

Semantic and Mental Boundaries in the Romanian-Hungarian Historical Dialogue on Transylvania

Case Study: the Historical Film

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SINCE THE Enlightenment the Romanian and Hungarian historiographies have had a permanent dialogue regarding Transylvania. In the context of the amplification of the Romanian national revival process, beginning with the middle of the 18th century, when bishop Ioan Inocentiu Micu-Klein and his *Suplex Libellus Valachorum* presented a first articulated view of the rights of the Romanians in Transylvania, the Hungarian reaction did not fail to appear. The Hungarian historiography set up a theory according to which the Romanians emerged as a people south of the Danube and migrated to Transylvania late in the Middle Ages and at the beginnings of modernity. The establishment of the modern Romanian state in 1859 gave new impetus to this historiographical movement, politicized by the political power in Budapest. The fact that the Transylvanian Romanians had a state to address their national hopes in a 19th century that essentially belonged to nationalities led to a terrible effort from the part of the Hungarian historiography concerning Transylvania to justify the control over a Transylvania where the Romanian population represented around 65% of the entire population.

Robert Roesler's theory according to which the Romanian people emerged south of the Danube and later migrated to Transylvania was formulated precisely in this context. The theory was first brought to the attention of the public in 1871, in a volume entitled *Romänische Studien*. In fact, Robert Roesler articulated in an elevated way the theories of his 18th century predecessors who had argued with the representatives of the Transylvanian School. We refer here to a series of works by Franz Josef Sulzer, Josef Karl Eder, and Johann Christian von Engel.

But this was just the beginning. Over the centuries, Romanian and Hungarian historians have fervently debated upon this subject. The present paper does not intend to pursue this subject from a historiographical point of view, although this kind of dispute has ultimately generated the present ideas, but to capture some instances of this dialogue in a totalitarian regime where word semantics was very important and mental and interpretative boundaries were extremely fragile, even for an educated audience.

We refer here to the '60s-'80s of the previous century when, in response to challenges coming from the Hungarian historiography and political circles, the Romanian historiography resorted to a complex arsenal in defending its point of view regarding Transylvania as well as to a series of collective means and messages. This was a period when it became more difficult for the general public to read the works that treated the subject either professionally or in an ideological manner.

For this purpose, the transfer of historical information to the public involved unconventional sources and resources, including the cinematographic film, or indeed the historical film. Films gradually became a historical source to be taken into account for the 20th century, a century that brought along a significant multiplication of the sources for the reconstruction of the facts or phenomena and that required great mobility and a permanent rethinking of the historical writing, under the pressure of ever more frequent and fast mutations in reality-history¹.

History also had to adapt to the "century of speed." Sometimes this was done with some slowness which, at least apparently, made it lose ground in the dispute with other fields, including those in the socio-human sphere, such as political science, international relations, sociology, psychology, economics, journalism etc., which seem to have obtained an extension at the expense of history.

We must admit that there are fields that were better represented in the encounter with the complicated and confused present, even if, in the end, their sources, arguments and some of their working methods belonged to the historical field. Historian Bogdan Murgescu draws attention to this phenomenon, emphasizing that "*without the historians' contribution, all socio-human disciplines would be practically depleted of the raw material necessary to formulate and to assess their theories and methods*"². They may all build theoretical scales that often have nothing to do with reality. But, to link them to reality they need "*the past experience of mankind. And this experience is made accessible to them by professional historians,*"³ concludes Bogdan Murgescu.

This is precisely the reason why greater emphasis is placed, even in history, on working methods and on methodologies of "exploiting" documents produced in a fast-forward way. However, our discipline must remain a profound one, anchored in its classic methods of working, but much more attentive to new investigative possibilities that may make it appealing to an audience in constant motion.

Under these circumstances, new interpretative solutions are currently required, based on sources which until now have not been regarded as useful for historical reconstruction. Certainly, to paraphrase academician Alexandru Zub, the goddess *Clio* is permanently under the sign of interrogation⁴ and multiplying the possibilities of investigating the past by resorting to new "documentary" solutions is an absolute necessity, especially for the last half of century, when technological breakthroughs have been legion, clearly influencing the course of history. Clear signs in this respect have been present for decades in the European as well as in world historiography. Jerzy Topolsky, for example, suggested new models of historical research and interpretation in the early '70s, asserting that even the etymology and the evolution of the meaning of the term history, in his view, changed from one historical period to another and that these conceptual changes became more and more obvious over the past decades⁵. That is why Jerzy Topolsky said that explanation in history undergoes new interpretations⁶.

