HISTORIES CONNECTED THROUGH ENLIGHTENMENT AND ROMANTICISM: A CROSS-CULTURAL JOURNEY OF IDEAS FROM FRANCE TO THE DANUBIAN PRINCIPALITIES

Mihaela STANCANA[*]

Abstract: In the first decades of the 19th century, two currents of thought brought significant intellectual transformations in the thinking of the Moldavian–Wallachian elites. Enlightenment and Romanticism transmitted impulses that inspired and motivated substantial efforts to reshape local realities. The reconfiguration of intellectual life both determined and was determined by a shift in the sphere of influence. The growing awareness of the urgent need to detach from Eastern culture and move closer to Western culture marked the process of transition toward a new modern era. At that time, the elites of the Principalities most often interpreted the expression of the West through the image of France. The French model of culture and civilization made its presence felt as a result of historical circumstances into which the Principalities had been drawn. The intermediaries who initially facilitated the French influence in Wallachia and Moldavia were the Phanariotes, later succeeded by the Russians. Through what they left behind, they contributed to the process of bringing the Danubian Principalities closer to European culture and civilization. Among all these experiences, the most valuable was the contact with Western ideas and intellectual movements, which the local elites continued to cultivate and reinterpret to serve their own purposes. This practice, encouraged by an increasingly favorable political context during the 1820s and 1830s, made possible a new level of interaction with Western ideas. At that moment, the elites of the Principalities assigned to the French model the role of main collaborator, one that would accompany it in the effort to reshape local intellectual and political realities into new modern forms.
Keywords: connected histories, cross-cultural history, cultural transfer, Enlightenment, French influence, Romanticism

Rezumat: În primele decenii ale secolului al XIX-lea, două curente de idei au produs mutaţii intelectuale importante în gândirea elitelor moldo-valahe. Iluminismul şi Romantismul au transmis atunci impulsuri ce au inspirat şi motivat eforturi semnificative de transformare a realităţilor locale. Reconfigurarea vieţii intelectuale a

[*] Mihaela Stancana, Ph.D. student at the Doctoral School of History, "Ovidius" University of Constanţa, Romania, e-mail: stancana_mihaela@yahoo.com.

determinat și a fost determinată de schimbarea spațiului de influență. Conștientizarea nevoii imperioase de decuplare de la cultura orientală și apropierea de cea occidentală a reprezentat procesul tranziției spre noi vremuri moderne. Atunci, elita din Principate a tradus expresia Occidentului cel mai des prin imaginea Franței. Modelul de cultură și civilizație franceze și-a făcut simțită prezența în urma unor conjuncturi istorice în care s-au aflat Principatele. Intermediarii care au mijlocit, în primă fază, *influența franceză* în Valahia și Moldova au fost fanarioții, succedați ulterior de ruși. Prin ceea ce au lăsat în urma lor, ei au contribuit la procesul de apropiere al Principatelor Dunărene de cultura și civilizația europeană. Din suma acestor experiențe, cea mai de preț a fost contactul cu ideile și curentele de gândire apusene, pe care elita locală a continuat să le cultive și interpreteze în interes propriu. Această practică, stimulată de contextul politic tot mai favorabil ale deceniilor trei-patru ale secolului al XIX-lea, au permis interacțiunea la un nou nivel cu ideile occidentale. Atunci, elita din Principate a recunoscut în modelul francez cadrul principal de sprijin care să o însoțească în efortul de redesenare în noi forme moderne a realităților intelectuale și politice locale

Cuvinte cheie: istorii conectate, *histoire croisée*, Iluminism, influența franceză, Romantism, transfer cultural

I.   Introduction

To what extent can the export of literature reverberate as the diffusion of a broad mindset? I have sought the answer to this question by using the history of how the Moldavian and Wallachian elites interacted with the ideas of Enlightenment and Romanticism in the early 19th century. At that time, social and political background shaped forms of creative expression, determining their transposition into currents of thought and stimulating creativity to the point of reversing hierarchies. The process of transformation and modernization of a generally backward society is a complex one that, in most cases, is driven and developed by a model capable of winning over minds, guiding reforms, and overturning beliefs. The fascinating metamorphosis through which the Danubian Principalities gradually moved away from the experience of the East to embrace the Enlightenment ideas of the West – introduced, among others, by the French influence – stands as one of the most compelling chapters in their search for a new identity.

In my attempt to trace the roots, reasons, and intellectual breakthroughs that determined and accelerated this reorientation, the main driver was the openness with which the Wallachians and Moldavians spaces allowed themselves to be reshaped by a cultural and civilizational model that was, in many ways, unfamiliar, distant, and complex. In historiography, the impact of French influence during the Romanian transitional period has been analyzed

from multiple perspectives[1]. Almost all these approaches arrive at the same conclusion: that of the discovery of the West, whose expression most often took the form of the image of France. The issue of French influence on the Danubian Principalities has seldom been revisited through analytical frameworks provided by modern Western cultural historiography. An examination of the historical context within the Principalities needs to identify the intricate consequences of the increasing French influence[2]. In this sense, employing contemporary methodological tools facilitates a more nuanced analysis of this period. Western scholarly literature analyzes such phenomena of

---

[1] Among the first to seriously document the phenomenon of French influence in the Danubian Principalities was Pompiliu Eliade, with his work *Influenţa franceză asupra spiritului public din România: Originile. Studiu asupra stării societăţii româneşti în vremea domniilor fanariote* (Bucureşti: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006). An important perspective on the phenomenon of *synchronization* and the assimilation of the French cultural model in the 19th century was also offered in 1920s by Eugen Lovinescu, in his three-volume work entitled *Istoria civilizaţiei române moderne*. Regarding the history of ideas, important studies analyzing the intellectual transformations that took place in Romanian elite thought as a result of contact with the Enlightenment were undertaken by Vlad Georgescu in *Political Ideas and the Enlightenment in the Romanian Principalities (1750-1831)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971) and *Mémoires et projets de réforme dans les Principautés Roumaines 1831-1848* (Bucureşti: Association Internationale d'Études du Sud-Est Européen, 1972). Paul Cornea also conducted an important research endeavor, in which he meticulously explores the aspects introduced by French influence in the Romanian cultural sphere through the channel of Romanticism *Originile romantismului românesc: Spiritul public, mişcarea ideilor şi literatura între 1780-1840* (Bucureşti: Editura Minerva, 1972). John Campbell wrote about the contribution of French influence to the development of Romanian nationalism in *French Influence and the Rise of the Romanian Nationalism* (New York: ArnoPress, 1971). Among the recent efforts to uncover the dimensions of modernization and modernity within Romanian society, the research conducted by Constanţa Vintilă stands out. She captured various aspects of the East-West transition at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Among the most important contributions on this matter, I would mention Constanţa Vintilă, *Changing Subjects, Moving Objects. Status, Mobility and Social Transformation in Southeastern Europe, 1700-1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), *Evgheniţi, ciocoi, mojici: despre obrazele primei modernităţi româneşti: (1750-1860)* (Bucureşti: Editura Humanitas, 2023) and *From Traditional Attire to Modern Dress: Modes of Identification, Modes of Recognition in the Balkans (XVI-XXth Centuries)* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011). Among the important contributions to the study of the impact of Romanian–French interactions and the role of Western ideas in shaping the first generation of intellectuals are those of Nicolae Isar, în *Relaţii şi interferenţe româno-franceze în epoca Luminilor: (1769-1834): Studii* (Bucureşti: Editura Universitară, 2017) and *Sub semnul „Luminilor”: Din istoria generaţiei de la 1821* (Bucureşti: Editura Universitară, 2018), among others. With regard to the shaping of the idea of *Europe* in the Romanian consciousness, an important study on this subject belongs to Laurenţiu Vlad, *Istorii româneşti ale ideii de „Europa”, secolele XVII-XXI (imagini, note, reflecţii)* (Iaşi: Editura Institutul European, 2021).

