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The Evolution of Mentalities in *Notes on the Manuscripts and Old Books in Moldavia*, I-IV, a Corpus Edited by I. Caproșu and E. Chiaburu. *History of the Small (ones)*

The present study is based on the *Notes on the Manuscripts and Old Books in Moldavia*, a corpus edited by Ioan Caproșu and Elena Chiaburu, containing four volumes and covering over four centuries (1429-1859). Escort elements of the book's content, the old notes gain their own value, becoming a separate literature, drawing a fresco of a past age.

On the one hand, I have tried to reconstruct the world to which the notes' authors belong to, and on the other hand I have tried to point out some changes in the sensibility of the *small people* who populate the texts. Coming from thousands of people from all over the country, the marginal notes are more affective than other sources. Hence, the marginal notes become very important sources in the striving of reconstructing the human sensibility of those periods, being the only ones which render fragments of the many and `dumb` of the history.

For certain, by the small people's voice, the marginal notes mirror some concrete realities. So I have tried to systematize **WHAT** they are writing about, I classified the information that arrives to us through this special type of sources. They write about the book and its value, about natural phenomena and historical events, about their personal life etc. Definitely, the content has a certain form. Thus, I have tried to find out **HOW** they write, to establish (or not) some patterns generated by the content's nature or by the established models. Finally, **WHY** do they write? The marginal text contains private note sometimes, information meant to posterity other times, we are interested in the mechanisms that made the old human to write.

According to the fragment of reality perceived and recorded, the marginal notes can be classified. The most such texts refer to the book (as a material, or a cultural product). The four volumes contain notes that write down: the owner of the book, the buyer, the price, the reader, the transcriber, the expense, information about the bookbinding, the renovation, the velvet coating or silver or precious stones inlaying; we also find out who and under what conditions translated the text, complaining of the linguistic difficulties; the donation `for getting the eternal remembrances` and for sin forgiveness, real trading deeds, the efforts of buying back, who and to whom lent the book, reviser's comments, contracts of pledge etc. The book – printed or manuscript – is very

present in people's life during those four centuries, gathering around it transcribers, sellers, donators, readers etc. An active factor in human life and enjoying a deep respect, the book is regarded as a means of conveying varied information by its everlasting characteristic. The spreading first, the circulation later, the emancipation from the religious tyranny, the extensive effort of translating from various languages mirrors a great cultural effervescence.

The book is a precious object all over the studied period, because of its religious content and of its overlaying with silver and gold. The concern that the book stays in the place where it belongs is a constant care of the whole period. Therefore the volume contains a more or less terrible imprecation, it is protected by the magical power of the word to invoke divine and diabolical forces against the one who would violate the interdiction of selling (the book), developing thus a whole imprecation literature. A whole heavenly and ecclesiastical hierarchy is summoned in order to punish the ones who would dare to `move` the manuscript or the printed work from its place. The penalties are considering this world as well as the world beyond, too. The death – be it physical or spiritual – is the aim of any curse. The Doomsday is a point of reference in the thieves punishing. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the penalty doesn't consider the end of the World anymore, but the present and the future in this particular world. The poverty and the physical pain are convoked in order to punish the `criminals`. The imprecation loses ground, becoming sometimes funny or having inverted values. In the `long duration`, of the collective mentality, the blind confidence in the power of the curse diminishes.

Money is a constant of the marginal notes between the beginning of the fifteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century, expressing either the equivalent value of various goods and services, or different loans. The modern reader may be amazed by the multitude of the monetary species that have been used once in our country in 1429-1859. Throughout the four centuries there is Romanian but also foreign currency (Italian, Turkish, Hungarian, Austrian, Russian, Polish, Dutch money etc.). There are over thirty names of coins in the marginal notes (ducats, zloties, Romanian coins, pennies, kopecks, kreutzers etc.) and we should have in mind that these register at most two-thirds of the money that have circulated on Romanian territory at a certain moment. Beef currency or mixed currency are used sometimes, even in modern age, but money is preferred in most cases. The monetary phrases also worth paying attention to. The determiners are absolutely necessary in the differentiation of the money (new, old), in emphasizing the concrete character of the coin (minted), in pointing out the origin (Dutch, Hungarian), the quality (good, bad), the material they are made of (silver, gold), underlining the belonging to a certain owner (mine) etc.

