

**ATTITUDE OF PREMODERN ROMANIAN SOCIETY TO
„THE MARGINALIZED”.
PERSPECTIVES OF OBSERVATION AND
INTERPRETATION**

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Abstract. *This paper gathered a series of manifestations of Romanian society regarding to its interpersonal relationship who has development during Premodern centuries. Our observations present the relationships that determined different attitudes of the „majority” of people towards those incapable to realize physical activity or to pray. These social categories were positioned to outskirts of society, becoming the „marginalized” (for example, the mentally ill, beggar, incurably ill, cripple, mutilated physically, deformed etc.). Towards those „social marginalizes”, Romanian society was called to showing the "Christian pity". Its attitudes were encouraged by the religious and legal norms.*

In order to highlight these relations, we used a various types of documents, as representative of the problem analyzed.

By nature of the topic, the work was formulated some assumptions that could become landmarks reliable in the future scientific research.

Keywords: *mentality, Premodern history, Christian Orthodox religion, social attitudes, norms.*

In the Pre-modern Romanian society, the ability to judge and to decide the place of each individual in society was attributed to the Orthodox Church which, in this sense, was working alongside the Lord, and also alongside the community in its entirety. So, the moral-religious and judicial percepts (at which we should add the will of the political power) were

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promoting the respect for the social order, a form of God's will, the passage from one state to another being the result of sin, of the divine will and of the Christian pity. In this sense, the Center, the social elite, seemed to be intangible (even if the lord, as the earthly representative of the divine will, could change at any time any social status), and its boundaries were more dynamic, including all of those who could no longer obey the laws of God. The social boundaries were made, from the conception of J. Le Goff, which referred to the European West society¹, the following social elements:

- a. the irrecoverable criminals, excommunicated, suicides, witches, heretics, „pagans” („p gâinii”), Jews, etc. (*the excluded*);
- b. the poor, beggars, insane, disabled, mutilated, etc. (*the marginalized*);
- c. those who practice infamous trades, incurably ill, etc. (*the outside social clase / „declasat”*).

The Romanian Pre-modern society, like any other society based on Christian pity, has established some landmarks on what concerns “the destitute”, the sin, divine judgment, charity and faith. Often, in the religious literature of the Romanian space of the XVIIth century, the Christian pity was invoked with words such as: “He who pities a poor man, makes a gift to God and He will repay his good deed²”.

The research of the situations of social marginality is supported today by the history of mentalities, especially by its side oriented towards the mentality facts: the paradoxes, bizarre superstitions, curious facts and attitudes confusing³. Even if, for the period and space we are interested in, the sources do not offer enough data to overcome the level of assumptions which can be more or less historically proven, and the level of speculations, we believe that this *semi-silence* is due to not only the priority orientation towards other social aspects, but also to the oddness related to these social elements, „the fools”, „foolish”, „beggars”. These cases, poorly marked in the writings of the time, we do not

¹ Jacques Le Goff, 1970.

² To see Ligia Livadă-Cadeschi, 2002, 11-60.

³ H. Martin, 2001, 228; J. Le Goff, P. Nora, 1974, Fr. Lebrun, 1967, H. Martin, 1998.

think can be considered exceptions. It is impossible that the frequent wars, predatory attacks, natural disasters and the lack of specialized health service have not increased social deprivation, number of maimed, crippled, deformed, insanes, incurably ill, criminals, beggars and vagrants.

Being incapable to get socially and lucratively integrated, and to respect God's laws, all of these made their marginality imminent. This marginality is emphasized also by the reaction shown by the community in dealing with these social elements. Therefore, pin-pointing the attitude towards those found at the edges of society, cannot be separated from the religious feelings that have motivated it, an aspect which we will focus on next.

1. Attitude towards the mentally handicapped (the insane)

Nervous ill, considered forms of insanity⁴ (especially epilepsy and manifestations of violence) were the result of demonic influences („every sin has one devil”⁵).