[2] An interesting debate on the notion of "influence" was opened by Alex Tipei, who, in her study "How to Make Friends and Influence People: Elementary Education, French 'Influence,' and the "Balkans, 1815–1830s", *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 3 (2018): 621-649, applies the theory that the term conveys a unilateral and limited impression of the phenomenon – a theory initially developed by Paula Young Lee in her work "Modern Architecture and the Ideology of Influence", *Assemblage*, no. 34 (December 1997): 6-29.

cultural import within the theoretical frameworks of *cross-cultural history*[3] and *connected history*[4]. On the one hand, the concept of *cross-cultural history*, also known as *histoire croisée*, establishes a paradigm for relating social, cultural, and political formations that are assumed to be interconnected. It involves investigating the intersection itself, its practical and intellectual attributes. The concept of *connected histories*, on the other hand, puts forward the fact that the understanding of regional histories is contingent upon an appreciation of the mutual connections that transcend national boundaries, encompassing political, commercial, and cultural domains. Both terms are theorized in connection to the study of networks for the circulation of ideas, people, or goods; mechanisms that are the primary means through which influence is transmitted and increased – supported, directly or indirectly, by the power of the model that exercises it.

These paradigms were also to be observed in the Danubian Principalities. In the late 18th century, the Romanians reached a crossroads and opted to deviate from the established trajectory that the Oriental model had dictated previously. For several centuries, the Danubian Principalities had remained under Ottoman suzerainty, an experience the local elites perceived to be deeply detrimental to their political, cultural, and social development. The Phanariotes, appointed by the Porte to govern the Danubian Principalities and to prevent any developments outside the Oriental order, became – often unintentionally – the intermediaries through whom European, and frequently French cultural influences entered the Romanian space. By encouraging book trade, translations, and newspapers, and thereby multiplying the contacts with the West, the Phanariotes contributed, for more than a century, to the gradual dismantling of the barriers that had isolated the Danubian Principalities from Enlightenment Europe in the 18th century.

Initially, the tendency to separate themselves from the Oriental world was fueled by the ideas and principles uncovered through the reading of Enlightenment literature, which found resonance with some of the main concerns of Wallachians and Moldavians. Weary of the Ottoman Empire's constant interference in their internal affairs and of the harsh control imposed by the Phanariot regime, the elites began to seek ways to escape this inopportune condition. Thus, the Romanian elite found itself compelled to seek

---

[3] Significant contributions to this subject have been provided by the following authors: Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity", *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (February 2006): 30-50, https://doi.org/ 10.1111/j.1468-2303.2006.00347.x. On the matter of cultural contacts and the process of hybridization, see also: Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).

[4] For a detailed exposition of the concept's genesis, see its foundational text: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia", *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1997): 735-762. Also see: Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde. Histoire d'une mondialisation* (Paris: La Martinière, 2004) – this work extends the concept's dimensions by exploring the history of early cultural globalization and the circulation of ideas.

potential support from abroad. Initially, they turned their hopes toward Russia, which was engaged in quasi-constant conflict with the Ottoman Empire and claimed to be the protector of Orthodox Christians in the East. The frequent Russian occupations during the late 18th and early 19th centuries brought not only adverse consequences but also new perspectives for change.

Among the most significant outcomes was the growing presence of Western cultural elements, which, by the 1820s and 1830s, contributed decisively to reshaping the Romanian intellectual – and, consequently, political – landscape. These transformations were, in many cases, supported and reinforced by the ideals of Romanticism, as well as by the major political events unfolding across Europe. Then, the transition was marked by a significant shift during the first half of 19th century. Unfortunately, it was characterized by the assemblage of multiple pieces that French influence has placed on top of the old existing base, which came to be detested for the prominent contrast that persisted in the shadow of the changes that were intended to be modern.

The purpose of the present article is to provide an examination of the impact of the French literary currents of Enlightenment and Romanticism on the cultural and political thought of the Danubian Principalities. The analysis will explore the role of French influence in reorienting the course of the cultural and political evolution in the Principalities, as it transitioned from the former Ottoman authority to an embrace of Western culture. Therefore, this article proposes a revision of the origins of French influence in the Romanian space through the paradigm of connection, which extends beyond the conventional narrative of "imitation" or "unilateral influence". In this sense, it formulates a theoretical framework that describes the circulation, mediation, and transformation of ideas in the Danubian Principalities during the 19th century.

II.   The French Connection

Throughout history, the importation of literary or artistic themes, concepts, and techniques from other cultures has been a recurrent phenomenon, providing a constant source of inspiration for creators while, at the same time, accelerating the pace of development overall. In Europe, whenever a civilization has experienced an era of cultural flourishing, ideas have been disseminated beyond its national borders. The analysis of the mechanisms of sharing and inspiring different ways of thinking offers a valuable perspective on the substantial contributions made to the reform of various fields. In this regard, we could mention, among other such influences, the role of Greek culture on the Roman civilization or that of the Italian Renaissance on 16th

century France[5]. However, this old practice of cultural borrowing will experience the most widespread and complex manifestation during and immediately after the Enlightenment.

On an intellectual level, an important consequence of the transformations that reshaped the world in the 18th century was the movement of ideas through literary and political works that were becoming increasingly widespread across the continent. Unlike Classicism, Enlightenment could be framed as the most extensive form of synchronization between cultures and, more than that, as a means of dispelling with the state of backwardness found in underdeveloped societies, especially where the upper classes were concerned[6]. For foreign ideas to permeate and leave their mark on the mentalities of European societies, a fragmentation of local tradition was required. This was perhaps the most difficult and troubling aspect of this transformation, frequently met with opposition – particularly from the clergy, that felt it was their duty to reject such atheistic representations[7]. The transition happened gradually and followed a different dynamic from case to case, especially in the Balkans, where evolution was slower.

For centuries, French influence has stood as the cultural compass of Europe. This kind of status further intensified the popularity and the diffusion of the French political and cultural model across the European continent in the 18th century[8]. The Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism endowed the Enlightenment movement with a broader scope[9]. The spread of ideas reached remarkable proportions throughout the century, culminating with the Revolution of 1789. Even after its decline, Enlightenment principles continued to circulate, subtly reshaping the mentality of the age, where they were often unconsciously assimilated. The ideals of equality and individual liberty, the emphasis on emotion and sensibility, and the search for the common good

---

[5] For more on the contributions of cultural exchanges and other trends regarding the modernization of European societies, see: Donatella Calabi and Stephen Turk Christensen, *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe – Volume II: Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400-1700.*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Marc Boone and Martha Howell, eds., *The Power of Space in Late Medievaland Early Modern Europe. The Cities of Italy, Northen France and the Low Countries* (Turnhout: Crepols Publishers, 2013); Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 7-13.

[6] Victor Neumann, *Tentaţia lui homo europaeus: geneza ideilor moderne în Europa Centrală şi de Sud-Est* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2006), 145.

[7] For more on the difficulty with which the Orthodox clergy, in particular, accepted change, see the first part of the study by Ionuţ Biliuţă, „'Agenţii schimbării'": Clerul ortodox din Principatele Române de la regimul feudal la statul naţional", in *„Ne trebuie oameni!": elite intelectuale şi transformări istorice în România modernă şi contemporană*, coord. Cristian Vasile (Târgovişte: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2017), 27-49; see also: Constanţa Vintilă, et al., *Lux, modă şi alte bagatele politiceşti în Europa de Sud-Est în secolele XVI-XIX* (Bucureşti: Editura Humanitas, 2021), 369, 373.

[8] Tyler Stovall, *Transnational France. The Modern History of a Universal Nation* (Santa Cruz: Westview Press, 2015), 9-12.

[9] Ibid.

represented innovative aspects of the Enlightenment – constituting a fundamentally different foundation for a new social order. Its adherents were primarily attracted to these theoretical and philosophical frameworks, which held the promise of transforming existing forms of social and political expression[10]. The complex legacy of 1789 increasingly drew the attention of Europeans to France at the dawn of the 19th century. Culturally, the prestige and allure of the French model expanded, awakening renewed curiosity about its origins – both directly, through encounters with its homeland and indirectly, through literature and arts[11]. The political doctrines derived from Enlightenment thought and the aspirations that had animated the French Revolution continued to inspire and propel nationalist movements, as well as radical currents in many parts of the world[12].

