evidence of their capability and morality by maintaining such an establishment in the capital for a long time.' Here we have the three selection criteria of the Ephorate of Schools: administrative and pedagogical abilities, morality, and experience in running a private school (or after the French term, a *pensionnat*).

4. Choosing the school principals for the state girls' school in Bucharest

4.1. The first school principal, by invitation on the part of the state

The choice had to be made from among the staff of the *pensionnats* known in Bucharest at the time. The Ephorate recommended a name that fulfilled the three criteria and was already known in elite circles and even to Prince Știrbei: the countess of Grand-Pré (ANIC, *Ministerul Cultelor si Instructiunii Publice*, 154/1851, f. 4). An impoverished but well-educated aristocrat, of French origin, with very good results in Bucharest—a *pensionnat* with ten stipendiaries—, she was the ideal that was sought (no one with better qualities was known) and her appointment would have constituted a real step towards Europeanization in education. However, the recommendation was rejected and the person chosen was Anna Iacobson, who was invited by the state to become the headmistress

of the state *pensionnat* in the summer of 1852. Why her? A glance at the above-mentioned context and at Mrs Iacobson's family history provides the answer. In 1852, Russia was at the height of its geopolitical influence and regional expansion, and Prince Barbu Știrbei sought to create at state level an elite who would correspond to the expectations of the more powerful of his 'supervisors'. He had to be prudent if he was to keep his position. Anna Iacobson, née Karpov (1798-1878) was the widow of Arnold Iacobson, the colonel (Russian rank of *polcovnic*, cf. Cernovodeanu & Gavrilă 2002, 106) attached to the occupation force and a former close associate of Kiseleff's: it was under his command that the outlaw Tunsul had been caught and he had also played a part in the suppression of the Brăila revolt (Potra 1990, 77). Unknown sources mention that she had an involvement in the 1848 revolution (Iorga, p. 77). Interestingly, one of the two sons of the Iacobsons, Victor, would be secretary to the Russian Diplomatic Agency (Bezviconi 1972, 19-9). Thus, we have a long-term family connection with Russia.

Another influential family of officers that came from Russia, the Blaremberts, had powerful ties in the capital of the empire, but also in Ukraine and Finland. Jean Blarembert (1772-1831) was a state counsellor in Russia while his brother, Constantin (?-1859), was a general and a supervisor at the imperial palace in Tsarkoe Selo. All Jean Blarembert's children (two sons and four daughters) were born in Odessa and made important matrimonial alliances in Romanian, French, and Russian families (Sturdza 2004). After the death of Jean Blarembert, Constantin became the head of the extended family (Opaschi 2005, p. 121). Jean's son, Vladimir Blarembert (1811-1846), was a commanding officer in the Russian army that occupied Wallachia, but he had fallen into disgrace for frequenting Romanians who sought emancipation like the Filipescus and their conspiracy of 1840 (Opaschi 2005, p. 125). From being adjutant to the ruling prince of the time, he was reduced to a mere clerk.

These two Russian families are important for the present study as the person selected for the post of school principal had to come from a family of Russian origin who enjoyed a certain prestige in the eyes of the Russian former occupiers, who had left in 1851. Iacobson met this criterion that could not be stated publicly.

Prince Barbu D. Știrbei decided on 27 August 1852 that the headmistress post should go to Mrs Anna Iacobson. Works on the construction of the premises had failed—they had been started in the yard of the Church of Saint Spyridon New, but had subsided because of the