Without claiming to make evident a monetary system, we have tried to clarify the various types of coins, then their etymology, origin, the period they circulated, and sometimes their other coins conversion, the linguistic forms they appear in marginal texts, as well as other determiners with which they form important phrases in the notes' context.

The reading of the marginal notes reveals a rich semantic field of names of occupation. These do not show up as a consequence of practicing, but they have a pragmatic role of identification as accurately as possible of the person concerned.

Various officers of the royal court, administrative clerks, army people, church people, craftsmen, traders etc. are the protagonists of the marginal notes in different circumstances: they transcribe or order the manuscripts copying, they sell, buy or donate books, they perform any other commercial transactions, they write down natural phenomena, intimate or historical events etc. In our attempt to depict an authentic society with the scattered pieces from the marginal notes we registered each occupation identified, we classified it, we discussed the etymology and we offered such examples from our texts. Thus we have tried to give consistency to the people who noted their names on the books' margins, to turn these 'paper beings' into real individuals, with a concrete life and various daily obligations, while also creating a background in which such people live.

That the man has always been interested in the environment is proved by the multitude of the marginal notes on the manuscripts and the old books on this particular subject. The notes' authors became an army of observers of the natural phenomena. The witnesses registered especially the unusual event, which is getting outside of the box, defying what is considered natural. The natural phenomena are sometimes superstitious being related to other social events while some other times they are registered as such, with a scientific interest, without being considered as signs of divine wrath.

There are plenty climatic notes, which is not a surprise, because the weather can make the difference between abundance and hunger. The hunger pangs, later the plague, the floods or the droughts are next to the locusts' calamity, their invasions being devastating in the studied period. Earthquakes also cause a destructive terror among the masses. Astronomical events have also been considered worthy of remembrances, arousing both the interest and fright among viewers. Varied marginal notes relate solar or lunar eclipses, comets or other atmospheric phenomena.

Sometimes the historical events – witnessed or not by the books' owners – are the topic of the note. These marginal texts provide important information about various voivods, about international political situation, about the relationships between the Romanian principalities and the Ottoman

Empire, they grasp certain concrete aspects of frequent military confrontations in Romanian area, of foreign occupation conditions or they record the passage of certain territories of the country under the domination of great powers. The marginal notes in first pages of the corpus (the fifteenth and sixteenth century) record varied historical events rarely and when they do, they provide only information related to the sovereign during whose time the note is written. But gradually, as we read further, the texts that contain exclusively political and historical information become independent from the personal facts. The agitated eighteenth century comes to life in the marginal notes, the personal, individual level begins to make room (to a certain extent) to a time of historical, major events.

Very concise sometimes, thoroughly other times, mostly realistic, the marginal note's author complains about the troubled times, treats them familiarly, comments them, rationally meditates on them; by writing down these information, the author comes out of his / her own selfish feelings to observe another thread of contemporary events. The interest in history is growing. Especially in the nineteenth century there are more retrospective marginal notes which record major events, some of them covering a period of a century. At the beginning the experience was superior – the recorded historical events are contemporary, they have been witnessed by the ones who write – but later they try to recover history.

On this background drawn by great events of the history stand out fragments from the daily life of the petty ones, who follow their natural course of life, despite the insecure world they inhabit. The books are sometimes turned into real register of births, deaths and marriages of various families. Thereby, the marginal texts are a first class source for the reconstruction of everyday life for the actual historical man.