III. Threads of Light

The diffusion of Enlightenment ideas in Europe followed captivating pathways. Contemporary scholarship on the conceptual analysis of *cross-cultural* or *entangled histories* offers a framework for understanding the emergence, spread, and nuances of this current[13]. Although the Enlightenment was far from being a purely French creation, following the trajectory of French Enlightenment works reveals a rich and intricate intellectual landscape[14]. For example, the French Enlightenment literature entered the German cultural space and inspired writers to imitate its models and ideas[15], contributing to such a rise in nationalism that any foreign currents - but especially French - came to be despised and regarded as forces liable to erode the distinctive character of the German spirit[16].

---

[10] Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times. Fron the Enlightenment to the Present* (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1974), 26-28; Marshall Brown, "Deconstruction and Enlightenment", *The Eighteenth Century* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 259-263.

[11] Christophe Charle, *Les intellectuels en Europe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), 17-22; Lucian Boia, "Sur la diffusion de la culture européenne en Roumanie (XIXe siècle et début du XXe siècle)", in *Modèle français et expériences de la modernisation. Roumaine, 19e-20e siècles*, coord. Florin Ţurcanu (Bucureşti: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006), 23-24.

[12] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 55.

[13] Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique", *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (October 2012): 1011, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/117.4.999.

[14] Ritchie Robertson, *Iluminismul. Căutarea fericirii, 1680-1790* (Bucureşti: Editura Litera, 2023), 17.

[15] Andreas Önnerfors, "Translating discourses of the Enlightenment: transcultural language skills and cross-references in Swedish and German eighteenth-century learned journals", in *Cultural Transfer through Translation. The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation*, ed. Stefanie Stockhorst (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), 226-228.

[16] Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, "Conceptual History and Conceptual Transfer: The Case of 'Nation' in Revolutionary France and Germany", in *History of Concepts. Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Iain

Through this map, one conclusion clearly emerges: the spread of Enlightenment ideas was determined by human needs which shaped their local adaptations and endowed them with distinct nuances[17]. Such was the case of the Wallachians and Moldavians.

The values and ideals of the Enlightenment resonated with their specific social and political conditions. However, Enlightenment ideas did not gain popularity in the Danubian Principalities because the process of modernization required the formation of specialized elites, like in other parts of Europe happened. The political circumstances of the time stood in the way of such an ambitious undertaking. The Romanians elites of the Danubian Principalities embraced Enlightenment principles insofar as they reflected their own aspirations and concerns. Consequently, interpretations varied, and this diversity of meanings played a significant role - especially in the early 19th century – in shaping a critical spirit to guide them through the desired change.

The period of manifestation varied too. While the Enlightenment in the Romanian Principalities, is generally placed between 1770-1780 and 1830, in the territories of historical Poland and Hungary, the current is considered to have developed between the mid-18th century and around 1820, whereas in the Russian Empire it is said to have lasted until the mid-19th century[18].

The 18th century is also seen by some researchers who have studied the Age of Enlightenment as a period of eastward expansion of the European frontier[19]. Pierre Chaunu, for example, placed in one of his studies, the Greek archipelago, the Danubian principalities, and part of Russia as territories that were *annexed* by Europe in the 19th century and which, before this fusion, embodied a sort of *no man's land*[20]. However, such theories have been easily challenged, particularly regarding the term *annexation*[21]. Looking at the internal developments within these regions, we can more often observe voluntary

---

Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tumans, and Frank van Vree (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 116-125.

[17] John Gascoigne, "Cross-cultural knowledge exchange in the age of the Enlightenment", in *Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archives*, eds. Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent, and Tiffant Shellam (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 132; Daniel Chernilo, "Theorising Global Modernity: Descriptive and Normative Universalism", in *Legitimization in World Society*, ed. Aldo Mascareño and Kathya

Araujo (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012), 61-80; Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity", in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 7-20; Alexandru Duţu, *Cultura română în civilizaţia europeană modernă* (Bucureşti: Editura Minerva, 1978), 60.

[18] Nicolae Liu, „Orizont european în Iluminismul românesc. Francofonie şi cultură franceză", in *Revista Istorică* 19, no. 1-2 (2008): 137-138.

[19] See more about this aspect in: Larry Wolf, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); see especially the fourth chapter, "Mapping Eastern Europe: Political Geography and Cultural Cartography".

[20] Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation de l'Europe des Lumières* (Paris: Arthaud, 1971), 43-63.

[21] Liu, „Orizont european în Iluminismul românesc", 137.

tendencies toward rapprochement with European culture rather than, conversely, tendencies of conquest or unilateral influence. Moreover, Western intellectuals such as the Marquis de Custine and Friedrich Hegel placed Wallachia and Moldavia within the region of the Orient, both geographically and culturally, emphasizing in their writings that the two spheres – the European and the Oriental – stood in clear spiritual opposition to one another[22].

While Enlightenment influenced the course of almost all of Europe, it did so by producing the particular transformations each society most required. Rather than being merely imitated, its ideas were reshaped and adapted to local necessities, filling the intellectual and social voids specific to every political space it reached. In generally backward societies, such as the Danubian Principalities, the Enlightenment generated changes that went far deeper and were more transformative. Naturally, the Romanian case was not an isolated one within the region. In the span of several decades – from the twilight of the 18th century to the dawn of the 19th – most South-East European cultures began to unfold new and varied forms of expression. Throughout the entire region, we can observe that wherever the flow of books increased, the first critical reflections would appear simultaneously. Most often, these were visible in the form of written texts, but also through the emergence of greater or lesser tensions between the emancipated society and the often oppressive political factor.

The development of this intellectual capacity for critical analysis represented perhaps the most important initial step on the path toward modernization. At the same time, such developments were deepening the gap between the cities and the countryside[23]. However, despite their differences, each South-Eastern political space carried traces of Western Enlightenment thought[24]. The analysis of these influences in Southeast Europe is important for outlining a more complex and heterogeneous picture of how modernity arose[25]. In this sense, the concepts of *cross-cultural* and *connected histories* find its very essence in adaptation.

---

[22] Orlando Figes, *Europenii: Trei vieți și formarea unei culturi cosmopolite în Europa secolului al XIX lea* (București: Editura Polirom, 2021), 68-71.

[23] Alexandru Duțu, „"Până nu vine iarna, primăvară nu se face". Transformări în mentaţitățile Sud-Est europene la început de secol XIX", in *Sud-Estul european în vremea Revoluției Franceze. Stări de spirit, reacții, confluențe*, coord. Alexandru Duțu (București: Institutul de Studii Sud-Est Europene, 1994), 11.

[24] Duțu, *Cultura română*, 85-90.

[25] For more on the issue of the birth of modernity in South-Eastern Europe, see: Evguenia Davidova, *Balkan Transitions to Modernity and Nation-States: through the eyes of three generations of merchants (1780s-1890s)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Roumen Daskalov and Tchavdar Marinov, eds., *Entangled Histories of the Balkans* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Diana Mishkova, ed., *We, the people: politics of national peculiarity in Southeastern Europe* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2009).

IV. Paths of French Cultural Transfer

The cultural transfer from the West to the East was not a one-way relation but rather the consequence of a broader and ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, there was the power associated with the model's expansion. On the other, there was the receiving culture's reaction, interaction, and desire to replicate it, which ultimately took center stage. This dynamic is evident in the Danubian Principalities beginning with the second half of the 18th century when foreign influences, primarily French, emerged, brought about changes, and drove this political space closer to the process of modernization. The context was defined by the proximity of the Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman empires with the Romanian space evolving both at the periphery and at the intersection zone between them[26]. The path toward the discovery of ideas originating from the French cultural sphere was opened in the 18th century under the Phanariot regime[27]. In such a political landscape, the Phanariot rulers sometimes acted as agents of cultural import: although they maintained an internal situation unfavorable to the Danubian Principalities, their contacts and interactions with the Wallachian and Moldavian boyars marked the early and indirect stages of French influence. Those circumstances arose from the fact that many Greek dragomans of the Phanar were already relatively well acquainted with the French language and culture[28]; thus, almost inadvertently, they came to transmit some of the French customs to the Moldavian and Wallachian boyars. Among the many ways through which this influence brought about change, the one that resonated most profoundly was the cultivation of a taste for reading, especially for works of French literature.

