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Cultural confluences in the old Banat

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Abstract

In the present study, we make a retrospective incursion in the history of Banat [Romania] by analyzing three old texts from different areas and times: Gerard of Cenad’s Deliberatio supra hymnum trium puerorum [1] (philosophy/theology), Nicolae Stoica of Țăg’s Cronica Banatului (Banat’s Chronicle)[2] (history/memoirism), and Constantin Diaconovici Loga’s Epistolariul romanesc pentru facerea a tot felul de scrisori ce săn că în viața soțietății omenești la mule întâmplări de lipsă (Romanian Epistolary for the Writing of all Types of Letters of Human Society, Lacking on Different Occasions) [3] (literature/epistolary style). The key to the reading and interpreting these documents is represented by the principles of multi- and inter-culturalism applied in the valorisation of old texts through modern research instruments and methods. The concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism are relatively new, but the practices on which they rely are old. The research of written documents and the presentation of old texts from modern perspectives through the principles of interculturalism can bring a new perspective on the past, and can emphasise the contribution of regional cultures to the richness of the world heritage.

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1. Interculturalism

The plurality of the European area is not a phenomenon of modern society because, instinctively, each human tends to consider his own cultural heritage better than that of others. The issue of national minorities has always been part of history, and cultural interferences have always existed, but their resolution used to be achieved through more or less violent encounters. In the present, interculturalism is treated in a different way: by accepting diversity and observing individual and collective identity within society. An important factor of the promotion of
intercultural principles is intercultural education\(^1\), which aims at molding tolerant attitudes and seek for educational answers to the different current issues such as, for instance, the religious phenomenon which, associated with the individual sphere – with the private area – has often been ‘expelled’ from the educational area.

2. Banat – a region of Western and Oriental cultural confluences

From a cultural point of view, regionalism and local identities have become important current issues, though, from an economic, informational and communicational point of view, we tend to globalise. The region of Banat is no exception: it is a region well known for its active intercultural traditions compared to other Romanian regions [5]. In varied historical contexts, mixtures of populations have been constituted here. In his Foreword to Gerard of Cenad’s Harmony of the World, Răzvan Teodorescu said

“In a way, Banat – as well as, mutatis mutandis, Rhenania, in Western Europe, Macedonia, in the Balkan Peninsula, or Galicia at the Russian borders – is, alone, a small world, a good example of what have been, in history, and mainly in cultural history, the encounters of different civilizations, of different human types, illustrated from pre-history and folklore by the lands between the Mureș and the Danube rivers” [1].

3. The presentation and analysis of old texts from the perspective of cultural interferences

If currently interculturalism is part of the educational and cultural policy recommended by the Council of Europe itself, its practices have always existed in varied cultural contexts. Banat has always known practices of cooperation and mutual acceptance in its history. Literature in the field refers mainly to the recent context, and historical works analyze events from the perspective of national identity because the dominant model used to be the “man of roots” [6].

The germs of interculturalism are in the past; this is why we bring forth in the present paper arguments in favor of multi- and intercultural traditions of the area through three old, representative texts aiming to revalorize them and bring them to the light of research\(^2\). These works, written in different periods – the Middle Ages and pre-modern era – refer directly or indirectly to the old Banat area: the perception of what they present through information analysis and interpretation can bring a different perspective on old events and mentalities [7].

The three written texts are:

- **Gerard of Cenad’s manuscript**, *Deliberatio supra hymnum trium puërorum* [1], which we read in the version Gerard din Cenad, *Armonia lumii sau tâlmăcire a cântării celor trei coconi către Isingrim* (Harmony of the World), Bucharest: Meridiane.


- **Constantin Diaconovici Loaga’s Epistolariul romanesc pentru facerea a tot felii de scrisori ce sănt în viața soțietății omeniști la multe întâmplări de lipsă* (Romanian Epistolary for the Writing of all Types of Letters of Human Society, Lacking on Different Occasions) [3], Buda: Tipariul Crăştii Tipografiei a Universității din Pesta.