unsuitable ground—so the state rented for three years the former house of Manuc Bey, then the property of a merchant. On 12 November 1852, the Princely Pensionnat for Young Ladies, which the Gazette announced was under the direction mentioned above and ‘situated on the road of the Outside Market in the house that is called Manuc’s.’ (*Vestitorul Romanesc*, no. 90/1852, p. 357; ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor si Instructiunii Publice, 288/1851; Radulescu-Pogoneanu 1934, 705). The pensionnat operated with interruptions—because of the outbreak of the Crimean War (1853-1856)—until 1857. Anna Iacobson was active in running it and advanced money from her own funds until the state refunded expenses. When the war ended, late in 1856, she presented her resignation from the post of school principal, citing family reasons (ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor si Instructiunii Publice, 146/1857, f. 14-15; Radulescu-Pogoneanu 1934, 723). Her resignation coincided with a reduction in Russian influence in the region and the appointment of a new ruler of Wallachia, approved by the three political actors involved at regional level (Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and the latter’s allies in the Crimean War): Alexandru Dimitrie Ghica (1796-1862). He was still a *kaymakam* (1856-1858), a substitute for the ruling prince, and thus in a somewhat temporary position. Again, the situation was difficult, but for the Russians he was a good guarantee: he had a long-lasting love affair with Countess Elisabeta von Suchtelen (née Lanskoï), the wife of a Russian officer of Swedish origin (Tomi, 2013) and he had previously favoured the Russians when he ruled Wallachia (1834-1842). As a counterbalance to the still-existing Russian influence, the forty-eighter emigrés now returned to Wallachia and the collective guarantee of the Great Powers was instituted. Russia was no longer the sole vector of political influence in relation to the Porte: the national party (represented by the forty-eighters) and European arbitration were part of the European political arena.

4.2. A second school principal and the public competition for the job of running the state girls’ school in Bucharest

Following the resignation of Anna Iacobson and to keep up democratic appearances in front of the Great Powers, rather than an appointment by invitation, a public competition was organized for the post of headmistress of the state girls’ school (the Princely Pensionnat). Early in 1857, the following announcement appeared in the gazettes:

Publication

On 25 March coming, competition will be opened for the post of headmistress of the Princely Pensionnat for girls in the capital. Ladies aspiring are invited to present themselves in the chancellery of this Ephorate [of Schools] from 1 March onwards to register their names and to present legal attestations regarding their morality.

No. 172

Feb. 9, 1857

We may notice that, in contrast to the previous selection, in 1851, there is now no mention of the criterion of capacity or of administrative and pedagogical abilities or the criterion of experience. However, among the few remaining private *pensionnats* after the war, hope appeared. Four candidates registered, none of them Romanian: the Countess of Grand Pres, Caroline Vaillant, Hermiona Lukasievici, and Elisa Blaremborg. Each made an application. The first three specify their achievements and why they should be taken into consideration:

The Countess of Grand-Pré had:

--- the recommendation of the Ministry of the Navy. The Commandant of the French Troops in the Orient, signed 10 October 1856;

--- a letter from the ruler of the neighbouring Principality of Moldavia, Mihail Sturdza,

‘in which he attests to the lady’s morality of good direction all the time she ran the pensionnat in Iași’;

--- ‘the letter of Mr Polizu thanking her for the good upbringing of his daughters’;

--- the fact that she was known to the Ephorate of Schools and to the previous administration.

Caroline Vaillant ran a pensionnat in Bucharest and had connections in the literary world of the time. Of French origin, she had received subsidies from the state before 1857 in recognition for her efforts. Caroline was also the wife of a well-known cultural figure in Romanian society, who was at the beginning of his activity a tutor and a teacher at the state school for boys (Saint Sava School): Jean-Alexandre Vaillant. He was a supporter of the Romanian liberal/national party, of the forty-eighters and an abolitionist who published extensively in French for the Romanian cause.²

Hermiona Lukasievici ran a pensionnat in Bucharest (ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor si Instructiunii Publice, 146/1857, f. 27; Radulescu-Pogoneanu 1934, 724).

The only one who simply asks to be taken into consideration, without any further details (ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor si Instructiunii Publice, 146/1857, f. 16), is Elisa Blaremborg.



Photo 1. Charles Doussault, *Portrait of Mademoiselle Elise of Blaremborg* (1843). Source: *Boabe de grau* (1934).