By the end of the 18th century, the long shadow of Greek influence paved the way for the arrival of Western culture. It entered the Principalities through two main channels. The first was the Greek language, esteemed by the upper classes as the most natural path toward refined learning and intellectual grace[29]. The second was the French language, whose presence began to flourish in the main cities of Wallachia and Moldavia, offering a direct bridge to the West. Knowledge of these two languages made it possible for the Enlightenment and classical works to enter the libraries of households in the Danubian Principalities. At first, the Moldo-Wallachian boyars encountered the

---

[26] The analysis of the network of connections between the boyars of the Danubian Principalities and Constantinople, Venice, Vienna, and Saint Petersburg was conducted by Constanţa Vintilă, *Changing Subjects, Moving Objects. Status, Mobility and Social Transformation in Southeastern Europe, 1700-1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

[27] According to Pompiliu Eliade, the French influence began in the Danubian Principalities with the first Phanariot ruler (Eliade, *Influenţa franceză*, 116).

[28] Vintilă, *Changing Subjects*, 7-15.

[29] Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, 62.

ideas of Rousseau, Voltaire, La Fontaine, and Lamartine through Greek sources and often through Greek translations. Later, in the early 19th century, the elites of the Danubian Principalities abandoned this intermediary route in favor of directly interpreting and translating French works[30]. In this way, they no longer needed a mediator to access Enlightenment ideas and finally came into direct contact with them. This laid the foundation for profound transformations at the dawn of the 19th century in the Danubian Principalities.

The Greek channel also played an important role in establishing connections abroad. For example, knowing the Greek language helped the young Moldavian Nicolae Rosetti-Roznovanu engage with prominent figures in Paris during his journey in 1818. There, he met Greeks who were committed to supporting other Orthodox societies in their struggle to escape Ottoman dominance. They introduced Rosetti-Roznovanu to various social and intellectual circles that included not only Southeastern European luminaries but also a number of liberal French thinkers and politicians[31]. Through these encounters, Nicolae Rosetti-Roznovanu achieved the main goal of his journey which had been to gather models of modern Western institutions. He collaborated with several of these individuals and brought to Moldavia the concept of mutual instruction – a Lancasterian system of education developed by French liberals within the *Société pour l'instruction élémentaire* (Eng. trans.: Society for Elementary Education). The society's mission was to promote an affordable educational model that could be implemented worldwide according to French principles. However, its true scope was broader: to achieve cultural domination and extend French presence across the world[32].

The first decades of the 19th century paved the way for another actor to emerge as an importer of the French model to the Principalities. The Russian Empire, under the pretense of acting as the protector of Orthodox Christianity in the Balkans, became increasingly involved in the internal affairs of the Danubian Principalities as early as the final decades of the 18th century. Seizing upon the many weaknesses of the Ottoman rule, Russian policy discovered an opportunity to win the hearts of much of the boyar class – those who, in time, would come to seek its aid and intervention[33]. Thus, Russia became an indispensable element in the construction of Romanian modernity. Unlike the Phanariotes, the Russia was under a stronger French influence during the 18th

---

[30] David Popovici, *La Littérature Roumaine à l'Epoque des Lumières* (Sibiu: Centrul de studii şi cercetări privitoare la Transilvania, 1945), 73.
[31] Tipei, *How to Make Friends*, 17.
[32] Ibid., 10, 12.
[33] Victor Taki, *Rusia şi Ţările Române: imperiu, elite şi reforme între 1812 şi 1834* (Bucureşti: Editura Corint, 2024), 62-72.

century due to the ruling elite's policies of social emancipation[34]. Consequently, the image of the French cultural model was conveyed through Russian intermediaries in the Wallachian and Moldavian Principalities, especially during the military occupations of the first half of the 19th century. The presence of Russia in the two Principalities, in the context of their war efforts against the Turks, offered the Wallachian and Moldavian boyars the opportunity to become acquainted with officer corps whose manners, tastes, social habits, and ideas[35].

The local elite who encountered the occupiers from the east adopted from them the rules of etiquette, a rethinking of certain social relations, a better pronunciation of the French language, as well as some of their reading habits, and through all these, a new bridge toward the West was built. The impulse toward Europeanization opened new perspectives, destroyed traditions[36], reached new generations, and stirred new ambitions for reform[37]. The presence of French influence during periods of Russian domination was stronger than in its earlier manifestations. The beginning of the 19th century and this second stage of Europeanization complemented the French influence that had already entered through Phanariot intermediaries in the preceding decades.

Familiarity with a state of affairs tending to resemble European civilization allowed that, starting from the 1820s and 1830s, Western cultural imports to become increasingly assimilated under the impulse of a more clearly defined desire for modernization. The importance of the Russian contribution to this process is significant[38] – the transformation of the Oriental background, a phenomenon without which Europeanization could not have taken place, is largely due to them. Likewise, the awakening of the European consciousness of the Wallachians and Moldavians at the beginning of the 19th century fostered their desire for emancipation. The context thus created allowed that, by mid-century, the influence directly exerted by France penetrated more easily into Romanian society and mentality.

In comparison with other neighboring regions, the ampleness of French influence in the Moldo-Wallachian cultural space can be explained by questions

---

[34] For more on the French influence and the trend toward the Europeanization of Russia, see chapter „Rusia europeană" (Eng. trans.: "European Russia") from Orlando Figes, *Dansul Nataşei: O istorie culturală a Rusiei* (Iaşi: Editura Polirom, 2024), 32-75.

[35] Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, 58.

[36] Nicoleta Roman, *„Deznădăjduită muiere n-au fost ca mine": Femei, onoare şi păcat în Valahia secolului al XIX-lea* (Bucureşti: Editura Humanitas, 2016), 160.

[37] Nicoleta Roman, *„Deznădăjduită muiere"*, 159; Constanţa Vintilă, "'Curls and Forelocks': Romanian Women's Emancipation in Consumption and Fashion, 1780-1850", in *Women, Consumption, and the Circulation of Ideas in South-Eastern Europe, 17th-19th Centuries*, ed. Constanţa Vintilă- Ghiţulescu (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 129-142.

[38] Constanţa Vintilă-Ghiţulescu, "Constructing a New Identity: Romanian Aristocrats between Oriental Heritage and Western Prestige (1780-1866)", in *From Traditional Attire to Modern Dress: Modes of Identification, Modes of Recognition in the Balkans (XVIth-XXth Centuries)*, ed. Constanţa Vintilă-Ghiţulescu (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 110.

of origin and identity. *Şcoala Ardeleană* (the Transylvanian School)[39] from Habsburg-ruled Transylvania carried the Latinist current beyond the Carpathians in the early 19th century, where it quickly became a driver of national awakening – equally a fixed idea and a social force. Of course, the Romanian scholars from Transylvania were not directly responsible for the growing popularity of French ideas in the two Danubian Principalities. Though the Enlightenment had influenced their thinking as well, it was by way of French, but rather through its German counterpart, the *Aufklärung*. Very few of them even expressed sympathies toward Paris. Thus, the Transylvanians contributed only indirectly to the more decisive assimilation of the French cultural model in Wallachia and Moldavia, starting around 1810[40].

According to the literary historian Garabet Ibrăileanu, it was through this foundation of Latin origin that most aspirations toward Western culture took shape, with the elite finding in the French model something both familiar and kindred[41]. In the first decades of the 19th century, Latinity represented an important bond both in the process of cultural rapprochement with France and in justifying the place of the Romanians within Europe[42].

Critical thinking was the main factor that led to the initial assimilation, reinterpretation, and authentic adaptation of Enlightenment and Romanticism's ideas. Its development and manifestation took place in the shadow of the transformations brought about by the influence of Western culture[43]. In the early years of the 19th century, these developments paved the way for a necessary transition to new political realities, marked by an imperative, conscious decoupling that would make possible the future social and political emancipation of the two Principalities[44].

V. Echoes of Enlightenment

Perspectives on the necessity of following a European path appeared in many different forms in the writings of the time. Most of these texts argued for closer ties with Western Europe in a way meant to challenge the reader – to present this *rebirth* or *awakening* as an urgent endeavor, a unique opportunity that

---

[39] An Enlightenment-inspired cultural and intellectual movement among Romanian scholars from Habsburg-ruled Transylvania in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

[40] Eliade, *Influența franceză*, 215-216.