Though the texts belong to three different fields (philosophy/theology, literature/epistolary style), we suggest as a reading key the modern principles of multi- and interculturalism.

*Deliberatio supra hymnum trium puërorum* [1] is a manuscript by Saint Gerard of Cenad, written in Latin around 1000 A.D., in Cenad. There have been three editions of this work: the one from 1790 in Alba-Iulia,

\(^{1}\) **Intercultural education** is “a structured process which aims at developing of understanding, accepting and constructive relations between people from different cultures” [4].

\(^{2}\) Through promotion and valorisation strategies, digital libraries can valorise old texts and produce critical editions in an electronic version.
Romania, the one from 1978, in Belgium, and the one from 1984, in Bucharest – a selection of texts after the original manuscript, translated in Romanian by Radu Constantinescu under the suggestive title *Harmony of the World*, the edition used in this paper.

Gerard’s work, “strangely original” [8], contains personal reflections, quotes and comments on biblical, patristic, and philosophical texts. His work is marked by the consolidation of Christianity in a context marked by archaic ritual practices of the inhabitants of Cenad considered heathen by Christians: “they all claim there is no resurrection, and there is no viler action in the world” [1].

Involved in the process of the evangelisation of Central Europe [9], Gerard notes in his works observations, confessional attitudes, political attitudes (repeated criticism of the clergy, of the nobility – the Caesars whose behaviour is immoral and non-Christian and oppress the poor): “thus, some of Christ’s priests, go hunting to get food, quarrel, plunder, oppress, say dirty jokes, give in to lust and forget about God’s laws” [1].

There are, in this text, comments about gender differences, of great interest from the perspective of multiculturalism. In the text, women, “females” are described with derogatory words – not unusual for the Middle Ages; thus, they are not able to understand philosophy, or to differentiate between learned men and impostors:

> “The greatest folly is to think of your children, whose end is known to anybody, as women thinking of their children do [...] How can they believe in things that should better be hidden than revealed? Nobody can say they are good at philosophy”; “What can we say about the sinners that females consider learned men” [1].

According to the ideas of present intercultural education – whose goal is to mould attitudes rather than carry on knowledge – Gerard recommended, in the year 1000:

> “The teacher (doctor) should do his best and teach his pupils to perfection. This is why he has the teaching gift (magisterium): to teach (exerceat disciplina) the best teachings in school (schola) from the science (doctrina) aiming at learning good manners (virtutium eruditio) rather than the speaking skills” [1].

Known particularly in the context of medieval history, Saint Gerard himself is an argument for interculturalism. He is particularly interested in theology, philosophy, and politics. This “cultural character,” whose name is linked to Cenad and Banat, is considered “the first writer of the area” [8]: “though a Venetian, he cooperated with the locals” [1]. It is due to Gerard – who promoted Western medieval culture in Banat and Transylvania – that Cenad got to be an exceptional place in Romania: it housed the country’s first school and first monastic library known to our days [10].

Nicolae Stoica of Hațeg – a priest, a man of culture – dedicated his entire life to the cultural emancipation of Banat’s people. His main conception about life concerned compassion in inter-human relationships: “for him, a man in difficulty has no relative, no social status or rank in the administrative or military hierarchy: he is a man in need and one must help him” [11].

His manuscript, *Banat’s Chronicle* [2], was written based on his lifetime notes and memories, in Romanian, at a very old age, between 1826 and 1827. It is his most important work, with a strong memoir-like character, in which he relates facts, events, and social movements in the Balkan area.

Later works of history presenting the Austro-Turkish War (1788-1791) with the backdrop of Banat, often refer to this chronicle because it is the work of a witness to the events – he participated in the war, as a military priest,

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3 Constantinescu uses this formula while speaking about Gerard, appreciating not his literary gift, but his innovating vision of starting a scholastic philosophy course in Cenad, in 1046, and particularly his temerary courage of initiating polemics and criticising political and religious authorities.

4 As for the fear engendered by the prospect of the Apocalypse, Gerard noted: “’The face of the world will be gone.’ It is said that the face of the world will be gone, not the world” [1].

