

DORU RADOSAV, *Transilvania are forma inimii. Istorie și peisaj în spațiul transilvănean al secolului al XVIII-lea* [Transylvania Is Heart-Shaped. History and Landscape in the Transylvanian Space of the 18th Century] (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2022)

The present approach will succinctly describe the contents and will emphasise several of the merits of Doru Radosav's book, *Transylvania Is Heart-Shaped*, published by the Școala Ardeleană publishing house at the end of 2022.

The people of the 18th century had a view on nature that can be expressed within a wider scope that requires the approach of both the perceptions and representations of the *human – nature/landscape* relation. Within the historiographic discourse, the recurring motif present in several historical periods, namely that of the return to nature, is built in and through a fully assumed intellectual discourse. As historian Johan Huizinga noted in 1919, the renouncement of the chivalric ideals and the abandonment of courtly life took place either by choosing an active life or by giving up on the world. According to the same historian, renouncing the world can be achieved by two means: on the one hand, by choosing a spiritual life and, on the other hand, by seeking the beauty of earthly life elsewhere than in the immediate reality. This *elsewhere* is precisely what draws people back to nature and, to those disappointed with the world but still eager for life, it gives the old illusion of a happily ever after (the well-known subject of pastoral literature). Starting from this point, Huizinga places the pastoral and the feeling from which it stemmed alongside other forms of life and thought that, in the twilight of the Middle Ages, prefigured the dawn of the pre-modern world.

In the European historiography, the theoretical discourse on the perceptions and representations of the *human – nature/landscape* relation already has somewhat of a tradition, as proven by the rich bibliography that approached this subject from multiple research angles. However, in the Romanian historical research sphere, the approaches on cultural history are most often rather singular. This fact is due to certain difficulties that I would regard both as methodological and conceptual in nature – difficulties faced by any researcher willing to approach the subject.

1. The methodological difficulties reside in the absence of a thought tradition and of a well-established theoretical scaffolding in the analysis of *human – nature/landscape* relation in a specific cultural space. Despite the fact that there have been previous attempts to analyse the perception on nature in the Romanian space – most attempts being disparate and isolated –, the present book represents the first articulated interdisciplinary research endeavour on

the subject for which the theoretical-conceptual scaffolding is built *ab initio*; however, the demonstrations employed in the case both of the historiographic discourse that approaches the subject and of the expression and forms that it takes up in the field of the perceptions, sensibilities and representations are remarkable.

2. In the case of the conceptual difficulties, in order to surpass them, I believe that the primary issue is that of the harmonisation between the perspectives of historical knowledge and those pertaining to the field of the history of culture, of creating a wider space for interdisciplinary interpretation and analysis. The European historians had an active scholarly interest in the perception on nature and in the representations it sprouted from the very beginning of the 20th century – either as a subject integrated in wider research endeavours, or as a subject that was theoretically resized by the research conducted in the field of the imaginary. Unfortunately, in Romania – at least in the field of the history of culture –, such approaches have not been carried out systematically. The merit of the present volume is thus, on the one hand, the fact that it connects the Romanian research sphere with the new trends with respect to the relation between history and landscape and, on the other hand, that it introduces the Romanian historical research to a new perspective on the relation between the *human* and *nature/landscape* by integrating the cultural representations of this subject into the historical knowledge.

Doru Radosav's career as a historian is widely known, and the research directions (in the areas of oral history, the history of books and printing, historical semantics, the history of culture etc.) that he opened in the Romanian historiography has plenty of continuators. With this new volume, Doru Radosav opens a brand new research direction in Romania that could truly inspire the future young researchers in their own endeavours.

In the volume *Transylvania Is Heart-Shaped*, considering the fact that multiple religious, social and linguistic communities of the 18th century shared the same geographic horizon, the description of the feeling of nature or of the landscape cannot ignore the multitude of distinctive representations that compile/configure this space.

Moreover, the historical, social and religious circumstances in Transylvania in the 18th century changed significantly together with the placement of this province under Habsburg rule, after the Treaty of Karlowitz (1699). The Habsburg Monarchy was responsible for these changes, especially due to the intervention of Maria Theresa and Emperor Joseph II, who, after the takeover of Transylvania, sought any means of centralising the power in the Viennese court and of bureaucratising the legislation of the new province, in order to hold a more efficient control over it. The 18th century is thus a century of historical changes and, more broadly, of paradigm shifts that were due to the pressures of the new ideas emerging from the west – ideas that were based on the Enlightenment concepts that had spread across Europe and that culminated with

the French Revolution of 1789. Implicitly, 18th century Transylvania is a complex universe within which numerous and divergent forces combine and make up a world that is not easy to describe or even to read from such a great chronological distance.