She was already known to the state, going back to 1850-51 and the first discussions about a state *pensionnat*. She had twice received state subsidies, and although the members of the board protested that she was taking this step too often, her third request was also approved. Elisa Blaremborg won the post. In the report of her selection, the following details are specified:

Today, 28 March 1857, being examined the evidence relating to the qualities and merits of the applicant such as are shown in her application among the headmistresses of private girls' pensionnats in the capital for the post of headmistress of the Princely Pensionnat, which post has become vacant through the resignation of the former headmistress the Polcovniceasă Iacobson, and being seen the result of the examination that Mrs Hermina Lukasevici has sat, the Ephorate is satisfied that Miss Eliza Blaremborg brings together all the qualities required for this important function. She is provisionally appointed headmistress of the Princely Pensionnat for Girls in the capital, having as recompense [the right] to enjoy all the benefits accorded to the previous headmistress of the said Pensionnat. This appointment of Miss Blaremborg will be submitted for confirmation to His Highness the Interim (caimacam) Ruler. (ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor si Instructiunii Publice, 146/1857, f. 29).

In 1857, as mentioned, the interim ruler was Alexandru Dimitrie Ghica, the brother-in-law of Elisa Blaremborg's brother, and he approved the choice. The board itself, besides the military officer Emanoil Florescu, included Gheorghe Costaforu, who was indebted to Ghica for sending him in his youth with a scholarship to study in Paris. We thus have a network of venality favourable to the Russophile party, under the mask of a competition democratically organized. A look at the manner in which the competition itself proceeded reveals how much it mattered what was officially announced in the gazette regarding the criteria of eligibility.

What, in fact, was taken into consideration? As we can see from the announcement published in the two gazettes, *Buletin Oficial* and *Anunțătorul Român*, the only condition presented to the public concerned the morality of the applicant. Nevertheless, after the registration of the four ladies mentioned above, each with her own plus points, came the examinations referred to in the board's report. From these examinations (not from the announcement), and thus informally, it emerges that two aspects were essential: pedagogical abilities, including knowledge of foreign languages, and the administrative skills necessary for the running of a *pensionnat*: in fact, the same that had been stated officially at the appointment of the first headmistress, Anna Iacobson.

None of them had a diploma attesting studies or graduation from a Western pensionnat, superior in the preparation it offered to the private establishments in existence in Wallachia at the time. As regards 'management', it was considered that the mere fact of having run a girls' *pensionnat* for an extended period demonstrated each woman's abilities

as a school principal. Regarding the building and its maintenance, another aspect may be noted. The best private *pensionnats* received subsidies from the government; nevertheless, they operated in rented houses, to the upkeep of which the headmistresses had to devote attention equal to their interest in pedagogical activity. While the majority of pensionnat headmistresses had to manage to the best of their abilities and keep expenses within the budget of the school, made up of income from tuition fees plus the state subsidy, the situation was quite different in the cases of Iacobson and Blaremborg. Iacobson was invited to be school principal, and until the building of the state pensionnat planned for the yard of the Church of Saint Spyridon New, she was offered space in one of the former houses of Manuc Bey, with the rent paid by the state.

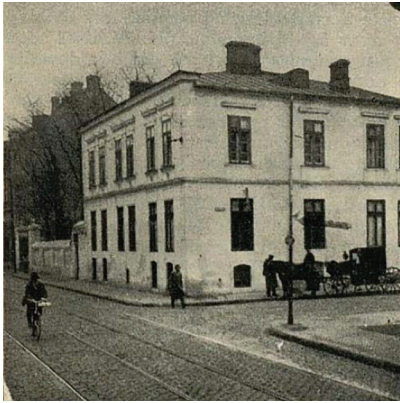


Photo 2a and 2b. Manuc House (outside view and from the interior court), photos from 1928. Source: Radulescu-Pogoneanu (1934, 707).

The planned building was never built. Elisa Blaremborg in her turn received a building belonging to the Ghica family, a veritable villa in comparison with the premises of the other private *pensionnats* including those of her counter-candidates. Neither of the buildings used in the middle of the nineteenth century as provisional accommodation for the girls' *pensionnat* exists today; both have been demolished.