[41] Gabaret Ibrăileanu, *Spiritul critic în cultura românească*, *Vol. I* (București: Editura Litera, 2011), 19-22.

[42] Eliade, *Influența franceză*, 216-217.

[43] Garabet Ibrăileanu, *Studii literare*, (București: Editura Minerva, 1979), 13.

[44] Mirela-Luminița Murgescu and Bogdan Murgescu, „Tranziție, tranziții: conceptualizarea schimbării în cultura română", in *Istoria României prin concepte: perspective alternative asupra limbajelor social-politice*, ed. Victor Neumann and Armin Heinen (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2010), 422-431.

could not be missed. The spread of Enlightenment ideas within Romanian society sparked many such reactions. Against this background, the desire for cultural alignment with the more developed parts of the continent grew stronger, as the elites of the two Principalities became increasingly open to and capable of receiving these new influences. In the turbulent time that marked the 19th century, the openness to change, admiration for French ideas, and the aspiration for a new social and political order, all inspired fresh ambitions. The fascination of this generation with Western Europe – and particularly with the French model of culture and civilization – fueled their longing to witness the lights of Paris with their own eyes.

Many of the writings from the early 19th century outline a new image of Romanian thought, distinct from that of previous decades. The novelty of these writing lies both in their frequency and in the conviction with which they speak about the necessity of turning toward Western models. In them, we find arguments explaining why *rebirth* and *awakening* had to take place urgently and inevitably following the model of Western civilization. Admiration for certain illustrious works from the Western world inspired many of these beliefs. The direction of thought was becoming increasingly clear, evident not only in everyday customs and not merely through imitation, but also as a genuine source of inspiration and motivation for future steps toward reform and creation. Thus, we encounter figures such as the poet Barbu Paris Mumuleanu. He wrote in 1822 about how much was owed to the West, about the achievements of Europe's enlightened minds, and about their contribution to the progress of humanity[45]. For him, as for many others, the Western world represented a center radiating civilization and culture, a nucleus from which science and higher spirituality spread their light further: "All the nations of Europe are gilded with knowledge; we see through the light of the sciences what we receive from them"[46]. Seeing in the alignment with the West the only solution to the Romanian problems of the time, Mumuleanu encouraged the youth to open themselves to European culture and to creativity. In an effort to bridge the gap between the local and Western worlds, Mumuleanu urged his readers to discover the works of the great European thinkers. In his view this recommendation served a double purpose: first, by interpreting these works through their own understanding, Romanians would become convinced of the greatness of that world; and second, as a natural consequence, they would thereby initiate their own process of emancipation[47].

Within the body of early 19th century literary works – representing the beginnings of Enlightenment thought among Wallachian and Moldavian societies – we also find *O privire politicească a Evropii toată din 1825 (*Eng. trans.: *A*

---

[45] Barbu Paris Mumuleanu, *Rost de poezii, adecă stihuri* (București, 1822), I-III.
[46] Ibid., I.
[47] Ibid., III-IV.

Political View of the Whole of Europe from 1825), a translation by Costache Conachi of *Revue politique de l'Europe en 1825*, published in Paris and authored by Pierre François Xavier Bourguignon d'Hérbigny[48]. The text presents the ideas of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, advocates for constitutional monarchy and representative government, and is characterized by a distinctly anti-aristocratic tone. Conachi's notes provide explanations and adapt these ideas to the internal political life in Principalities. The notion of *politifsire* – that is, "the skill to which man has attained not only in learning but in the knowledge of truth in all things"[49] – represents d'Hérbigny's indirect apology for the Enlightenment movement. The author connects the lack of this *politifsire* among the people to the resistance of the upper classes, who feared losing their privileged status once the others became politically awakened. Costache Conachi applies this thesis to the Romanian case, offering details about what prevented Romanians from achieving emancipation, among the main culprits being the rulers and the boyar system[50]. d'Hérbigny also draws attention to the fact that the intellectual level reached by Europeans no longer corresponded to the political practices of the ruling class, thus making change inevitable. Conachi complements this statement by including Romanians among those emancipated yet persecuted nations, thereby asserting their belonging to the Western world in an effort to instill in the mind of the reader a sense of European solidarity[51].

The first issue of the publication *Albina Românească* draws attention to the revolutionary phenomena of the age, which people should not ignore. Issued in 1829, the magazine highlights the opportunities created by the circulation of ideas and the cultural influences spreading across Europe, which had become increasingly accessible to all nations.. This phenomenon is presented as an opportunity to be embraced, a decisive moment in which the reception and understanding of ideas from the West had the potential to bring about profound transformations, provided they were adopted by those who received them. Moreover, the text emphasizes the importance of cultural enrichment through direct contact, speaking of the honor bestowed by travelers from Western Europe who "share everywhere the rays of their light"[52].

Such urgent calls for awakening were frequently found in the press of the time. This rhetoric was closely tied to the political circumstances in which the Danubian Principalities found themselves at the time and to the desire of certain groups of scholars to steer future developments away from the traditional state of affairs that had dominated the Romanian lands for centuries.

---

[48] Paul Cornea, Andrei Nestorescu, and Petre Costinescu, *Scrieri literare inedite (1820-1845): V. Aaron, A. Beldiman, C. Conachi, N. Dimachi, D. Gusti, C. Negruzzi, G. Peşacov, V. Pogor, E. Poteca* (Bucureşti: Editura Minerva, 1981), 133.

[49] Ibid., 133-134.

[50] Ibid., 134.

[51] Ibid., 137.

[52] Albina Românească, „Înainte cuvîntare", no. 1, June 1st, 1829, 1.

VI.   Romantic Stirrings

The essence of the aspirations for freedom, self-determination, emancipation, and modernization can be traced to a movement that set a new course for Europe's development. Romanticism inspired and motivated, more profoundly even than the Enlightenment did before it, a process of restoring – or, in some cases, entirely rebuilding – the values on which 19th century intellectuals built modernity. Through literature, Romanticism translated social and political imbalances into creative expression, mobilizing artistic production across Europe to an unprecedented degree and placing it in the service of modernity. The inclusive and tolerant nature of the Romantic movement significantly broadened its reach, extending its influence into other social strata. It succeeded in bringing together and giving momentum to the emerging ideas of the middle classes – groups whose positions had previously been largely absent from reformist efforts.

If, in the Western world, Romanticism meant the removal of the old order in the name of an unprecedented reconstruction of the intellectual, artistic, social, and political life[53], in the other half of Europe – the Central, Eastern, and Southeastern regions – the movement served, through the same means but in different forms. The Romantic movement can be considered an important ally in the effort to overcome historical delays. In any case, the source of these transformations came through cultural paths. On this foundation, various branches emerged toward the development of a political purpose. This transcendence was, in almost all cases, composed of a dual nature - sustained, on the one hand, by an attachment to the ideas imported from the West, and, on the other hand, by the emotional factor that fostered solidarity in the form of nationalism[54]. This was the outcome of a process initiated by the Enlightenment and carried forward by Romanticism.

The spread of this expression of freedom and reason across almost all fields began in the pre-Romantic period and, in some places, progressed with difficulty. The idea that a newly formed social class – the middle class – could have a voice in reorganizing social and political matters was not generally well received, particularly in the more backward regions of southeastern Europe. This was also the case of Wallachia and Moldavia. Despite the resistance encountered, the attempt to give expression to the new movement acquired impressive dimensions, leading to an unprecedented mobilization of intellectual efforts that put into practice the ideas discovered in the works of Western thinkers.

---

[53] Isaiah Berlin, *Originile Romantismului* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2024), 145-157.

[54] Campbell, *French Influence*, 1-4.