This highly complex historical context is both permeable to thought trends and philosophically and spiritually diverse. Thus, an attempt to outline a unitary view on the feeling of nature/landscape in 18th century Transylvania bears several obvious positioning risks in relation with the traditional historical discourse, as well as with the image on the different linguistic and/or religious communities' perceptions and representations of Transylvania. Fully cognizant of these risks, Doru Radosav achieves a true tour de force and, without overlooking any aspect, he builds an excellently articulated theoretical scaffolding, so as to offer a cultural history of the 18th century Transylvanian landscape that is rigorous and objective from a historical and cultural viewpoint. In order to construct the aforementioned scaffolding, the author proceeds in the manner of a true architect, creating the blueprints for a coherently structured edifice that is also aesthetically built, from a stylistic viewpoint. A benchmark in understanding this scaffolding is provided by the author himself, in the book's *Introduction*, in the form of five historiographic strands or perspectives that lie at the basis of the research.

The five historiographic strands that the analysis constructs axially are as follows: the epistemological strand, the philosophical-ethical strand, the literary strand, the practical-physiocratic strand and the socio-economic strand. They generate the directions in which the feeling of nature and the relation between human-nature/landscape can be studied. However, if they are not intertwined into a unitary image of relations, they could remain as segments that do not echo one another. The author masterfully manages to unfold this complex system of relations by employing a subtle network of correspondences generated by the *human-nature-landscape* relation from the political, ethnic and/or aesthetic viewpoints. The relations established by the landscape are with the power that rules over it as a piece of property, or with the ethnic / linguistic / religious identities naturalised within a certain cultural geography, or with the imaginary thought responsible for the creation of certain characters that were then transferred into discourse and returned into sensibilities, intersecting each other within the aforementioned historiographic strands. These relations compile the overview on the feeling of nature in 18th century Transylvania.

The book is structured into seven chapters that encompass the aforementioned theoretical scaffolding. Thus, the author starts from the historical documentary sources, as well as from the entire literature dedicated to the description of Transylvania of that time, and leads the readers towards a very well articulated network of narrations on the landscape. These narrations contain new views and representations of the feeling of nature/landscape. In Transylvania at that time, as well as all across pre-modern Europe, what emerged was the idea of a qualitative space that would no longer be defined merely by quantitative terms (size, surface, volume), but rather through a qualitative expression of space. This expression would also reflect the relation between history and landscape by regrouping the *sensibility, perceptions and representations on the level of several types of analyses and reconstructions* (as described by the author): *the metaphor-landscape, of biblical and religious extraction, the*

gaze-landscape, from the level of the iconographic and artistic transfigurations, the nature-landscape in its geographic and physiocratic conditions which must include the narrative and allegorical foreshortening, the memory-landscape and the utopia-landscape as toponymical, cartographic and utopian marks in the case of the public gardens and parks. All of these types of analysis thus compile the cores of the titles of the book's seven chapters.

Beginning from the historical-geographic monographs of the 18th century, the allegorical descriptions of the Transylvanian space reveal a discourse that was common practice in other countries with respect to their cultural discourses, namely that of the relation between territory and corporeality. The allegory of the heart shape – *Transilvania forma cordis*– appears, as Doru Radosav shows, at the beginning of the 18th century, written by J. Graffius of Sibiu in a graduation thesis at the University of Altdorf. In a monograph from 1743 from the University in Cluj, Franciscus Fasching speaks, in chapter four, of *the very beautiful heart shape of Transilvania*. Thus, the allegory of the heart shape was borrowed and developed by other subsequent authors. What is remarkable in Doru Radosav's scientific endeavour is the manner in which the heart emblem is interpreted and analysed, as a representation of the Transylvanian space/landscape, by integrating the allegory in *the allegorical descriptive itinerary, from the shape of the vine leaf, to that of the turtle, to that of the flounder, to the shape of the heart*, within a process that connotes and crystallises the feeling of patriotic affection for the province. Thus, in conclusion, the patrimonialization of the landscape has effects, as demonstrated by the author, on the level of patriotic sentiments as well. The truly remarkable aspect is the way in which the volume exploits the historical and geographic literature of that time, the journey literature and the fictions, as well as the corpus of official documents. The endeavour offers, to the alert reader, a conceptually coherent and excellently articulated discursive narration.

The context of imagining Transylvania as heart-shaped also includes the book's front cover, which depicts a young girl holding a heart-shaped balloon. A closer look at this balloon reveals that it portrays the heart of Transylvania on its surface. In other words, the space is continuously invested with affective values and we are always willing to approach it as if by taking a stroll (never alone, however) through our own memories, since the space we inhabit cannot be separated from the time factor in its succession and simultaneity. Therefore, each epoch left its own stylistic and allegorical mark on the space and built a series of narrations that the present volume urges people to read. The reading keys that the author provides aid in the better understanding of the Transylvanian 18th century and perhaps even in the better understanding of our present epoch. In this sense, I do believe that this was also the idea behind the image on the cover.

Translated from Romanian by Anca Chiorean

FLORINA ILIS

ilisflorina@gmail.com.

ORCID: 0000-0003-4633-4279

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2023.28.1.14>