The reading of the marginal notes reveal a change of paradigm in long duration in what concerns the attitudes towards life and death among those four centuries. The very fact that, at a certain time, some intimate events are considered 'worthy' to be put down in the blank space on the so valorous books' pages is illustrative. The preference for creating a cutting up for the time that families have been founded, children have been born or have died, for the time that the loved ones (or not) have died usually follows a certain pattern. As time passes, from the middle of the eighteenth century, the topoi of this particular marginal notes multiply, we witness a more frequent expressions of feelings of joy or sadness. The family starts to fulfill not only social, but affective functions as well, sharing more and more of its intimate life. All kinds of affectionate determiners, the suffering caused by the death of the beloved being expressed increasingly more often and more intensely reveal the pulse of

a different emotional life. The increased interest in the children's life, in their education, starts to reveal a family whose centre of gravity is the child. The development of a more affectionate discourse in the marginal notes in what concerns the marriage, the birth and the death is a symptom of a mutation in the mentality.

Either they are a pen test, or ex-libris-es, or donation acts, or personal notes, or various natural phenomena or historical events etc., most of the marginal notes are dated. The reading of the texts makes it obviously that, sometimes, besides the objective noting of the date, the author provides all kinds of supplementary information becoming temporal anchors for the recorded event. These reference elements belong to the cosmic time, which is evident in days and nights alternation and in seasons sequence; there is also a chronic, impartial time, measured by clocks – time accuracy becoming constant sometimes. In linear and implacable flow from the Creation of the world toward Doomsday – key moments in the marginal notes – the sacred time of the holiday erupts and reiterates the same sanctified moment in the history of Christianity. The high frequency of 'Holy Easter', of Christmas and of a multitude of Christian characters, also the presence of fasting days as reference points in temporal anchoring defines a deep religious mentality. Everything can become a temporal reference: the reign, the various prelate's pastorship, social events which have impressed the collective sensibility, natural phenomena, personal, domestic or intimate events etc.

It is interesting the cumulation of all these reference elements, sometimes the time expressing is so detailed that it far exceeds the extent of the recorded event. Accuracy is a topos of the marginal notes, so we witness an assiduous attempt to capture the moment, to transcend beyond the ephemeral, to save a piece of intimate or collective life in the flow of time. The many reference points, the book being related to as a symbol of the eternal, the marginal note on various topics itself prove exactly this attempt to defeat time somehow, to immobilize it in a glimpse of life, to record for the next generations a breath of these notes' authors lives.

The reason why the small and unimportant put down together great and tiny facts is the awareness of the durability of the manuscripts and old books: they write down in order that the next generations know about all these events. From 1429 until 1859 some elements are constant, while others are variable, the marginal note will carry out new meanings. The desire to express oneself by writing is a fact which calls for the act of recording itself, of reflecting, of synthetizing or analysing.

Initially the marginal notes follow a certain pattern, with minimal variation, both in terms of content (the topic is the book, invariable) and form, revealing a deeply religious mentality and respect for books and the written word in general. For more than a century and a half the marginal

notes record the donation or other pious activities related to the book for the sins' forgiving. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the marginal note constitutes a religious sensibility dimension and clearly express the possibility of eternal life through it. Starting with the seventeenth century appear notes with other topics. The marginal note doesn't mirror the book content anymore, but the notes' author becomes a true author, in the real sense of the word. Parallel to the topic of the book there comes information from the outside, from the person who writes down or from the world in which he or she lives in. personal note appears, without much emotional impact yet. Events from the political and social background also start looming out. In the second half of the seventeenth century the marginal notes multiply and the content of the recorded facts diversifies and enriches. The function of the marginal text is to inform of the diverse fact which is remarkable (natural phenomena, weather conditions) or emotional (marriages, childbirths), thus impressing.

Not all the notes are of equal importance. Some of them are not designed to survive in endless ages next to God, they are neither a bridge between generations, but have an immediate utilitarian finality. Some of the notes use the free space on the book's pages as any other piece of paper, recording requests to borrow money or lists of expenses, just like in a account book.

Incomplete or complex, the notes on manuscripts and old books prove that the man who made them took an attitude toward life. By their polymorphic character they reveal a glimpse of the real and concrete old man, they reflect something of the vision of man and the world. A sequence of testimonies, the marginal notes bring first and foremost the initiative of people who want to preserve the traces of their own activities, inaugurating thus the act of making history in living memory. Actually, the marginal texts are about traces of the past in the present, people in time. Without claiming an exhaustive work, I have tried to develop some important directions, to draw some research ways.