

"Poverty burdens the soul"

An unprecedented study of poverty at the beginning of Romanian modernity

(Simeon Marcovici, 1839)

Abstract

This habilitation thesis is comprised of two main sections: one which presents the research and teaching activity and another which deals with a still unpublished study, covering several aspects of Simeon Marcovici's (1802-1877) work as a translator and vector of Western culture in the Romanian Principalities.

The first section, in turn, consists of a series of chapters and sub-chapters, chronologically and thematically structured, which show the main areas of interest which have characterised my scientific career. In general, these have to do with poverty and care for the poor during the 18th and 19th centuries and with the relation between social care and healthcare during the 19th and 20th centuries, concentrating on role and position of the doctor in society, according to two main currents of thought, hygienism and eugenism. I have also referred to a number of additional themes (poverty-delinquency-criminality or philanthropic and assistive aspects of abolitionist projects) and medium-term research projects (war memoirs of Romanian doctors during the 19th and 20th centuries) and teaching activity.

I graduated from the Faculty of History of the Bucharest University in 1991. In 2000 I obtained my PHD in History with a thesis written within the Institute for South-East European

Studies of the Romanian Academy under the scientific guidance of Prof. Dr Andrei Pippidi, *Marginal and marginalized members of society in the 16th and 18th centuries. Analogies and contrasts between Western Europe and the Romanian Principalities (Marginali și marginalizați în secolele XVI-XVIII. Analogii și contraste între Occidentul european și Țările Române)*. Since 1991 I have been a researcher at the the Institute for South-East European Studies of the Romanian Academy, and since 1998 I have been a teaching at the Faculty of Political Scienes of the University of Bucharest (I hold the title of professor since 2014).

The subject which never ceased to fascinate me and which has remained a priority of mine has been shaped form the very beginning of my scientific career. I dare say that in regards to Romanian historiography, my approach, the history of the poor and of poverty, was the first of its kind. With some exceptions, studies on the subject were lacking and the few which existed did not deal with a history of the poor. Although a well-shaped research subject in international historiography, in Romania the history of the poor and of poverty was a research subject that had to be almost invented and then built up.

Identifying and outlining the main research directions in which the history of the poor and of poverty could develop was the essence of my first volume on this subject (based on my PHD thesis), *From charity to philanthropy. Institutions which assist the poor in Wallachia and Moldova in the 18th century* (Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest 2001, reedited in 2020 by Editura Cuvântul Vieții, in honnor of the commemorative year of Romanian Orthodox Philantropy). Considering that few historians have written about poverty up until that point, I chose to identify the factors that led to the empoverishment of different social classes, with emphasis on the differences between social levels, starting from the economic and social consequences of a series of aspects closely connected to the historical evolution of the Romanian Principalities, already well-known and documented, but which have never been approached from the perspective that I had proposed (the worsening of the Ottoman rule, the obligations of different peasant categories to the land owners or to the ruling bodies, the work-rank-property ratio, the insecurity of daily life – climate accidents, epidemics, wars). The result of these unfavourable situations and conjunctions was the empoverishment of a significant number of people. These are the characteristics of the social and political climate in which the emergence of the first forms of poverty assistance in Wallachia and Moldova during the 18th century took place. Another characteristic which must be

taken into account was the emphasis that the Western culture of that era put on social aspects, a fact which was not unknown to the Greek princes. However, in this type of cultural context the religious aspects of helping the poor prevail over the natural law or the civic virtues, and the practical means show a constant emphasis on adapting the social aid to the social status of the beneficiary, mainly favouring those who lost their wealth rather than the poor in general. As such I have analysed the forms of social care according to the social status of the beneficiary, from beggar guilds and hospices for poor, ill citizens, to the Charity Box (orig. Cutia Milelor) and royal donations for those who have lost their wealth.