Photo 3. Alexandru Ghica Palace on Coltei Street, at the intersection with Serafim Street. Photo from 1875, building demolished in 1890.
Source: Radulescu-Pogoneanu (1934, 716)

Informally, Elisa Blaremborg started out with the advantages mentioned above: a family connection, through her brother Vladimir Blaremborg, with the interim ruler of Wallachia, Alexandru Dimitrie Ghica; a spacious and modern building in comparison with the others; and her belonging to an elite of Russian origin that was favoured because of the geopolitical context. The competition came as an unexpected inconvenience for the authorities, especially the registration of Lukasiévici, the headmistress of a private pensionnat in Bucharest about whom they had not known. As the report shows, the two Frenchwomen were eliminated in the first phase. For the Countess of Grand-Pré, it was the second time during her residence in Wallachia that this had happened. Caroline Vaillant was

known to the state as a good school principal of a private pensionnat since she previously received financial help; however, her personal connections with the liberal/national party could have been an impediment to be selected. Thus, we have two Frenchwomen with experience in their field and already recognised for their activity as managers and teachers that are rejected. In the second phase, Elisa Blaremborg remained in competition only with Lukasiévici, a newcomer in comparison with the experience of the others and a person who had maintained her pensionnat by her own efforts, without subsidies or interventions. The solution was to examine the two women as regards pedagogy and to carry out an inspection of the girls' pensionnats in the capital (ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor si Instructiunii Publice, 146/1857, f. 33). At the examination in subjects taught in a Wallachian girls' pensionnat, Lukasiévici came out quite well, proving her knowledge before a board curious to know who she was:

<i>Langue française</i>	<i>bien</i>
<i>Géographie</i>	<i>bien</i>
<i>Catéchisme</i>	<i>bien</i>
<i>Arithmétique</i>	<i>très bien</i>
<i>Grammaire valaque</i>	<i>bien</i>

(ANIC, Ministerul Cultelor si Instructiunii Publice, 146/1857, f. 28, 143).

At the inspection of private pensionnats, her situation was not so good, and her building was relatively small and not as well equipped as Elisa Blaremborg's. Indeed, it could hardly have been otherwise. Combined, the two 'tests' eliminated Lukasiévici from the race, and thus Eliza Blaremborg could say that she was the headmistress of a state school, albeit a provisional, interim headmistress.

We may notice that these stages in the selection process were not specified in the announcement of the competition; they appeared along the way. That this is the case emerges even from the certificate recognizing headship *capability* given by the state to Hermiona Lukasiévici in 1860, once Elisa Blaremborg was no longer interim but a school principal in the full sense of the word. And regarding the sole criterion mentioned, there is a problem. If we return to the announcement, we can see that the only requirement publicly specified in the gazettes is morality. Anna Iacobson was the widow of a high-ranking Russian officer, a mother, and a woman whose strictness and rigour won her respect in society. In the second case, paradoxically, the only one of the four candidates for the

post of headmistress of a pensionnat (regardless whether private or state) who did not fulfil the condition of morality was precisely the winner. Elisa Blaremborg had a personal history that contrasted with those of her predecessor and her counter-candidates and indeed with the standard of respectability that was an implied requirement for the post. At the time of the competition, she was unmarried and had an illegitimate daughter, Iulia (Juliette), born in 1848 (Sturdza 2004). After she was abandoned by her partner, the French painter Charles Doussault (1806–1880), a celebrity among the aristocracy, the situation was—to use a present-day term—“whitewashed” by her family. Iulia (1848-1890) was adopted by one of her relatives (Opaschi, p. 132) to avoid possible scandal due to the relations of kinship between the Blaremborg family and the ruling family of Wallachia, the Ghicas. Moreover, Doussault had come to Wallachia in the suite of Prince Albert of Prussia in 1843, and at the request of the Romanian authorities he had painted a set of ten watercolours that were given to the prince as a souvenir. A bohemian wanderer, attracted by the picturesque of the Orient, Doussault frequented consular circles and the Romanian elite, through whom he received orders; his portrait of the great boyar lordache Filipescu is perhaps his most well-known work from his time in Wallachia (Roman 2017-2018). Although the daughter, Iulia, was adopted, she grew up with her mother. However, this matter of morality is not mentioned in the report on Elisa Blaremborg’s application, as it would have implicated figures from the elite and would have eliminated her from the start. Her personal story was known in the society of the time, but because of its ramifications at a high level, it became a taboo subject in the salons of Bucharest. As a solution to the problem posed by the unexpected competition, the preferred approach was, as we have seen, an administrative one. The two additional tests that appeared with ad-hoc boards established that her pensionnat was in good order. Thus, the official requirement, morality, no longer had any real value.