Of course, the most suggestive proposals in this field of ideas that aim at multiplying the sources to be investigated for a more complete understanding are offered by the French and Anglo-Saxon structuralist historiography. The closest to us are those offered by the French historiography, especially by the Annales School.

The cinematographic film, mainly the historical one, is without a doubt a historical document worth taking into consideration, especially by the totalitarian regimes that are constantly looking for a good image.

To make our point, we have chosen a single “documentation” proposal that is very little, if at all, exploited, at least in Romanian historiography. We refer here to the use of fiction film as a historical document to reconstruct the history of Romanian communism, namely, its ideological aspects. Of course, for the traditional historian who practices his profession by resorting to classical sources these aspects are perhaps harder to decant, as he resorts to the tools of macrohistory. But for the historian who uses a wider sphere of interpretative suggestions, the historiographical product consequently pays much more attention to these aspects.

The historical fiction film is undoubtedly such a “document” to be used in the reconstruction of the past. And to understand the way history was passed through the ideological filter of the communist era, the fiction film of the period represents, we dare say, a fundamental document, as it surprises better than anything else the developments within the communist regime in Romania and the teleological way in which several ages and personalities of our national history, which supported the present communist regime and its leaders in their effort to create a “bright” future, were analyzed. In fact, cinematography, the historical film in particular, was perhaps the most direct and effective way of reaching a general public that had to learn about the national history as it was ideologically filtered. The past became a treasure for the future, in segments that were almost exclusively useful to the regime from an ideological perspective. A book was harder to read and understand, but a film came much easier into the mind of ordinary people, in doses and quantities of a past that had been previously ideologically filtered and polished. It is no wonder that nowadays a whole generation of co-nationals knows history from television or cinema. For example, for many Michael the Brave is still Sergiu Nicolaescu or Constantin Vaeni’s Michael the Brave and not Nicolae Iorga or Petre P. Panaitescu’s, and the Dacians are Sergiu Nicolaescu, Gheorghe Vitanidis or Mircea Dragan’s Dacians rather than those of Hadrian Daikoviciu⁷, Mircea Petrescu-Dimbovita⁸, Ioan Glodariu and Eugen Iaroslavschi⁹, and the examples can continue. Consequently, excepting the academic environment, it is hard to talk, even today, to those who know history only from this perspective about those historical themes that were ideologically distorted by the communist regime.

In Romanian historiography the use of historical films as a source for the reconstruction of the past is still at the beginning. The same cannot be said of other historiographies. Although few would believe, Robert Mandrou can be considered a pioneer in this direction. His article entitled *Histoire et Cinéma*¹⁰, published in 1958, is considered, in a way, the founding document of what would become a kind of social history of cinematography from the perspective of using the historical film as a tool of political propaganda and distortion of the past, adjusting the present in order to prepare a hypothetically bright future. In his article he pointed out that the historic and political films are

not just the stories of film fans with benign anecdotal incidents, but artisans of the history of the present as they are able to change mass mentality and even the ways of thinking and acting¹¹. The study is not an actual article, but a critical analysis of Edgar Morin's book entitled *Le cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire*¹², published in 1956, which dwells at length upon cinematography's power to shape man. A philosopher, but mainly a sociologist, Edgar Morin sets up other interpretive paradigms three years after Robert Mandrou, when discussing the past-present-propaganda-manipulation relationship in a context where, in a very interesting as well as exciting formula, he says cinematography often "acts" and is a "dangerous game of necessity" that too often creates tensions.

However, according to most specialists, the symbolic birth of the field of "history and cinema" in historiography took place in 1968, when Marc Ferro signed an article, only five pages long but very dense, suggestively entitled *Société du XXe siècle et histoire cinématographique*¹³.

Marc Ferro directly states that, in order to study contemporary history, all sources produced during this period must be analyzed. Therefore, he says, cinema should belong to the category of institutions that produce historical information. Thus, Marc Ferro talks about the possibility of depicting the Middle Ages only from texts (documents), which would mean that medieval society cannot be revealed in all its dimensions. That is why, Marc Ferro affirms, it is vital for contemporary history to raise the "dialectic of interpretation" so that we pay close attention to the relationship between gestures, dialogues, film images, on the one hand, and the political, economic and social realities of the contemporary age, on the other. We would be surprised by the numerous interpretative suggestions we may find here, but especially by the social realities that are more or less captured by films, realities that cannot be captured by documents¹⁴.