5 In the Middle Ages, Cenad was called Morisena.
and the episodes narrated are authentic. The history of the Romanians—a nation always in the neighbourhood of great empires and in the way of nomad invasions—is reflected in literature from the perspective of the ongoing struggle of self-defence against the great powers of the time, or from the perspective of national rights and social and religious acknowledgement. Stoica of Hațeg’s Chronicle evokes numerous moments of cohesion of the population, human solidarity—regardless of ethnicity or religion—when attacked by the Turks or by the Austrians, when the population was involved without direct motivation. Turkish prisoners are supported in the camp, German and Hungarian soldiers abandoned behind the front line are saved from frost during a severe winter, Jewish carriers are saved from being taken prisoners, and Romanian defectors are saved from death penalty: “Please, God, go on like that—do not side the Turks or the Germans” [2].

Epistolariul românesc pentru facerea a tot felul de scrisori ce sânt în viață soțietății omenești la multe întâmplări de lipsă (Romanian Epistolary for the Writing of all Types of Letters of Human Society, Lacking on Different Occasions) [3], published by Constantin Diaconovici Loga in Romanian, in Buda, 1841, was written in Cyrillic and has not been reedited. Though, at first sight, it is an exclusively educational work, a handbook of epistolary style—whose goal was to spread among young students the norms of nice and correct cultivated Romanian—it illustrates, between the lines, the development of urban culture in Banat. Stoica of Hațeg [2] presents a rather rural landscape through the village communities of the Orșova-Mehadia-Caransebeș area. The models of letters supplied by Loga [3] in his Romanian Epistolary describe relationships between parents and children and between spouses, relationships between people and administrative authorities, school relationships, trade relationships—all promoting tolerance, mutual respect, and fairness.

Linguistic pluri-culturalism is an important element of the Banat’s Chronicle by Nicolae Stoica of Hațeg [2] and the Romanian Epistolary by Constantin Diaconovici Loga [3], because Banat is a border region and it has always been the theatre of pluri-cultural interferences. Here is an example from Loga’s Epistolary [3] of the inhabitants’ multilingualism and of the cities’ cosmopolitism in a letter of recommendation written for a well-trained young man applying for the job of councilor help:

“This young man has beautiful traits and studied Philosophy and Law. In addition, he speaks Latin, Italian and German as a native; and Romanian, Hungarian and Serbian even better, because he grew up speaking them” [3].

Given that the two works are close chronologically (their authors were contemporaries), we have carried out a comparative analysis of the vocabulary and selected some of the terms designating positions, dignities, and noble ranks used in Banat at the end of the 17th century and in the first decades of the 19th century. Some of these terms are nowadays part of the international vocabulary; others are considered archaisms or dialectal (a Banat sub-speech). Other terms have not survived in modern Romanian because they were regional. What we wanted to point out is the diverse etymology of these words: German (predominant), Latin, Turkish, Hungarian, Serbo-Croatian, which speaks of the ethnicities that impacted the region economically, culturally, and educationally.

Latin etymology:

- **consul** ‘consul’ n. 1. “An official appointed by a government to reside in a foreign country and represent his or her government’s commercial interests and assist its citizens there. See Usage Note at council. 2. Either of the two chief magistrates of the Roman Republic, elected for a term of one year. 3. Any of the three chief magistrates of the French Republic from 1799 to 1804.” (<L consul, G Konsul) [2,3];
- **duc** ‘duke’ n. “1. A nobleman with the highest hereditary rank, especially a man of the highest grade of the peerage in Great Britain. 2. A sovereign prince who rules an independent duchy in some European countries. 3. Used as the title for such a nobleman.” (<L dux, -cis, F duc) [2];
- **nobil** ‘noble’ n. “A member of the nobility” (<G Nobel <L nobilis; F noble) [3];
- **sedrie** ‘council’ n. “(Obsolescent, Regional) an assembly of nobles from a region” (<L sedria) [3].