With the reconfiguration of the political scene in Wallachia and Moldavia following the end of the Phanariot regime in 1821, the Principalities gained a measure of autonomy, and intellectual life began to take on new dimensions. The literary contributions of the Wallachians and Moldavians increased remarkably in the following years[55]. During this period of transition, developments did not unfold under the sign of dethroning Classicism in favor of the new Romantic movement as had happened in the West, nor in terms of redefining moral or religious values[56]. Often, in the Romanian cultural space, the new elements emerged in a confusing symbiosis with the old ones, resulting in a distorted form of the movement itself. From this metamorphosis, authors expanded the boundaries of creation increasingly drawn toward Romantic themes while remaining, throughout the entire period, somewhat connected to the past[57]. The pre-Romantic current took root in the writings of Romanian scholars during the first decades of the 19th century, developing on a foundation that was not yet clearly defined. Romanian culture was taking shape during this period within a double alterity framework: marked, on the one hand, by the distancing from the Orient and the experiences of the past, and, on the other hand, by the idealization of European civilization – still largely unknown yet eagerly embraced by the emerging elites[58].

Pre-Romanticism evolved after 1821 under the impact of the political atmosphere in Wallachia and Moldavia. Three successive events with strong reverberations in society elevated the debates among the elites to a new level. First, the uprising led by Tudor Vladimirescu and the growing awareness within Romanian society regarding the national struggle, formed the basis for the emergence of the first texts dedicated to the insurrectional movements of the early 1820s. Most of the literary contributions from this period reworked the raw material of the events in an artistic tone, thereby distinguishing themselves from the chronicles of the time. Second, the signing of the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, the official recognition of political autonomy of the Romanian Principalities, and the abolition of the Turkish monopoly further stimulated the transformation of social realities[59]. The ensuing economic, social, and political momentum created the conditions for intensifying the conflict between the high-ranking boyars and the middle and lower nobility. Third, another signal

---

[55] Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, 267.

[56] Șerban Cioculescu, Vladimir Streinu, and Tudor Vianu, *Istoria literaturii române moderne, Vol. I* (București: Editura Casa Școalelor, 1944), 7-8.

[57] Ibid., 268.

[58] Catrinel Popa, „Locuri comune și locuri ale memoriei", în *Levantini, orientali, balcanici: reflexe ale spiritului oriental în literatura română din secolul al XIX-lea*, ed. Catrinel Popa (București: Editura Eikon, 2024), 11-18; For more on the 1821 generation and their literary development, see Isar, *Sub semnul „Luminilor"*, 11-18.

[59] Nicolae Isar, *Istoria modernă a românilor: 1774/1784-1918* (București: Editura Universitară, 2006), 70.

announcing the reformist ambitions of the new generation was the contestation, by the fourth decade, of the Organic Regulations. Over time, the inefficiency of this modernization project became increasingly evident, and its provisions no longer aligned with the vision of the young generation of intellectuals of developing the Principalities in accordance with the European standards of culture and civilization[60].

The tension accumulated from these profound changes in political life eventually spilled over in culture. An unprecedented phenomenon in its scope, Romantic literary creation broke free from the forms of manifestation dictated by the Oriental rhythm. Literature assumed the dimensions of a complex expression, becoming a means of understanding and transcending the struggles of Romanian society. Distancing from the exclusivity of Slavonic and Hellenic cultural spheres, the abandonment of cultural signals dictated by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as well as those coming from Russia, represented inevitable fractures in the process of reorientation[61]. The literary creations of the third and fourth decades of the 19th century faithfully reflect the effort to synchronize Romanian culture with the literary developments of Western Europe, particularly those taking place in France.

The first form of synchronization between Romanian and European culture was achieved through the current of Romanticism[62]. French ideas spread with far greater impact between 1820s and 1840s, due to the political circumstances in which the Principalities found themselves and to the growing number of study trips undertaken by Romanian intellectuals to the West. The innovation of ideas, the transformation of tastes, and the acquistion of new cultural sensitivities placed young intellectuals in a position to inaugurate the most comprehensive form of cultural import of that time. The Romanian elite developed in a dynamic society shaped by a fashionable and appealing intellectual movement, and while not yet fully mature, its members saw their own idealistic aspirations reflected in this environment. The importance of Romanian Romanticism extends far beyond its literary dimension. This borrowed, adapted, and reinterpreted current, reshaped by Romanian minds would help spur a prototype of modern thought in the Danubian Principalities. This transformation formed part of the broader upheaval that Romanticism was generating across the continent at the time[63].

The movement of cultural and political rebirth then spread from Central toward Eastern and Southeastern Europe and, in all cases, began with the

---

[60] Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, 513.

[61] Elena Siupiur, *Intelectuali, elite, clase politice în sud-estul european. Secolul XIX* (Târgoviște: Editura Domino, 2004), 16.

[62] Keith Hitchins, *Românii: 1774-1866* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2018), 231.

[63] John R. Gillis, *Youth and History. Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770-Present* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 74.

emergence of a local educated class ready to carry it forward[64]. Romanticism inspired a variety of ambitious projects throughout the Balkans – from Greece's *Megali Idea*[65] (Eng. trans.: Great Idea) to the *Illyrian* cultural movement of the Croats, which later evolved into a political program aimed at uniting all the South Slavs[66].

The transition of Romanian literature from pre-Romanticism to Romanticism is difficult to place within a clearly defined period. Literary creation exhibited Romantic characteristics until roughly the 1830s. Before that, the pre-Romantic and Romantic trends had long coexisted within the broader literary movement, intertwined with other artistic forms such as neo-classicism, pre-Romanticism, and spontaneous realism. The cohesion of these styles was made possible within the process of developing modern Romanian culture, aptly illustrating its accelerated passage through successive stages[67]. The 1830s and the1840s were marked by the emergence of more refined Romantics who overshadowed the works of Paris Mumuleanu, Costache Conachi, and Iancu Văcărescu – previously the main references for modern Romanian literature.

Ion Heliade Rădulescu, Vasile Cârlova, Grigore Alexandrescu, and Cezar Bolliac in Wallachia, and, somewhat later, Costache Negruzzi, Alexandru Hrisoverghi, Dimitrie Ralet, and Vasile Alecsandri in Moldavia, were among the leading figures who brought Romanian prose and poetry into the modern period by integrating their literary creation into the Romantic movement. The inspiration of this new generation was no longer devoted exclusively to national ideals while the habitual idealization of Western civilization gradually faded, giving way to the development of critical thinking[68] and the discovery of the artistic self[69]. The lucidity with which the new generation of writers began to look toward the Western world did not stem from a rejection of the desire for European synchronization, but rather from elevating that goal to a higher level, one adapted to their own intellectual framework. Most representatives of this movement were trained in universities from Western Europe, a place to which they remained both culturally and emotionally attached, and whose model they sought to cautiously transplant at home.

---

[64] Siupiur, *Intelectuali, elite, clase politice*, 29.

[65] Dimitrios Stamatopoulos, "Hellenism versus Latinism in the Ottoman East: Some Reflections on the Decline of the French Influence in the Greek Literary Society in Istanbul", *Études Balkaniques*, no. 3 (2007): 84-85.

[66] Mark Biondich, ""We were Defending the State": Nationalism, Myth, and Memory in Twentieth-Century Croatia", in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, ed. John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 55-57; Daniel Citirigă, *Europa Centrală și tentația federalismului: Istorie și diplomație în perioada interbelică* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2015), 199-200.

[67] Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, 518-519; Popovici, *La Littérature Roumaine*, 493.

[68] Al. Dima et al., *Istoria literaturii române. De la Școala Ardeleană la Junimea* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1968), 17.

[69] Hitchins, *Românii: 1774-1866*, 235.

This generation of Romantics thus found solidarity with the authors from whom they drew inspiration. N. I. Apostolescu attributes this to the fact that all Romanian poets of that period were, in essence, disciples of French Romanticism[70]. Ion Heliade Rădulescu, for instance, was an advocate of the theory of imitation, convinced that Romanian poetry could not succeed among the great European names without borrowing from their substance[71]. Consequently, in the lyrical work of the Wallachian author we find themes and approaches similar to those of Alphonse de Lamartine and Victor Hugo, among others. The rejection of the past, the emphasis on cultivating new artistic forms, the need to adapt to the modern world, and the appreciation of contemporary creativity were just a few of the ideas borrowed from French writers around which Heliade built his work[72]. Thus emerged the first form of Romanian Romanticism, modeled after the French one[73].