For all this to be possible, Marc Ferro suggests that, for a more complete approach, it would be necessary that these analyses be made by historians and sociologists, linguists, anthropologists, and, to make it technically possible, a legally authorized film archive should be set up. This archive should be accessible to researchers without copyright complications and strictly used for scientific and didactic purposes¹⁵.

In 1968 Marc Ferro draws attention to the manipulating potential of cinema and television among the "unconscious" human collectivities, as he calls them, poorly educated, we would say today, which can change entire communities from a psychosocial point of view by using in a propagandistic way the ideologically shaped historical truth¹⁶.

Five years later, the same Marc Ferro, in a defining study for this direction entitled *Le film, contre-analyse de la société?*¹⁷, begins by asking whether the film is an undesirable document for the historian¹⁸ as, he continues, the almost centenarian cinema has not yet entered the mental universe of the historian¹⁹. To demonstrate the need of using the historical film as a document for the reconstruction of the historical truth in as many of its aspects as possible, Marc Ferro compares two film productions with strong ideological connotations: *Uplotnenie*, one of the first Soviet films made in 1918 under the aegis of Anatol Lunacharski, the young Soviet republic's culture minister, which did not fail to demonstrate the necessity of a fusion between the working class, the peasantry, and the intellectual class for a better Russia and, in contrast, *Jours de terreur à Kiev*, also made in 1918 in Kiev, which presented an anti-Soviet position under the aegis

of the German authorities that protected the “white” Skoropascki and attempted to prove the opposite of what was shown in the former film. The film, subtitled in German and French, revealed a Bolshevik regime that was terrifying for most people.

Marc Ferro’s question is how the audience would relate to the two films and what would take for themselves from the perspective of the historical truth and its social, political, economic future implications. He concludes that this is not about the presentation of a rational vision on history, but rather about the desire to manipulate and control society, a reflection of an unnatural relationship between authorities and society—“*dirigeants et la société*”²⁰—as Marc Ferro says, dominant attributes in a totalitarian society, which can also belong to a democratic one, but here subterfuges and suggestions are much finer, as are the consequences for society.

Hence, a historical literature is born, not yet very rich, but present in the French historiography. We shall mention here only two representative studies for the last decades: Jean Michel Frodon’s study, *La projection nationale: cinema et nation*²¹, published in 1997, and, more importantly, Christian Delage and Vincent Guigueno’s volume *L’Historien et le film*²², published in 2004.

The Portuguese, Italian and mainly the Spanish historiography, but also other historiographies such as the Romanian one, even if more timid for the moment, have such approaches regarding the use of this source and documentary resources for the restoration of certain social levels that are barely or not at all reflected in the official documents of the time.

On the one hand, the historical film becomes an argumentative instrument in the hand of the ideology of the time, including the aspect of the Romanians’ presence in Transylvania at the moment the Hungarians came to the Pannonian Plain, and, on the other hand, a necessary approach, given that the historiographical aggressions of the Hungarian historical writing and ideology regarding Transylvania became increasingly present. It was a sort of response to the actions coming from Budapest in this direction. Since the Hungarian educational system and historiography, which were ideologically controlled, advanced such ideas as “Transylvania, Hungarian Land,” the Romanian side responded accordingly and sent signals that “Transylvania is Romanian Land.” It was an extremely exciting, passionate, often very complicated and not always professional dispute. The world of cinema was used to its maximum effect in this respect. There are many examples to prove this. This paper presents several examples that captured this reality.

A very complicated problem in the Romanian-Hungarian historiographical discussion was related to who was first present in Transylvania. We do not discuss here the validity of one or another point of view, although we clearly state here that the arguments of the Romanian historiography related to the continuity of the Romanians in Transylvania are clear and irrefutable. Starting from here, it must be said that the subject caught the attention of the Romanian fiction film starting from the very moment of the Romanian ethnogenesis. In our opinion, perhaps the most successful example regarding the way the Romanian ethnogenesis was explained to the general public is *Columna* (The Column), filmed in 1968, whose action takes place in Transylvania, more precisely in the area of the fortresses in the Orăștie Mountains and of the towns of Napoca and Porolissum, that is, in the current counties of Hunedoara, Cluj and Sălaj, located in the very heart

of Transylvania. The world had to learn that the Romanian people was formed by the Dacians' fusion with the Romans and, above all, that this happened in Transylvania.