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6 It is, though, reproduced in the Annexe of our doctoral thesis [12], transliterated with Latin letters.
German etymology:
- *ambasador* ‘ambassador’ n. “A diplomatic official of the highest rank appointed and accredited as representative in residence by one government or sovereign to another, usually for a specific length of time” (< G *Ambassadeur*, < F *Ambassadeur*) [2];
- *auswärtiger minister* ‘Emperor’s Minister’ “foreign affairs minister of the Emperor” (< G *Auswärtiger Minister*) [2];
- *baron* ‘baron’ n. “1. A feudal tenant holding his rights and title directly from a king or another feudal superior. 2. A lord or nobleman; a peer” (< G *Baron* < F *baron*) [2,3];
- *kronprinz* ‘crown prince’ n. “the male heir apparent to a throne” (< G *Kronprinz*) [2], Glosar;
- *kurfürst* ‘prince-elector’ n. “prince-elector” (< G *Kurfürst*) [2];
- *elektor* ‘elector’ n. “One of the German princes of the Holy Roman Empire entitled to elect the emperor; synonym: *kurfürst* (< G *Elektor*, < F *électeur*, L *elector*, -oris) [2];
- *erbhertog* ‘archduke’ n. “In certain royal families, especially that of imperial Austria, a nobleman having a rank equivalent to that of a sovereign prince.”(< G *Erzherzog*, idem”) [2];
- *stab* ‘(general) staff’ n. “A group of military officers charged with assisting the commander of a division or higher unit in planning, coordinating, and supervising operations,” “La ofiții stabului” [3] (< G *Stab*);
- *freiherr* ‘baron’ n. “1. A feudal tenant holding his rights and title directly from a king or another feudal superior. 2. A lord or nobleman; a peer” (< G *Freiherr*);
- *gubernator* ‘governor’ n. “An official appointed to govern a colony or territory” (< G *Gubernator*, ML *gubernator*) [2];
- *herzog* ‘prince, duke’ n. “A male member of a royal family other than the monarch, especially a son of the monarch” (< G *Herzog*) [2].

Turkish etymology:
- *capeği-başça* ‘great porter’ n. “One in charge of the saray gate or door” (< Tk *capigi-başça*, s.v. *capigiu* “saray’s porter”) [2], Glosar;
- *effendi* ‘effendi’ n. “1. Used as a title of respect for men in Turkey, equivalent to sir. 2. An educated or respected man in the Near East” (< Tk *effendi*) [2];
- *hasnadar* ‘treasurer’ n. “One who has charge of funds or revenues, especially the chief financial officer of a government, a corporation, or an association” [2], Glosar (< Tk *khasnadar*);
- *paşa* ‘pasha’ n. “Used formerly as a title for military and civil officers, especially in Turkey and northern Africa”; (< Tk *paşa*) [2].

Hungarian etymology:
- *grofi* ‘noble’ n. “A member of the nobility” (< Hung *grob*, count*) [3];
- *nemes* ‘noble’ n. “(in Transylvania) a member of the nobility” (< Hung *nemes*) [3];
- *span* ‘count’ n. “leader of a county” (< Hung *span*) [2], Glosar.

Serbo-Croatian etymology:
- *ipan* ‘boyar’ n. “boyar; “(in the Middle Ages in Wallachia and Moldavia) title awarded to the most important boyards” (< Serbo-Cr *župan*, < Slav *županu*) [2].

The etymologies and the meanings of the words come from reference Romanian and German language dictionaries and from reputed Romanian linguists. They were linguistically analysed in detail in Dialectul literar bănățean. Privire specială asupra epocii moderne [12].

4. Conclusion

Interculturalism is studied with interest nowadays and is based on the cultural diversity and interferences at social level; pluri-culturalism has always existed and Banat, as an area of ethnic, socio-economic and religious
confluences, a good host for Latin, Slavic, Austrian, Hungarian, and Turkish cultures is representative for this type of cohabitation.

The research of written sources, the presentation of old texts from a modern perspective through interculturalist principles can bring forth a new perception of the past and can emphasize the contribution of regional cultures to the enrichment of the world cultural heritage.

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