In the gestures and words of such a sick person, the other members of the community were seeing the presence of the devil, fool being called „a charmed by Satan”, „mad” („smintit”), „possessed” („îndr cit”), „the mindless” („cel lipsit de minte”), „ugly” („pocitul”), „freak” („pocitania”), „ugliness”, („dambla”), „stroke” („apoplexie”), „cataroi”, „pale” („paliz”). By taking power over his mind⁶, the devil “was working” the body of the possessed one, so that the sick started⁷ „to wallow” and „to twitch”⁸) („se bate, se t v le te i-i merg spumele”, „î i schimonose te fa a i î i schimb c ut tura”). Such gestures were troubling the viewers and their religious belief. Therefore, „the possessed” used to be isolated in monasteries and in their families. Were denied the their presence in the church, because „they will no say any bad and disgusting word in the church, and to terrified and to temping the crowd frightened people and stop the service of God”⁹ („s nu spun cuvânt r u i scârnav la

⁴ V. V. Toma, A. Majuru, 2006.

⁵ *Cazania*, 177.

⁶ *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 112, 140.

⁷ *Cazania*, 234.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 177.

⁹ *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 92, 125.

biseric , s sp imeze i s sminteasc gloata oamenilor i s curmeze slavoslovnic, adic slujirea Domnului”).

Even if the writings about their existence are poor, we do believe that there must have been quite a few cases of madmen in the Romanian society of the XVIIth century, especially since their status was somewhat regulated in the known Rule of Vasile Lupu (*Carte româneasc de înv tur de la pravilele împ r te ti*, 1646) and Matei Basarab (*Îndreptarea legii*, 1652).

Regarding at the one who have this situation, considered repairable and legal intangible, it have established the following:

- a. „the possessed” as „those up to 20 years old, the deaf (...) at the servant, at the immoral”, „can not testify at trial”¹⁰ („cel îndr cit”, ca și „cei de pân în 20 ani, cel surd (...) cel slug , cel curvariu”, „nu pot m rturisi la judecat ”);
- b. if a personor is or is not intended become a priest, but „it is happen to have a devil, this man must to no interfere with the faithful to pray until he will clean up the disease after those to make priest”¹¹ (dac o persoan intenționeaz sau nu s devin cleric, dar „se întâmpl s se îndr ceasc , s nu se amestece s se roage cu credincioșii pân ce nu se va cur ța de acea boal , dup aceia s se fac cleric”);
- c. if „the woman have a devil, her husband must wait three years, unless hell delivers from lust he it have to release”; „if her husband have a devil, him wife must to wait five years and then she have to marry”¹² („mujiea dac se îndr cește” b rbatul s u „trebuie s o aștepte 3 ani, dac nu se izb vește din patima dracului s se elibereze”; „dac el se îndr cește, ea s îl aștepte 5 ani și apoi s se m rite”);
- d. „if she did not confesse at the start of wedding that she has this lust, the husband have to separate of her and he cant to married with another woman (...) if the lust of woman has come after the wedding , the husband does not break of her”; it is valid for the man also¹³ („dac femeia nu a m rturisit la început c are patima s se despart și s ia

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, Glava No. 24, 85.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, Glava No. 92, 125.

¹² *Ibidem*, Glava No. 235, 229.

¹³ *Cazania*, 234.

alta (...), dac patima a venit dup nunt , nu se desparte”, reglementarea fiind valabil și în cazul „într cirii b rbatului”);

- e. who kills his deformed child, „which has terrible signs, he is not punished by law”¹⁴ (cine își ucide copilul deformat, „care are semne groaznice, nu e certat”);
- f. if someone is crazy and foolish and kill his father he does not judged, because the penalty to get them crazy it is enough”¹⁵ („dac cineva este nebun și f r minte și ucide tat l nu se judec , pentru c pedeapsa de a fi nebun îi ajunge”).