The film *Columna* (The Column) is suggestive from this perspective. If in *Dacii* (The Dacians), an earlier film on this subject, we are still in an era of uncertainty and the Romanian ethnogenesis has ideological uncertainties, in *Columna* (The Column) things are totally different. The film begins with a scene of war, in 106 AD, with the siege and conquest of Sarmizegetusa by the Romans. If in *Dacii* (The Dacians) the Romans are defeated, in *Columna* (The Column) the Romans win at the beginning of the film, clearly illustrating our positions and the atmosphere in the entire film, that of the Dacian-Roman symbiosis. If in *Dacii* (The Dacians) everything lies under the sign of conflict, here we find a movement away from conflict, mentioned only in the beginning of the film, to the Dacian-Roman co-existence that would give birth to the Romanian people. The Romans' features are sweetened throughout the film. They are no longer tough and ruthless, much less imperialistic and arrogant than in *Dacii* (The Dacians), and there is a permanent Dacian-Roman collaboration in the construction of fortresses, civil settlements and even in establishing families. There are various relationships between the Romans and the Dacians in this film, although there is still some mutual mistrust. This fact is highlighted by the content of the relationship between the Roman Tiberius and the noble Dacian Andrada. She is fearful and warns Tiberius, though they are now husband and wife: "*No one on this land will ever tell you anything of what you do not need to know. No one will give you anything that you do not need to have.*" One must admit that this is a tough warning for the Roman who is reminded that he is still a guest in Dacia, without having access to all the information on the country that is hosting him. This is only a reminiscence of the Dacian courage, as defined in historiography and as it was visible in *Dacii* (The Dacians). However, unlike *Dacii* (The Dacians), *Columna* (The Column) answers many of the questions about the Romanian ethnogenesis because, surprise, the two, Tiberius and Andrada, have a child. But what will the child be called and what will the child be in terms of identity? These issues were brilliantly solved by scriptwriter Titus Popovici and director Mircea Drăgan so that the audience, if still in doubt after the '50s, would now find out that the Romanian ethnogenesis came exclusively from Dacians and Romans. The child is called Tiberius Ulpus Traianus, a clear name that leaves no room for interpretation, the very name of the capital of the new Roman Dacia. Furthermore, the Roman origin of the name is more than evident, to the prejudice of the Dacian one. To a certain extent one may notice a sort of return to the Latinizing current of the 19th century after the Slavicizing excesses of the previous years.

The answer to the question of what the son of Tiberius and Andrada is from an ethnical point of view is given by the child Tiberius Ulpus Traianus himself. It is very interesting that a child is the one who defines the Romanian people and this is obviously owed to scriptwriter Titus Popovici, who conceives an extraordinary dialogue on this topic between Tiberius Ulpus Traianus and Gerula, a Dacian leader of the anti-Roman resistance. Interestingly, after this dialogue, Gerula abandons the fight.

Traianus, "*What are you doing here?*"

Gerula, "*I'm throwing you in the water,*" joking.

Traianus, "*So what. I shall get out and crack your head with a stone.*"

Gerula laughs.

Traianus, “*I’ve never seen you around here. What’s your name?*”

Gerula, “*Gerula.*”

Traianus, “*If you come to the city, I shall take you to the thermae. We have thermae like in Rome. You have to bathe because you stink. What a beautiful sword you have. Give it to me. When I grow up, I’ll spin it around like the great King Decebalus.*”

Gerula, “*What’s your name?*”

Traianus, “*Traianus.*”

Gerula, “*Whose son are you?*”

Traianus, “*My father’s name is Tiberius Ulpus and he is the commander of the Roman camp.*”

Gerula, “*And your mother?*”

Traianus, “*My mother’s name is Andrada. She is Dacian. But now we are all Roman citizens.*”

What a difference between the approach in *Dacii* (The Dacians) where the Romans represent the absolute evil, the imperialists, the invaders, and the approach in *Columna* (The Column) where Roman citizenship becomes a virtue. The film was shot in 1968, a year when Nicolae Ceaușescu had a certain position in relation to the West and to the Soviet East. Traianus’s words “*now we are all Roman citizens*” may suggest a clear option of belonging to the Latin world of Western origin, without indicating that Nicolae Ceaușescu would have directed the Romanian policy in this respect. The parable should be regarded as a “jab” at the Soviet Eastern world rather than a clear political option for the future. Such jabs would occur in time in the Bucharest-Moscow relationship, given that an open political reaction of Bucharest against Moscow was virtually impossible.