As most of them continued to exist and underwent a series of reforms during the following century, I have continued my research. I have chosen as a first chronological milestone the first constitutional act of the Principalities, Regulamentele Organice, which introduced the first pension scheme, established the first public social care institution, Poor Law Board (*Eforia caselor făcătoare de bine și de folos obștesc*), and organised the functioning of the hospitals through the Department of civilian hospitals (*Eforia spitalelor civile*), which introduced a unified administrative system for these hospitals which for the time being functioned separately. For the first half of the 19th century, I have been able, by sheer luck, to benefit from a corpus of unitary sources, the documents regarding the *Eforia caselor făcătoare de bine*, which span from 1832 to 1839 (The National Central Historical Archives – still A.N.I.C., Bucharest, inventory 2347, fund ”Eforia caselor făcătoare de bine”, files 1-265). Up until that moment, these documents had never been systematically used. As such I had the opportunity to benefit from a chronologically and thematically coherent archive source and to bring to the historical landscape the first contributions to the history and functioning of this first public social care institution. The result of this research was the volume *Begging as a profession in our homeland. Fragments of Romanian social history, 1800-1900* (Editura Universității din București, 2013). This volume includes the history of the *Eforia caselor făcătoare de bine și de folos obștesc* between 1832 and 1848, from the moment of its establishment to the date of the last documents referring to this institution. The most substantial part of this work analyzes the actual functioning of the first public aid scheme, based on individual requests from beneficiaries (including the authorities’ investigations and responses). Since the study concentrates on numerous particular cases, it allowed me, before having drawn up a series of general conclusion, to pinpoint and to restore very sensitive aspects of the daily life of certain social categories, that are otherwise very hard capture as an object of research. As for the general

conclusions, they refer to the evolution of social care for the poor, from a general attribute of moral governance to an autonomous area of public administration. The main constraint of this type of social care, recognized as a public duty, organized, financed and managed by the state, remains the impossibility of the resources (exclusively budgetary and therefore permanently deficient) being adequate to the general character of the right to healthcare recognized by the Romanian health legislation and public health tradition. Orphans, abandoned children and widows (sometimes) were some of the beneficiaries of this public social care. Nevertheless, in its early stages, this care had only been provided to the poor who were sick, which justifies the permanent link between social assistance and healthcare. For this reason, my research into poverty and the poor has gradually been sliding from social care to healthcare. In the mid-19th century, *Eforia caselor făcătoare de bine și de folos obștesc* practically disappears from documents. According to the communal organization laws (1863-1864) the enforcement of social assistance (including healthcare for the poor) becomes the responsibility of the prefects, underprefects and mayors, supported by a number of Sanitary Councils (with doctors), but which had a strictly consultative role.

For the 19th century Romania, in the case of health and social care for the poor, the idea of a European model organically takes precedence. This is directly related to the efforts of the Romanian elites, most of which had been educated by great European universities, to integrate the Romanian space into the European civilization model. In this context, I have concentrated on the hygienist movement and its links to the larger international movement, European models and the profoundly étatist character of the first measures of public health, introduced during the first decades of the 19th century, the effort to introduce public medicine in rural areas, the relations between politics and medicine, intrinsic to all aspects above mentioned. The boundaries between these research subjects are flexible, separating them being most of the time the result of formal constraints (the length of studies, certain themes of different projects, conferences or collective volumes).

The study of the Romanian hygienist movement in the European context was included in the project managed by the Romanian Academy, *The Valorification of cultural identities in global processes*, co-financed by the European Social Fund through the The Operational Sector Program for Human Resources Development (orig. POSDRU) 2007-2013. As far as I am concerned, I have

been part of this project from 2011 to 2013 and at the end I published a volume *The socio-medical discourse of the Romanian Hygienist Movement. Addressing local characteristics from the perspective of Western European experiences, the 19th and 20th century* (Editura Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, București, 2013). This is the first work on the hygienist movement in the Romanian historical space which concentrates on pauperism. Aside from identity aspects, linked to the unequivocal expression of the attachment to the model of European civilization, the adoption of the hygienist model in the Romanian area also meant adapting it to specific local conditions, which determined its orientation mainly towards rural areas.