One’s facts could not be judged according to the social laws, because one was not aware of one’s mistakes, so it was impossible for one to amend oneself and to obtain the soul salvation by fulfilling the given punishment. Thus, the madman, who for his sins or the sins of others, was caring the devil inside him, was treated as an irresponsible sick person, but not as an incurable one, because the divine pity and forgiveness could cure him. Meanwhile, he was remaining in the care of his family or in that of the monastery¹⁶, where, in isolation he would wait for his redemption. The biblical texts were talking about their salvation in the scenes where Jesus was driving away the devil from men, so as to strengthen their belief in the God. The interpretation offered by the *Homiliary* („Cazanie”) puts emphasis on this teaching, but also has drawn attention over a detail which has fueled the superstitious believes of the people: the crises of the possessed started when it was a full Moon, which was definitely the work of the devil¹⁷.

In the clerical discourse, if the possessed ones were pitied in general, the sinners were considered more worthy of pity because their souls were even harder challenged by the devil than their bodies („urât e m cenia dracului când vedem cum zdrobe te i munce te trupurile oamenilor în care intr . Iar f r

¹⁴ *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 244, 240.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Evlia Celebi has described a physically deformed man, with a monstrous face, who was living at the corner of a monastery and he was eating i mân stiri, hr nindu-se with everything that he found, see *C l tori*, 1976, 726.

¹⁷ *Cazania*, 51-54.

nici o îndoire mai r u zdrobe te i munc te sufletele cele ce ine în puterea sa, adic în p cate”¹⁸).

The possessed ones, through their sins, “they were giving themselves to the world and their bodies, to their lusts”, “they were not taking care of their souls either”, proving “the lack of power of humans and the weakness of those who had a child’s mind”.

For a Christian man, the devil’s possession was meant to scare him more, because the devil was hiding in the mind and the soul of men, even if his presence was permitted by their owner as a result of one’s neglect of the Christian duty and because of „the sweetness” of sin. They „do not care for their soul or the God”, demonstrating „the fruit of human helplessness and weakness of the child mind”¹⁹

By developing its meaning of „different than others, by not obeying the worldly laws”, the term „mad” was also attributed to those who, for a greater love of God, were courageously breaking the human rationality so as to follow Christ.

2. The attitude towards the one who has physical (and material) weakness

The disadvantaged social categories had the possibility (cripples, paralytics, mutilated, sick etc.) of becoming the main source for delinquents and the most effective way to destabilize the life of a community. So, their marginality was inevitable and the maintaining of this state was considered legal. For example, the separation of the man who became „fools” was accepted, but „if she has the disease, she can to separate, but he take care of her, feeds her all life”²⁰.

If the disease was born like as, then the patient must remain in the care of his family²¹, so „who send sick son to the house where beggars and sick people are losing their earthly

¹⁸ Antim Ivireanu, 1997, 208.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 225, 227.

²¹ L. Livad -Cadeschi, 2002, 26, 30, 33. First hospital who has mentioned in the romanian cronicles, was one at on „the outskirts of Bucharest, with many litle rooms and a church in the midst of domaine”, as has asserted Dionisie Ecclesiarhul”. This hospital was founded by Alexandru Moruzi in 1753. There were the people sicked of the plague.

power”²². This affirmation supports the idea of some establishments that were meant to host individuals which society was considering being physically and mentally incapacitated. First hospital from Moldavia and Valahia in 1619-1620 (the hospital of Suceava, founded by Bishop Anastasie Crimca), but the most significant places of this kind belong to the XVIIIth century.

In their support, of these communities that were helping the poor, the crippled and the sick, the Lord has allowed them not to pay taxes, has encouraged the monasteries to help them. The people with a physical handicap were not losing their properties as they were capable to dispose as they wished of their goods²³. For this situation, the Romanian examples are not poor, because we see deeds upon which we can find names and that person’s disability noted down²⁴.

In order to help the sick and the old, the infirmaries were created bolni ele ²⁵, even if their activity is debatable until today. Some think that they were an institution which was offering medical assistance to the clergy and the simple people („romanian hospital”²⁶). Others said that they were some sort of annex of the monasteries meant for the retirement of the old and sick monks, having its own church around which the monks were getting buried²⁷. It is certain that here were being taken care of, after the empirical methods, not only monks, but also the founders and the benefactors of the monastery, and those that became ill while visiting the religious place²⁸.