The idea of Latinity, of the positive features brought by the Romans in the process of the Romanian ethnogenesis, is the leitmotif of the film. From a much blamed city in *Dacii* (The Dacians), Rome becomes in *Columna* (The Column) a space of light and common sense, of a well-being that flows over Dacia. Centurion Sabinus, who remained in Dacia, married a Dacian woman and became a teacher for the children born of the Dacians and of the Romans, directly tells the children: “*Children, you are Roman citizens. One day I shall take you to Rome, the most beautiful city in the world.*” However, one must keep in mind that we are in 1968, at the height of the Cold War, when Rome, and not Moscow, was the most beautiful city in the world, and when Bucharest had a singular position within the communist bloc regarding the intervention in Czechoslovakia.

All this reveals an impressive opening in a general Central and Eastern European carceral context. Censorship, as we cannot talk of its absence, gave a green light to these dialogues that went deep down in the consciousness of those who watched the films due to an anti-Soviet feeling that was manifest at the level of the population, a feeling that was also supported by such cinematographic films.

The whole story of *Columna* (The Column) is an ingenious indirect reference to the Transylvanian question, a Transylvania where the Romanian people descended from the conquered Dacians and the conquering, even imperialist Romans, but who contributed to the formation of the Romanian people 2,000 years ago, that is, 1,000 years before the arrival of the Hungarians in Transylvania.

If in *Columna* (The Column) this may seem like an elitist suggestion in this direction, though not because in the school textbooks things were analyzed in the same paradigm, the film *Buzduganul cu trei peceți* (The Mace with three Seals) may be regarded as a really well-targeted arrow, where things are said straightforwardly, with no mercy, making it clear for everyone leaving the cinema that the migrating Hungarians came into the house of the Romanians in Transylvania. Dialogues and lines are edifying in this regard, especially since we are not talking here about Dacians and Romans, but about Romanians and Hungarians during Michael the Brave's conquest of Transylvania, and these dialogues take place between Romanians and Hungarians.

The dialogue between Nicolae Pătrașcu, Michael the Brave's son, who arrives at Alba Iulia bearing a message, and Sigismund Báthory, the prince of Transylvania, is illustrating in this respect. The dialogue seems to continue the discussion between the child Tiberius Ulpian Traianus and the Dacian Gerula, only centuries later and taking place between his successor, Nicolae Pătrașcu, and a Hungarian from Transylvania, Sigismund Báthory. Three interlocutors, Sigismund Báthory's wife, Earl Gaspar Kornis and Nicolae Pătrașcu's companion, boyar Radu Buzescu, also intervene. We say that it is practically a continuation of that dialogue as it starts where the discussion on Romanian ethnogenesis ended. The discussion is only updated for the time, that is, the end of the 16th century. The dialogue is not at all aggressive, but bears the mark of the clear cultural elitism of the two main interlocutors. The issues of the Romanian ethnogenesis and of the Romanians' continuity in Transylvania until the moment of the discussion are clearly settled down despite Sigismund Báthory's "opposition" and "arguments."

Sigismund Báthory's wife begins the conversation with a question regarding a ball given by Prince Sigismund Báthory in honor of the messengers from Walachia:

S.B.'s wife, "*Young prince, how do you find the wines of Alba Iulia?*"

Nicolae Pătrașcu, "*I'm far from being a connoisseur. But I know that the Latin historians cite brilliant opinions about the Apulum wines.*"

S.B.'s wife, "*You mean the Romans brought these vineyards with them?*"

Nicolae Pătrașcu, "*They may have brought them, since in most of the Dacian kingdom King Burebista ordered the destruction of the vineyards beginning with those on the shores of the Euxine Pontus.*"

Sigismund Báthory, "*Are you implying that the laws of Euxine Pontus had power as far as Transylvania?*"

Nicolae Pătrașcu, "*No Prince, the laws of the Dacian kingdom were made in Transylvania. This was the Dacians' heartland and capital, and their kingdom stretched to the Black Sea and to its shore as far as the mountains of Prometheus.*"

Sigismund Báthory, "*Hmm ... I did not think you were a connoisseur of the old legends, Prince.*"

Nicolae Pătrașcu, "*You think of course that I called Caucasus the mountains of Prometheus. As far as the Dacian kingdom and its borders are concerned, they are part of history. Perhaps, when besieged at Sarmizegetusa, another Dacian king, Decebalus, mixed his poison into such a liqueur (he looked at the glass of wine).*"

Sigismund Báthory, "*Hmm ... another beautiful legend about a troublesome defeat of a people long gone.*"

Nicolae Pătrașcu, *“My father believes that only defeats can be wiped out of history, populations do not disappear, they renew and often mix, but they remain the same in their being.”*