In the case of the hygienist movement, the main sources come from the published works of Romanian or foreign doctors, who took an interest in the Romanian, Eastern European or Balkan areas, health reports and the collection of the first public hygiene review in Romania *Medical and Hygiene Guide* (1899-1907). As such, the doctor's position in society became a recurring theme, which will later on follow two research directions, the pre-eminent position which doctors demand in the political sphere (justified not only by years of study, but also by the organicist metaphor, which considered the social and biological bodies as mirror images of one another) and the submission to the representatives of local administration, which they constantly denounced.

After the First World War the Romanian hygienist movement showed traces of eugenics, but keep in mind that in Romania eugenism always had a significant social hygiene branch. The hygienist movement and eugenism are currents of thought, which propose means of developing societies and most importantly states, anchored in medical or biological models, which were transposed in the social field. The similarities between the two movements are significant and they justify, in my opinion, seeing interwar eugenism as a direction for the development of the hygienist movement. My research on eugenism has focused on the work of certain 20th century medical figures (dr. Nicolae Minovici, dr. Dimitrie Mezincescu, dr. Gheorghe Banu) and the collection *Social Hygiene Review* (1931-1944). Without explicitly stating an ideological view, most authors recognized the implications and political stakes of eugenism, and especially its privileged link to authoritarian left/right groups. Based on the illusion of a medical technocracy (already outlined by pre-war hygiene workers), they proposed a much more pronounced and comprehensive interventionism, their ideas clearly pointing to authoritarian choices, to the detriment of liberal or democratic ones (prophylactic dictatorship, Dr. Ghe. Banu, 1943).

All these incursions into the world of poverty, which I briefly outlined here, have also led to the development of some research themes that I have named complementary, because, although they are linked to poverty, they lead to independent research areas (the history of criminal law or the history of slavery or of the abolitionist movement). I am referring here to studies published based on the analysis of legal documents or abolitionist projects. The first case refers to *Prince Alexandru Constantin Moruzi's Collection of penal judgements* (orig. *Condica lui Alexandru Constantin Moruzi Vv. De anaforale criminalicești, cu întăriri, tacriruri, jelbi, 1794-1796*, A.N.I.C, inventory 292, fund *Manuscripts*, mss. 30/microfilm roll 15, frames 238-445), the only remaining collection of the Criminal Law Department of Bucharest, based on which I have also published, in collaboration with Laurențiu Vlad, the volum *The Criminal Law Department. The activity of a wallachian criminal court* (orig. *Departamentul de cremenalion. Din activitatea unei instanțe penale muntene, 1794-1795*, Editura Nemira, București, 2002). The second refers to Teodor Diamant's projects from 1835 and 1841 that had philanthropic, social assistance and abolitionist ideas.

Since 1998 I have been teaching a number of compulsory and optional courses at the Faculty of Political Science, *Governance and political institutions in Romania, 19th-20th centuries, Poverty and social exclusion, The History of Romanian Roma, The History of Romanian social assistance*. Without focusing on the thematic details of these courses, we can see that almost all of them, with the exception of the general course of political history, are directly related to my area of scientific research. This suitability between my teaching activities and personal research themes allowed me not only to permanently improve the content of my courses, but also share the results of my research, in both the research world and in the Univeristy.

The second part of the habilitation thesis is based on three still unpublished studies, centered on Simeon Marcovici's work as translator and vector of Western culture in the Romanian Principalities. A harsh critic of this section could rightly point out the inadequacy of representativeness between its title, which also gives the title of the thesis and its content where the focus is primarily on cultural imports (where the perception of poverty is only one aspect). However, I have chosen to keep this version primarily for subjective reasons. My first contact with Simeon Marcovici's work, which intrigued me and convinced me to continue my research, remains linked to his perception of poverty, completely unusual for the Romanian space of the first half of

the 19th century. Viewed from this perspective, Simeon Marcovici's study of cultural activity is part of the main research area that I have undertaken throughout my entire scientific career. It has subsequently developed in several relatively autonomous but highly suggestive directions for Simeon Marcovici's cultural, pedagogical and civic options, which are responsible for introducing the above-described unusual view of poverty into the Romanian space, to which I refer in the title of the section and of the thesis of habilitation.