The manifestation of realism, through or in the absence of Romanticism, introduced satire to the Romanian verse and prose. Another imported element, the realist-Romantic style left its mark in fables and epistles where it created a vivid image of Romanian society in its transitional years toward modernity, during the first half of the 19th century. The social "physiologies" of Alecu Russo, Vasile Alecsandri, and Costache Negruzzi portray in a humorous and descriptive manner the social types struggling to assert themselves amid this modernization process[74]. For these authors, inspiration probably came from Honoré de Balzac[75] and his essays that make up *La Comédie humaine*. Similarly, Alecsandri's earliest verses, written in French, reflect the intellectual atmosphere in which they were conceived. Influenced by numerous circumstances – most notably by the Parisian intellectual environment – Alecsandri infused his works with reinterpreted fragments from Lamartine's *Invocations*[76]. The French author served as an inspiration for the Moldavian poet[77], who, in 1841, dedicated to him the ode *À Mr. de Lamartine, par un jeune Moldave* (Eng. trans.: *To Mr. de Lamartine, by a young Moldavian*) Alecsandri expressed his admiration and

---

[70] N. I. Apostolescu, *L'influence des romantiques français sur la poésie roumaine* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1909).

[71] David Popovici, „Introducere", in *Opere, Tom I* by Ion Heliade Rădulescu (București: Editura pentru Literatură și Artă, 1939), 54.

[72] Ibid., 54-63.

[73] Vasile V. Haneș, *Formarea Opiniunii franceze asupra României în secolul al XIX-lea. Vol I* (București: Editura Scrisul Românesc, 1929), 28.

[74] Dima et al., *Istoria literaturii române*, 16.

[75] Ibid.

[76] This refers to the opening of *Méditations poétiques*: *Invocations* and to the verses from *Chant d'amour*, by Alphonse de Lamartine (Paris: La Librairie Grecque-Latine-Allemande, 1820).

[77] For more on the impact of Alphonse de Lamartine's work on Vasile Alecsandri's literary formation, see chapter: „Alecsandri poet liric și romanticii francezi. I. Alecsandri și Lamartine", in Ch. Drouhet, *Vasile Alecsandri și scriitorii francezi* (București: Editura Cvltvra Națională, 1924), 12-30.

gratitude, having been influenced by Lamartine's *Méditations* and *Harmonies*, which had guided the lyrical expression of his deepest emotions[78].

In the broader context of the efforts to synchronize or adapt to European realities, the merit of this generation of Romantic writers lies in their capacity to view in a distinct manner the model upon which they gradually sought to build their own modernity. The import of Western culture and civilization reached, with them, far higher dimensions than among their predecessors. Romanticism made its way into the Principalities not solely through French influence; the literary current could enter Romanian thought primarily because of the social-historical context and the prevailing mentalities that allowed its reception.

VII. Conclusion

The story of the interaction between the Moldavian-Wallachian world and the French Enlightenment and Romantic currents reveals the mechanisms through which ideas travel, merge, and give birth to new identities. In a broader context, it reflects a map of connections and relationships that drive transformation. The encounter with Western modernity – first mediated through Greek and Russian intermediaries, later pursued directly by the emerging educated elite – represented far more than the adoption of foreign ideas. Mapping these trajectories allows us to trace and assess their impact. Undoubtedly, the reconfiguration of intellectual, social, and political realities in the Danubian Principalities during the first half of the 19th century is closely linked to – and largely shaped by – the ideas that circulated amongst the local elites at that time. This phenomenon was part of a complex tableau that outlined and reshaped the cultural map of modern Europe.

Southeastern Europe was transformed in the first half of the 19th century into a space for the interpretation of Enlightenment and Romantic ideas imported from the West, most often from France. Within this framework, the Danubian Principalities interacted with these ideas in a markedly different way compared to other neighboring polities. Their historical experience, geopolitical environment, and Latin origin granted them a distinct status, and enabled the development of a particular affinity for the French model of culture and civilization. By internalizing, adapting, and transforming the imported ideals, the Principalities rearticulated them in the context of their own social and political realities. While Enlightenment contributed to build the intellectual foundation for reform, Romanticism inaugurated the feeling of nationalism and gave voice to the aspirations for political awakening, autonomy, and creativity. These transformations led the Francophile elite that inaugurated modernity in various

---

[78] Drouhet, *Vasile Alecsandri*, 12.

fields by the mid-19th century, to graft the French model onto Romanian life for an indefinite period of time.

REFERENCES

- Albina Românească. „Înainte cuvîntare". no. 1, June 1st, 1829.
- Apostolescu, N. I. *L'influence des romantiques français sur la poésie roumaine.* Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1909.
- Berlin, Isaiah. *Originile Romantismului.* București: Editura Humanitas, 2024.
- Biliuţă, Ionuţ. „'Agenţii schimbării': Clerul ortodox din Principatele Române de la regimul feudal la statul naţional". In *„Ne trebuie oameni!": elite intelectuale și transformări istorice în România modernă și contemporană*, coordinated by Cristian Vasile, 27-64. Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2017.
- Biondich, Mark. ""We were Defending the State": Nationalism, Myth, and Memory in Twentieth-Century Croatia". In *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, edited by John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower, 54-109. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004.
- Boia, Lucian. "Sur la diffusion de la culture européenne en Roumanie (XIXe siècle et début du XXe siècle)". In *Modèle français et expériences de la modernisation. Roumaine, 19e–20e siècles*, coordinated by Florin Ţurcanu, 1-29. București: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006.
- Boone, Marc and Martha Howell, editors. *The Power of Space in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Cities of Italy, Northern France and the Low Countries.* Turnhout: Crepols Publishers, 2013.
- Brown, Marshall. "Deconstruction and Enlightenment". *The Eighteenth Century* 28, no. 3 (1987): 259-263.
- Burke, Peter. *Cultural Hybridity.* Cambridge: Polity, 2009.
- Calabi, Donatella and Stephen Turk Christensen. *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe – Volume II: Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400-1700.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Campbell, John. *French Influence and the Rise of the Romanian Nationalism.* New York: ArnoPress, 1971.
- Charle, Christophe. *Les intellectuels en Europe au XIXe siècle.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996.
- Chaunu, Pierre. *La civilisation de l'Europe des Lumières.* Paris: Arthaud, 1971.
- Chernilo, Daniel. "Theorising Global Modernity: Descriptive and Normative Universalism". In *Legitimization in World Society*, edited by Aldo Mascareño and Kathya Araujo, 61-80. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012.

- Cioculescu, Șerban, Vladimir Streinu, and Tudor Vianu. *Istoria literaturii române moderne, Vol. I.* București: Editura Casa Școalelor, 1944.
- Citirigă, Daniel. *Europa Centrală și tentația federalismului: Istorie și diplomație în perioada interbelică.* Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2015.
- Conrad, Sebastian. "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique". *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (October 2012): 999-1027. https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/117.4.999.
- Cornea, Paul. *Originile romantismului românesc: Spiritul public, mișcarea ideilor și literatura între 1780–1840.* București: Editura Minerva, 1972.
- Cornea, Paul, Andrei Nestorescu, and Petre Costinescu. *Scrieri literare inedite (1820–1845): V. Aaron, A. Beldiman, C. Conachi, N. Dimachi, D. Gusti, C. Negruzzi, G. Pesacov, V. Pogor, E. Poteca.* București: Editura Minerva, 1981.
- Daskalov, Roumen and Tchavdar Marinov, editors. *Entangled Histories of the Balkans.* Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- Davidova, Evguenia. *Balkan Transitions to Modernity and Nation-States: Through the Eyes of Three Generations of Merchants (1780s–1890s).* Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- Dima, Al., I. C. Chițimia, Paul Cornea, and Eugen Todoran. *Istoria literaturii române. De la Școala Ardeleană la Junimea.* București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1968.
- Drouhet, Ch. *Vasile Alecsandri și scriitorii francezi.* București: Editura Cvltvra Națională, 1924.
- Duțu, Alexandru. „"Până nu vine iarna, primăvară nu se face". Transformări în mentalitățile Sud-Est europene la început de secol XIX". In *Sud-Estul european în vremea Revoluției Franceze. Stări de spirit, reacții, confluențe*, coordinated by Alexandru Duțu, 7-33. București: Institutul de Studii Sud-Est Europene, 1994.
- Duțu, Alexandru. *Cultura română în civilizația europeană modernă.* București: Editura Minerva, 1978.
- Eliade, Pompiliu. *Influența franceză asupra spiritului public din România: Originile. Studiu asupra stării societății românești în vremea domniilor fanariote.* București: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006.
- Figes, Orlando. *Dansul Natașei: O istorie culturală a Rusiei.* Iași: Editura Polirom, 2024.
- Figes, Orlando. *Europenii: Trei vieți și formarea unei culturi cosmopolite în Europa secolului al XIX-lea.* București: Editura Polirom, 2021.
- Gascoigne, John. "Cross-cultural Knowledge Exchange in the Age of the Enlightenment". In *Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archives*, edited by Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent, and Tiffant Shellam, 131-146. Canberra: ANU Press, 2015.
- Georgescu, Vlad. *Mémoires et projets de réforme dans les Principautés Roumaines 1831–1848.* București: Association Internationale d'Études du Sud-Est Européen, 1972.