Sigismund Báthory, *“I did not know that your father is first and foremost a philosopher.”*

Nicolae Pătrașcu, *“Unfortunately, my father is a warrior.”*

Earl Gaspar Kornis, *“Unfortunately? What about the glory?”*

Radu Buzescu, *“With so much glory, Captain Kornis, we shall end up drinking only blood and forget the taste of these noble wines.”*

Sigismund Báthory’s wife’s question is a benign one for Nicolae Pătrașcu, who is holding a glass of wine: *“Young prince, how do you find the wines of Alba Iulia?”* However, the question was meant to introduce the issue of the formation of the Romanian people and the Dacian-Roman continuity in Transylvania. Nicolae Pătrașcu’s answer is slightly offensive and ingenious at the same time, going back to Antiquity, to the Latin historians who speak of Dacia, of Roman Dacia and of the ancient name of Alba Iulia, Apulum. Nicolae Pătrașcu is not, therefore, in Báthory’s Alba Iulia, but in the Apulum of the Dacian-Romans and of the Latin historians. Báthory’s wife seems baffled by the answer because, being Hungarian, she does not perceive the Transylvanian territory as that of Antiquity, a territory with Dacians, Romans, Latin historians, cities (Apulum) and Dacian-Roman inhabitants. So, she asks ironically if the Romans brought the vine to Transylvania, thus making a concession to the Romans, but not to the Dacians who would have existed only in legends. The irony of the Transylvanian noble lady is met by a very subtle Nicolae Pătrașcu who takes the answer back to the territory of both Dacians and Romans, claiming that the vine may have been brought by the Romans, as the Dacian King Burebista, present only in legends according to Sigismund Báthory’s wife and to Báthory himself, as we shall see below, had decided to destroy all the vineyards in order to make the Dacians more moral. Thus, the vines were cut down in the entire Dacian territory, from the Euxine Pontus (Black Sea) to Transylvania.

Since the Transylvanian noble lady, Sigismund Báthory’s wife, is surprised by this answer, the Transylvanian prince himself interferes, pretending not to understand Nicolae Pătrașcu’s message. Reinforcing the idea of the Dacians as a mythical people, the prince ironically demands further information on how the *“laws of Euxine Pontus,”* whether Greek or later Roman, influenced Transylvania, taking the existence of the Dacian state in Transylvania for a legend.

Nicolae Pătrașcu’s answer is devastating thanks to the accuracy of the historical information provided. Thus, he clearly points out that *“the laws of the Dacian kingdom were made in Transylvania. This was the Dacians’ heartland and capital, and their kingdom stretched to the Black Sea and to its shore as far as the mountains of Prometheus,”* sending Sigismund Báthory into a historical reality that actually meant that it was not the fortresses of the Euxine Pontus that controlled a deserted Transylvania, but it was a very strong Dacian kingdom, with its center in Transylvania, that controlled the space of the Black Sea.

Sigismund Báthory replies sending the Dacians back into the legend. He subtly asserts, while pretending to praise Nicolae Pătrașcu’s knowledge, that *“I did not think you were a connoisseur of the old legends, Prince.”* But he is actually being ironic. Nicolae Pătrașcu’s answer is quite reasonable, arguing that the Burebista’s Dacian kingdom and its *“borders are part of history”* and that another Dacian king, *“Decebalus, mixed his poison into*

such a liqueur;” underlining directly and straight to the point that the wine drunk by the Hungarian nobles in Transylvania has its origin in the vineyards of Burebista and Decebalus’s Dacians and in the vineyards of the Dacians and of the Romans with whom they had mixed since Antiquity. This statement is reinforced later on by the same Nicolae Pătrașcu, when Sigismund Báthory again refers to the Dacians as a legendary people, “*another beautiful legend about a troublesome defeat of a people long gone.*” This time, Nicolae Pătrașcu mentions his own father, Michael the Brave, who taught him that Transylvania’s inhabitants of the Antiquity, Dacians, Romans, and later Daco-Romans did not disappear but formed a new people with a continuous presence in the same space. Thus, he says, “*populations do not disappear, they renew and often mix, but they remain the same in their being*” and the new people resulting from this “*mixture*” is precisely the Romanian people, “*the same in their being,*” with the populations that “*do not disappear*” but “*renew.*” The answer is puzzling and in fact represents the description of the Dacian-Roman continuity in the Transylvanian space over a millennium and a half, until the supposed discussion from the end of the 16th century.