I discovered Simeon Marcovici nearly ten years ago, when I first came into contact with *The duties of the Christian man* (1839), a work in which I found, with great surprise, a new view of poverty / wealth which is much closer to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* than the traditional Orthodox one, which I would have expected. The situation was all the more exciting as the volume had benefited from a foreword written by the Bishop Ilarion of Argeș, and hence from the approval of a high Orthodox clergyman. Trying to translate, a few years later, with the help of my colleague Laurențiu Zoicas, from the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literature of the University of Bucharest, a series of passages for a presentation in French, we found that we were actually faced with a translation. This translation itself was made through a French intermediary, from a famous work at that time, which was also very present in the Romanian cultural space in the 19th century, but which, from a religious point of view, had most likely originated from the Protestant space. I am referring to the work *Religious Meditations* translated after the German work *Stunden der Andacht*, by the Swiss writer of German origin Johann Heinrich Daniel Zschokke (1771-1848). The details of this identification belong to my colleague Laurențiu Zoicas, together with whom I wrote an article, which is being published in the *Yearbook of the Institute of History A.D. Xenopol* in Iași, and as such I did not insist upon them.

My contribution to this afore-mentioned article and therefore the aspect that interested me and which I studied, is linked to the popularity of this work, present not only in Simeon Marcovici's work, but also in the intellectual classes of Romanian society. Many of its fragments have been translated and published (in periodicals such as *The Romanian Bee/ Albina Romaneasca*, *Almanah of learning and living/ orig Almanah de invatatura si petrecere*, *Moldavia Newspaper/ orig. Gazeta de Moldavia*, *National Museum/ orig. Muzeul National*, *Messenger for both genders/ orig. Curierul de ambe sexe* and *The Church Herald/ orig. Vestitorul biseric*) independently, respectively G. Munteanu - professor at the seminar of the Diocese of Buzau -

Religious Meditations, Buzau, 1839-1840, Vol. I and II). The undeniable literary value of Zschokke's work alone cannot explain why Romanian intellectuals from the middle of the 19th century adopted and translated it. The answer however can be found in the content and message of this work.

We have thus reached the intellectual biography of Simeon Marcovici: his studies abroad, which took place just as the idea of governance was profoundly changing in the Romanian Principalities, through the restoration of local princes and the initiation of a whole cultural and national renaissance, his subsequent activity as a teacher, a writer, a translator. Marcovici did not have any pretensions and didn't wish to be an author. He has been seen throughout his life as a vector of European culture and values, which he helps circulate in the Principalities, after having made his own selection, not at all accidental ("by shrusting out of the poisonous flowers, we have picked as much as we could, the sweet and useful ones", first speech delivered on his return in september 1827). In this context, the question is why do those called upon to shape the public spirit in the Romanian society (as Marcovici and Munteanu were also professors) considered the *Religious Meditations* so important that they be published not only in journals, but also in two distinct volumes. These appeared at approximately the same time and the authors must have known of one another. I believe that the explanation is to be sought in the role of religion in the Principalities, but also in the Balkan territories dominated by the Ottoman Empire, in constructing the patriotic citizen of the first half of the 19th century. All national and reformist movements originating in the Balkans are characterized by the strong religious feeling of their respective peoples. Opting for the European (Western) model of modernity goes hand in hand with the reaffirmation of belonging to Orthodox Christianity, with this branch of Christianity becoming a sort of brand and guarantee of the European character of the cultures and religion of the Balkan peoples, as opposed to the eastern, Asian, Islamic character of the Ottoman Empire. If the French citizen (bourgeois) is the honest man (orig. honnête homme) without being seen as a Christian, in South-Eastern Europe, Christianity joins in full all the other bourgeois values (Roxane Argiropoulos).

In regard to the source used, Marcovici opted for a clear selection. While *Meditations* was primarily recommended as a work of personal edification, Marcovici intended to educate the citizen, starting from the most important individual and group identity quality, that of being a

Christian. His option seems obvious from the very title he chose, abandoning the word „meditations” in favor of „duty”. Simeon Marcovici always puts emphasis on the ability of Christianity to mobilize notions such as the common good or the love of thy neighbor, not only at the level of human relations, but also, through extension and similarity between ones own family and the citizens' Community, but also at the level of socio-political structures. This is what *The Meditations* and therefore *The Duties* call Christian patriotism/patriotism chrétien. Once the citizen is essentially defined as a religious man, patriotism borrows the features of a secular religion and the cult of the country, those of a political liturgy (the relationship between this world's homeland and the eternal homeland, between the Christian citizen and the Christian martyrs, etc.).