Elisa Blaremborg collaborated with the Ephorate of Schools, later the Ministry of Public Instruction, especially after her appointment was made definitive in 1860. Nevertheless, she presented her position twofold. In the internal administrative documents of the pensionnat, referring to teachers or to the grading of pupils, she names the institution that she headed ‘The Blaremborg Young Ladies’ Pensionnat’ (*pensionatul de demoazele Blaremborg*) or *Institut de demoiselles du Gouvernement dirige par Mademoiselle Elise de Blaremborg à Bucarest*, while in external correspondence and communication with the Ministry she keeps to the

title preferred by the authorities, 'The Princely Pensionnat' (*Pensionatul domnesc*): simple, without any addition. Thus, while she as an individual considered herself entitled to see the pensionnat as hers, the state perceived the situation in a neutral, depersonalized manner. From 1857 to 1864, Elisa Blaremborg faced no contestation or competition regarding the running of the institution. In 1864, however, the latest inspection brought to light a shocking fact: the pensionnat had hygiene problems, and in any case, was in decline. This was the first challenge to her management (Radulescu-Pogoneanu 1934, 735), and she did not react at all well before the Ministry board: she affirmed her noble origin and threatened to take the twelve bursary-holding pupils that she had brought and leave. The board was unimpressed by arguments of this sort and allowed her to resign. In 1870, we find her opening a private pensionnat in Bucharest (*Românul* 1870 an 14), while the state girls' school would become the Central School. However, this is another stage in the story of secondary education for girls in Romania, with different staff, different norms, and different management.

5. Conclusions

The present inquiry brings to light four conclusions. In the first place, the presence of the authentic or real Western female teacher with experience as principal was not a reality at the level of state education. Candidates of French origin were eliminated from the start in favour of candidates of Russian origin. Hence the second conclusion. The appointment of principals for the state school was based on geopolitical convenience and not on merit. An exploration of the dynamics of the appointments shows the power of Russia's networks of influence in Wallachia, as both the principals appointed came from families of officers with links to the armies of occupation. Third, we may observe a permutation in the field of education of the Russian imperial policy of censorship and elimination from the political field. Hermiona Lukasievici, the only candidate who had set up a private pensionnat by her own efforts, without enjoying the advantages of the selected headmistresses (Iacobson and Blaremborg), was 'suspended' from activity from 1857, the year of the competition, until 1860, when Blaremborg's post was made definitive. Then she too was given her attestation and resumed her activity in the educational field in Wallachia, as there was now no possibility of any contestation. Fourth,

these appointments suggest that in Wallachia there was a controlling factor in the educational system that reflected the geopolitical interests of the time: an elite of bourgeois women familiar with and favourable to a Russian presence and culture. Thus, through education Russia aimed at creating a client state in the Romanian principality, engaging loyalties and assuring its influence in the region even though after the Crimean War it was no longer a protecting power.