Faced with these statements, Sigismund Báthory steps back, he does not send the Dacians into legend again, the Romans being a historical presence accepted in the discussion, as it would be difficult to ignore them, and focuses on Michael the Brave, calling, ironically again, the Romanian voivode a philosopher who supports these theories. Nicolae Pătrașcu responds, underlying that “*unfortunately, my father is a warrior first and foremost.*” Sigismund seems very embarrassed by Nicolae Pătrașcu’s answers, but this is the moment when the nobleman Gaspar Kornis, a real historical character who attends the discussion together with Radu Buzescu, comes to Sigismund’s rescue, annoyed by the fact that Michael the Brave is unhappy as a warrior who has a lot of glory and considering that a leader, like the Hungarian one from Transylvania, must enjoy a lot of glory. The answer comes from his Wallachian counterpart, boyar Radu Buzescu, a very tough answer with direct reference to Transylvania’s Hungarian rulers who seek only glory and wars, like all migrators: “*with so much glory, Captain Kornis, we shall end up drinking only blood*” suggesting that the Romanians, as descendants of the native Dacian-Romans, in their permanent continuity here have not sought glory, but only to defend their lands against the various aggressors.

It is the kind of dialogue that had to deliver the historical information about the Romanian ethnogenesis and continuity in Transylvania directly to the target, that is, firstly to audiences in the cinemas and in front of the television screens, and then to the entire society. The film gives special attention to the clarification of the issue of the Romanian ethnogenesis and continuity in Transylvania. This dialogue alone takes 6.20 minutes in the economy of the film, from a total of 177 minutes, between minutes 61.20 and 67.40.

If this discussion was placed at a level of historiographical interpretations based more or less on historical sources and legends, in other words, at an elitist, but extremely ironic level on the Hungarian part, the film *Buzduganul cu trei peceți* (The Mace with three Seals) contains a moment that clearly presents the point of view of the Romanian historiography regarding Transylvania, especially the Romanians as natives in Transylvania at the time of the arrival of the first tribes of Hungarian migrants in the Transylvanian territory at the end of the 9th century.

This moment refers to Transylvania being taken by Michael the Brave from the hands of Cardinal Andrew Báthory at Șelimbăr, 18/28 October, 1599, and to the arrival in Transylvania of Lady Stanca, Michael the Brave's wife, with one of the Wallachian voivode's military columns. Surprisingly, however, the strongest position on this issue is expressed by Lady Stanca herself and not by Michael the Brave, Nicolae Pătrașcu or some Wallachian boyar. We believe that this choice was equally assumed by the director, the scriptwriter and by the censorship, because these words spoken directly and extremely harshly could seem less virulent in the mouth of a woman than in the mouth of any political leader of the time, and the fact that the dialogue takes place in a Catholic church in Prejmer, Brașov county, bestows upon it a confessional dimension rather than an ethnical one, though the references are clear.

The dialogue takes place during a German sermon that Lady Stanca and her procession attend. The German priest who officiates the sermon does not object to the presence of an Orthodox group at the sermon, as a proof that what has to be demonstrated does not concern the Germans in Transylvania. We say this because, during the sermon, Cardinal Malaspina enters tempestuously. The actor who played the cardinal's part was Loran Lohinski, a Hungarian-speaking Romanian actor with a strong Hungarian accent, perhaps to strengthen the beliefs of those watching the film and to send a clear message.

The dialogue between Lady Stanca and Cardinal Malaspina is a very short one, but it is electrifying and very direct. It only takes a few sentences to clarify the question of those who were natives in Transylvania, the Romanians, and of the Hungarian foreigners who came to these lands hundreds of years after the formation of the Romanian people. Thus, while tempestuously entering the church in Prejmer, Cardinal Malaspina addresses Lady Stanca: "*Lady, stop praying in a church that is foreign to you,*" suggesting Lady Stanca should leave the church. But Lady Stanca immediately positions herself trying to find out if the cardinal's words are of confessional or of ethnic nature, asking him "*is your Eminence's inappropriate behavior of a religious nature?*" Malaspina does not confirm that his behavior has religious connotations, but his immediate statements prove his approach is political and ethnic, saying that "*Transylvania can be a vassal of the Polish or of the Habsburg Crown, but never of a Wallachian Crown.*" By saying this, Malaspina makes a gesture of contempt, both with his hand and his face.