In general, Marcovici writes a faithful translation of the French intermediary-text. Substantial changes are to be noted only in two cases : the chapter on baptism is almost a summary of the original, while the chapter on soldiers has a significant number of omissions and additional passages. Their logic only confirms the assumption that Marcovici has operated permanently and committed himself to a shift of focus from the individual to the society/homeland. As far as the view of poverty is concerned, the first thing which draws our attention is the absence of a stand-alone chapter on poverty from the perspective of the religious and civic command of charity, which seems to be the cornerstone of the author's entire moralizing speech. This can be seen in chapters such as *The Happyness of the Rich* and *Sacrificing oneself for the good of the community*. Emphasising the value of the Christian act of gifting, but always keeping in mind its social usefulness, Simeon Marcovici condemns not only the poor, as the useless members of society, but also the indiscriminate donors who encourage the lack of caution and the laziness of the poor, through undifferentiated charity, seen as waste. Between the rich and the poor, Marcovici positions himself unambiguously on the former's side, through a discourse that uses biblical examples in a reading key not only unseen before, but also rather uncanonical. For example, Simeon Marcovici was convinced that Jesus did not actually ask the rich to share their fortunes with the poor, because “What would the wife gain if all the riches had deserted their fortunes? They would make themselves poor and other rich people would come in their place, who are totally unworthy of using the wealth they have suddenly acquired.” Moreover, Simeon Marcovici condemns the option of religious voluntary poverty, which he considers to be lacking either in rationality or authenticity.

In the spirit of the official doctrine of the church, he condemns not wealth in itself, but only the illicit gain and greed, but the meaning of *the charity* is far away from traditional Christian charity, being significantly more similar to the philanthropic approach of the Enlightenment, sensitive not to the sotherological values of the gift, but to its ability to contribute actively to the common good, to be constantly directed at its social usefulness. *The benefits of society* a standard and necessary condition of charity, as Simeon Marcovici thought, necessarily requires the existence of an important category of Christian citizens, aware of their social role and actively involved in the dynamic of goods. The social ideal must first be had, then given, but the gift, at an individual level, remains a universal duty of the wealthy and the poverty. However, it can only turn into a social duty if the poor, like any other member of society, assumes their own status, namely that of a poor industrious man, a view whose pragmatism is similar to English classic liberalism rather than religious doctrine.

Poverty in itself is not a virtue. Simeon Marcovici sees it in a negative way. Even so, to be a good Christian is what is expected of the poor, because God will ultimately account for their virtue correctly. Yet the ontological identity of virtue remains an ideal figure. In the real world, which Simeon Marcovici addresses, the virtue of the poor is worth less than the virtue of the wealthy, for the simple reason that the lack of resources of the former is implicit in his condition and it is not the result of a sacrifice, of a renouncement. Finally, what Marcovici proposes, in full accord with the ideas of his century regarding the means of combating pauperism, but using traditional religious motivation and a classic biblical example (the talent of the widow), is to cultivate and practice, at every level of society, the bourgeois values of restraint, planning and making economies ("the rich should learn to be poor with his riches, the poor, to one more become rich in his poverty, and thus to live up to his needs, for it will always be through economy that he will find a means of showering his surroundings with happiness").

We do not know under which circumstances Simeon Marcovici found Zschokke's work. What interested us, however, was his option to translate and publish it. We believe that this option is closely linked to the explicitly religious nature of *The Meditations*, when religion was an important component of identity speech, but also to the fact that it equally addressed the private life, but also to the public life of the individual. The selection of chapters and the translator's interventions indicate his main interest was public behavior. Certain fundamental values of

Christianity are assimilated to civic values (love thy neighbor / social solidarity) and patriotism, the cornerstone of national movements in the 19th century, is understood as a logical result of the correct practice of religious commandments (Christian patriotism).