- Georgescu, Vlad. *Political Ideas and the Enlightenment in the Romanian Principalities (1750–1831).* New York: Columbia University Press, 1971.
- Gillis, John R. *Youth and History. Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770–Present.* New York: Academic Press, 1974.
- Gruzinski, Serge. *Les quatre parties du monde. Histoire d'une mondialisation.* Paris: La Martinière, 2004.
- Haneş, Vasile V. *Formarea Opiniunii franceze asupra României în secolul al XIX-lea. Vol. I.* Bucureşti: Editura Scrisul Românesc, 1929.
- Hitchins, Keith. *Românii: 1774-1866.* Bucureşti: Editura Humanitas, 2018.
- Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Revolution 1789–1848.* New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
- Ibrăileanu, Garabet. *Spiritul critic în cultura românească, Vol. I.* Bucureşti: Editura Litera, 2011.
- Ibrăileanu, Garabet. *Studii literare.* Bucureşti: Editura Minerva, 1979.
- Isar, Nicolae. *Sub semnul „Luminilor": Din istoria generaţiei de la 1821.* Bucureşti: Editura Universitară, 2018.
- Isar, Nicolae. *Relaţii şi interferenţe româno-franceze în epoca Luminilor (1769–1834): Studii.* Bucureşti: Editura Universitară, 2017.
- Isar, Nicolae. *Istoria modernă a românilor: 1774/1784-1918.* Bucureşti: Editura Universitară, 2006.
- Lamartine, Alphonse de. *Méditations Poétiques.* Paris: La Librairie Grecque-Latine-Allemande, 1820.
- Liu, Nicolae. „Orizont european în Iluminismul românesc. Francofonie şi cultură franceză." *Revista Istorică* 19, no. 1–2 (2008): 135–157.
- Lovinescu, Eugen. *Istoria civilizaţiei române moderne.* Bucureşti: Editura Minerva, 1997.
- Lüsebrink, Hans-Jürgen. "Conceptual History and Conceptual Transfer: The Case of 'Nation' in Revolutionary France and Germany". In *History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Iain Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tumans, and Frank van Vree, 115-128. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998.
- Mishkova, Diana editor. *We, the people: politics of national peculiarity in Southeastern Europe.* Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2009.
- Mitchell, Timothy. "The Stage of Modernity". In *Questions of Modernity*, edited by Timothy Mitchell, 1-34. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Mumuleanu, Barbu Paris. *Rost de poezii, adecă stihuri.* Bucureşti, 1822
- Murgescu, Mirela-Luminiţa and Bogdan Murgescu. „Tranziţie, tranziţii: conceptualizarea schimbării în cultura română". In *Istoria României prin concepte*, edited by Victor Neumann and Armin Heinen, 419-446. Iaşi: Editura Polirom, 2010.

- Neumann, Victor. *Tentația lui homo europaeus: geneza ideilor moderne în Europa Centrală și de Sud-Est.* Iași: Polirom, 2006.
- Önnerfors, Andreas. "Translating Discourses of the Enlightenment: Transcultural Language Skills and Cross-References in Swedish and German Eighteenth-Century Learned Journals". In *Cultural Transfer through Translation: The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation*, edited by Stefanie Stockhorst, 209-229. Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010.
- Popa, Catrinel, „Locuri comune și locuri ale memoriei". În *Levantini, orientali, balcanici: reflexe ale spiritului oriental în literatura română din secolul al XIX-lea*, edited by Catrinel Popa, 9-28. București: Editura Eikon, 2024.
- Popovici, David. *La Littérature Roumaine à l'Epoque des Lumières.* Sibiu: Centrul de studii și cercetări privitoare la Transilvania, 1945.
- Popovici, David. "Introducere". In *Opere, Tom I* by Ion Heliade Rădulescu, 3-63. București: Editura pentru Literatură și Artă, 1939.
- Rabinow, Paul. *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment.* Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989.
- Robertson, Ritchie. *Iluminismul. Căutarea fericirii, 1680–1790.* București: Editura Litera, 2023.
- Roman, Nicoleta. *„Deznădăjduită muiere n-au fost ca mine": Femei, onoare și păcat în Valahia secolului al XIX-lea.* București: Editura Humanitas, 2016.
- Siupiur, Elena. *Intelectuali, elite, clase politice în sud-estul european. Secolul XIX.* Târgoviște: Editura Domino, 2004.
- Stamatopoulos, Dimitrios. "Hellenism versus Latinism in the Ottoman East: Some Reflections on the Decline of the French Influence in the Greek Literary Society in Istanbul". *Études Balkaniques*, no. 3 (2007): 79-106.
- Stovall, Tyler. *Transnational France: The Modern History of a Universal Nation.* Santa Cruz: Westview Press, 2015.
- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia". *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1997): 735-762.
- Taki, Victor. *Rusia și Țările Române: imperiu, elite și reforme între 1812 și 1834.* București: Editura Corint, 2024.
- Tipei, Alex R. "How to Make Friends and Influence People: Elementary Education, French 'Influence,' and the Balkans, 1815–1830s". *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 3 (2018): 621-649. https://doi.org/10.1017/S147924431700018X.
- Vintilă-Ghițulescu, Constanța. *Evgheniți, ciocoi, mojici: despre obrazele primei modernități românești (1750–1860).* București: Editura Humanitas, 2023.
- Vintilă, Constanța. *Changing Subjects, Moving Objects. Status, Mobility and Social Transformation in Southeastern Europe, 1700-1850.* Leiden: Brill, 2022.

- Vintilă, Constanța, Giulia Calvi, Mária Pakucs-Willcocks, Nicoleta Roman, and Michal Wasiucionek. *Lux, modă și alte bagatele politicești în Europa de Sud-Est în secolele XVI–XIX*. București: Editura Humanitas, 2021.

- Vintilă-Ghițulescu, Constanța. "Curls and Forelocks": Romanian Women's Emancipation in Consumption and Fashion, 1780-1850". In *Women, Consumption, and the Circulation of Ideas in South-Eastern Europe, 17th-19th Centuries*, edited by Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, 129-142. Leiden: Brill, 2018.

- Vintilă-Ghițulescu, Constanța. "Constructing a New Identity: Romanian Aristocrats between Oriental Heritage and Western Prestige (1780-1866)". In *From Traditional Attire to Modern Dress: Modes of Identification, Modes of Recognition in the Balkans (XVIth-XXth Centuries)*, edited by Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, 104-128. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.

- Vintilă-Ghițulescu, Constanța, editor. *From Traditional Attire to Modern Dress: Modes of Identification, Modes of Recognition in the Balkans (XVIth-XXth Centuries)*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011.

- Vlad, Laurențiu. *Istorii românești ale ideii de „Europa", secolele XVII–XXI (imagini, note, reflecții)*. Iași: Editura Institutul European, 2021.

- Werner, Michael and Bénédicte Zimmermann. "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity". *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (February 2006): 30-50. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2006.00347.x.

- Wolf, Larry. *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

- Wright, Gordon. *France in Modern Times: From the Enlightenment to the Present*. Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1974.

- Young Lee, Paula. "Modern Architecture and the Ideology of Influence". *Assemblage*, no. 34 (December 1997): 6-29.