Lady Stanca's tough and straightforward reaction comes immediately, directed against those who supported in 1977, the year of the film, the fact that the Romanian people was formed south of the Danube and migrated to the north of the Danube in the 14th century, and that the first Romanians arrived in Transylvania in the 17th century. We primarily refer here to the Hungarian historiography, politically supported by the communist regime in Budapest. Thus, Lady Stanca tells Malaspina, "*If you do not measure your words before the Lady of the Country, measure your words at least when you speak about the Wallachians. Transylvania is just beginning to be free... I am at my home, while your Eminence and Báthory as well are not.*"

The answer is clear, in Transylvania the Romanian Lady Stanca is at home while the Catholic Cardinal Malaspina and the Hungarian Báthory are not. It is an uninterpretable response to the presence of the Romanians in Transylvania and to the fact that the Hungarians arrived in the home of the Romanians much later. The firmness of the

words is obvious. Few are the passages in the historical Romanian films of the '70s and '80s that speak so clearly about the Romanian-Hungarian dispute over Transylvania. It was a means by which the public would find out the general opinion of the Romanian historiography on this issue, which was contrary to the Hungarian one.

The film's end anticipates the future historical developments. Despite the fact that Michael the Brave's entry in Alba Iulia is cheered by an enthusiastic crowd, happy that the union of the three countries has taken place, since "*they have one heart and this heart is beating today in Alba Iulia,*" an uncertain message, somewhat pessimistic, is passed on to posterity anticipating the later destiny of Transylvania and of the union of 1600 in general. Thus, he says, "*I see the clouds of future tempests gathering.*" But, at the same time we have an optimistic message that is not related to the political elite, but to the Romanian people, since the same Michael the Brave asserts "*but for as long as you, your sons, the sons of your sons shall be the heights of our history, the nation and the union will be eternal, as you are eternity.*" One must admit that this discourse resembles a lot a discourse that takes place a few centuries later, in a play written by Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea in 1909 and entitled *Apus de soare* (Sunset). This time it is Stephen the Great who says, "*Remember Stephen's words, who has been your shepherd till his old age, that Moldavia did not belong to my ancestors, it hasn't belonged to me or to you, but it belongs to your descendants and to the descendants of your descendants to the end of time.*" These words will also appear in Stephen the Great's speech in the homonymous film from 1974.

Conclusions

THE USE of the historical cinematographic film to support historiographical and political positions during the years of the totalitarian communist regime is not a surprising fact, especially since similar phenomena are present in other European totalitarian countries of the 20th century. Given that the discussed topics could not be raised at the official political level in the Romanian-Hungarian relations, the disputes were sent to related fields, first of all to those related to historiography, but also to others, such as cinematography. What could not be said directly in the historical writing could be said by historical characters such as Lady Stanca and Nicolae Pătrașcu. However, the end was the same. In this case the statements were much more direct and virulent.

Even if they were clearly covered by the historical reality, the way they were uttered could lead to certain negative feelings between the communities targeted in the film. However, one must also take into account the period when these films were shot. It was the time when the political regime was growing weaker and, in order to generate some solidarity around the political leader, historical issues and foreign enemies were exacerbated so as to generate solidarity in the face of a possible external danger. Solidarity could only be around the leader. It is a constant phenomenon, present in the authoritarian-dictatorial regimes of all times, that seek various solutions in order to survive, and a foreign enemy is conveniently at hand. This is no longer about political ideologies, but rather about attempts to keep their own power.

The consequences are, however, extremely damaging to historiography and to the public in general, even if in its essence the approach is based on the historical truth which once again provides credibility to the regime. It is an example of how the historical past can be used to manipulate the interests of a political present in an authoritarian/totalitarian regime. At the same time, it is an appeal to leave history in the hands of the professionals, that is, to historians, and not to use history for political reasons. □

Notes

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Abstract

Semantic and Mental Boundaries in the Romanian-Hungarian Historical Dialogue on Transylvania. Case Study: the Historical Film

The cinematographic film, mainly the historical one, is without a doubt a historical document worth taking into consideration especially by the totalitarian regimes that are constantly looking for a good image. The use of the historical cinematographic film to support historiographical and political positions during the years of the totalitarian communist regime is not a surprising fact, especially since similar phenomena are present in other European totalitarian countries of the 20th century. The consequences are, however, extremely damaging to historiography and to the public in general, even if in its essence the approach is based on the historical truth which once again provides credibility to the regime. It is an example of how the historical past can be used to manipulate the interests of a political present in an authoritarian/totalitarian regime. At the same time, it is an appeal to leave history in the hands of the professionals, that is, to historians, and not to use history for political reasons.

Keywords

ideology, historical film, Transylvania, Romanian-Hungarian historical dialogue