Endnotes

- ¹ The head of the provisional government was Neofit II, the metropolitan of Ungro-Wallachia. The members were Christian Tell (army), Gheorghe Magheru (army), Ion Heliade Radulescu (publicist, writer, and professor), and Stefan Golescu. The secretaries of the government were C.A. Rosetti, Nicolae Bălcescu, Al. G. Golescu, and Ion Brătianu. The collaboration between the Church, the army, and the young cultural elite may easily be observed.
- ² Selective publications by Jean-Alexandre Vaillant (1804-1886): *Grammaire roumaine à l'usage des Français*, Boucourest: F. Walbaum, 1840 (first edition in 1836); *La Romanie, ou Histoire, langue, littérature, orthographe, statistique des peuples de la langue d'or, Ardialiens, Vallaques et Moldaves, résumés sous le nom de Romans*, Paris, Arhus Bertrand, 1844 ; *Poésies de la langue d'or* [choisies et traduites par J.-A. Vaillant], Paris, J.-A. Vaillant, 1851 ; *Actes diplomatiques constatant l'autonomie politique de la Roumanie*, Impr. de Soye et Bouchet, 1857 ; *Les Romes, histoire vraie des vrais Bohémiens*, Paris, E. Dentu, 1857.

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New Europe College (NEC) is an independent Romanian institute for advanced study in the humanities and social sciences founded in 1994 by Professor Andrei Pleșu (philosopher, art historian, writer, Romanian Minister of Culture, 1990–1991, Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1997-1999) within the framework of the *New Europe Foundation*, established in 1994 as a private foundation subject to Romanian law.

Focused primarily on individual research at an advanced level, NEC offers to young Romanian scholars and academics in the fields of humanities and social sciences, and to the foreign scholars invited as fellows appropriate working conditions, and provides an institutional framework with strong international links, acting as a stimulating environment for interdisciplinary dialogue and critical debates. The academic programs that NEC coordinates, and the events it organizes aim at strengthening research in the humanities and social sciences and at promoting contacts between Romanian scholars and their peers worldwide.

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The fellowships awarded in this program are supported by the National Council of Scientific Research and are part of the core **NEC Fellowships** program. They target young Romanian researchers.

Project number PN-III-P1-1.1-BSO-2016-0003, within PNCDI III

- ***The Gerda Henkel Fellowships (since 2017)***

The fellowship program, developed with the support of Gerda Henkel Stiftung (Germany), invites young researchers and academics working in the fields of humanities and social sciences from Afghanistan, Belarus, China (only Tibet and Xinjiang Autonomous Regions), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mongolia, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, for a stay of one or two terms at the New Europe College, during which they will have the opportunity to work on projects of their choice.

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The *GCE St. Gallen* Fellowship Program, supported by the University of St. Gallen's Center for Governance and Culture in Europe (GCE), targets Ukrainian and Russian scholars in the humanities and social sciences whose academic careers have been affected by the current war in Ukraine.

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TANDEM, Author with Translator – Translator with Author is a program exclusively dedicated to literati, writers and translators, with the aim to promote authors from the Black Sea Region by encouraging the translation of their work into the local languages. The program is supported by S. Fischer Stiftung, Germany.

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The fellowship program targets early career scholars (within five years of receiving their doctorate) from Central and East European (CEE) and Black Sea states (Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Belarus, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Turkey, Georgia, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan), affiliated with an academic institution in these countries at the time of application. The program is open to all academic disciplines in the social sciences; candidates are expected to propose projects in comparative social science. The selected post-doctoral researchers have the opportunity to work on their projects for one or two semesters in Bucharest.

- ***Sustaining Ukrainian Scholarship (SUS-VUIAS) (since 2023)***

The fellowship program, run jointly by the New Europe College (Bucharest) and the Centre for Advanced Study (Sofia), aims to support scholarship in the regions affected by Russia's war against Ukraine. It targets qualified researchers (post-doctoral level) in the humanities and the social sciences, including law and economics, who wish to work on a project of their own choosing. Selected applicants are offered the opportunity to spend an extended period (ideally one or two semesters) as Fellows, residents in either Bucharest or Sofia, where they enjoy all the benefits associated with a fellowship (stipend, accommodation, academic and administrative assistance, integration into international academic networks).

- ***IWM for Ukrainian Scholars (2023-25)***

After Russia's brutal full-scale invasion in Ukraine, the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna made special funds available to New Europe College to invite further Ukrainian researchers in the humanities and social sciences.

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