²² *Îndreptarea legii*, Glava No. 244, 239.

²³ See Marcel –Dumitru Ciuc , Silvia V tafu-G itan, Meletina Bâzgan, 1993. Doc. no. 1036, 357.

²⁴ It is case of the decision of Matei Basarab (in the document / *hrisov* from 1639) who established the exemption of the village M ul de Jos, at South of the Muscel, for to be „the work and the feed for the poor, halted, hunched of the city Câmpulung (*Catalogul documentelor rii Române ti din Arhivele Statului*, vol. IV (1633-1639), 1981. Doc. No. 1514 bis, 654-655. This case has presented by L. Livad - Cadeschi, 2002, 28.

²⁵ For more details about the hospitals monastic („bolni e”) from the XVIIth century, to see M. P curariu, 1992, 222-223.

²⁶ P. Gh. Samaritan, 1938, 116-117. See P. Miroiu, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, 1969, 9-10 and 1970, 1-2.

²⁷ G. Br tescu, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, 1969, 9-10.

²⁸ In this sense, we remark the document of lord (*hrisov domnesc*) on 19 of May 1713, where the wallachian lord Constantin Brâncoveanu reinforced and complemented the donation of the high backrest (*marele sp tar*) Mihai

These types of concerns have become part of the monastery's norms, them being stated in the *Ritual Law (Tipicon)*. The egumen must to concern for healing the sick, from monastery or from the abroad, younger or older („ i de va veni cineva strein i f r cas , în casa de streini cu vreo boal cuprins (...) i s i se porunceasc a petrece în casa de cea de bolnavi, pân se va face s n to i i atunci cele de trebuin în cale de la egumen, împreun cu rug ciunea primind, cu pace întru ale sale s se slobozeasc . Iar b trânilor i celor ce nici un ajutor nu au, s porunceasc a se îndulci de toate cele de trebuin . i pat lor întocmai num rat s le puie lor pentru odihn ”²⁹).

In *the Romanian Codex (Pravila româneasc , 1646)* it is established that: “This is what we teach: build a church or an infirmary or an eating house where the strangers can stop or other similar buildings and you will find happiness and you will not be judged by God” („Iaste înv tur s fac biseric sau bolni sau osp t rie ce s dzice cas de str ini sau grobnic i alte asemenea acestora, pentru c atunci s ia singur cu voias i nu trebuie nice un giude i înc poate s ia singur cându-i ca alege st pânul în zapis”³⁰). The bishop Atanasie Crimca with the brothers Lupu and Simion Stroici raised at the Dragomirna Monastery, his foundation in 1602 a chapel who became „bolni ”³¹. In 1637-1638, Lady Anu a, the daughter of the lord Mircea Ciobanul was foundation „bolni a” by wooden at Dintr-un lemn Monastery. The Lady Marica Brâncoveanu founded the „Bolni a” („Adormirea Maicii Domnului”) in 1696-1699 at Hurezi Monastery. Of course, in these charitable initiatives were involved the representatives of the nobility or high clergy.

Therefore, we may consider that, the attention offered to these people remains mainly anchored in the religious sphere. The mentally ill or the physically and mentally disabled were perceived as an intermediary between the benefactor and God.

Cantacuzino to Col ea Monastery of Bucharest whose founder he was, the surrounding walls, the cells and the school of here, the hospitale for to rest here the foreign sick”. This donation was for feeding, care and treatment of foreign sick, to see *Condica Marii Logofe ii*, Doc. No. 403, 566-567.

²⁹ *Apud* P. Miroiu, in *Mitropolia Olteniei*, 12, 1969, 699.

³⁰ *Carte româneasc de înv tur de la pravilele împ r te ti*, 1960, 78.

³¹ Al. I. Gon a, în *Studii de istorie medieval , 1998, 260; P. Miroiu, în Mitropolia Olteniei, 1-2, 1970, 66.*

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