

Dimitrie Cantemir – Forerunner of European Sociology

Corina Dumitrescu*

“Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University, Romania

Abstract: *The paper aims at making an analysis of the erudite Dimitrie Cantemir from the perspective of contemporary sociology. The ideas brought forth by this paper can be summarized as follows: The erudite prince, whom Nicolae Iorga characterised as “raised among books of wisdom”, managed to be a forerunner in the field of the future-to-be science of sociology. His fundamental work in this direction is Descriptio Moldaviae [Description of Moldavia], written upon request of the Berlin Academy of Sciences. Being written in Latin, as the philosopher-prince wrote this book of reference as foundation for the European sociology, allowed it to be studied by all European learners interested in aspects of a science that was to be defined. Moreover, arguments in support of the assertion that Dimitrie Cantemir is a forerunner of the science of sociology can also be found in other reference works, studies and monographs. A significant example is his work Hronicul vechimei a romano-moldo-vlahilor [Chronicle of the old history of the Romano-Moldo-Vlachs] in which, as a true sociologist, Cantemir makes a comprehensive analysis of the way in which the Romanians had lived in Dacia, their organization, customs, social hierarchy and their cultural-social relations with other European peoples, considering them a “bridge between the Orient and the West”. Historia incrementorum atque decrementorum Aulae Othomanicae [The History of the Ascent and Descent of the Ottoman Court], although claimed by historians, is a reference work for the encyclopaedic mind of Dimitrie Cantemir, and a fundamental one for the European sociology. This book, existing in the Library of the American Congress, describes true sociologic investigations about the Turkish society and about the other European states of that time, which coexisted with the Ottoman Empire.*

Keywords: *homo sociologicus*; social model; education; culture; religion; reason; sociology of action; knowledge; monograph.

Cuvinte-cheie: *homo sociologicus*; model social; educație; cultură; religie; rațiune; sociologia acțiunii; cunoaștere; monografie.

Man – universally embodied by the prince-philosopher is represented by the prince-philosopher himself in the supreme value of the very science dealing with social values: sociology.

The entire universe of this science, and the science itself is, first of all, the outstanding outcome of those who represented the humankind elite, of their hardships, dedicated to everyone, to

* “Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University, Romania. E-mail: rectorucdc@yahoo.com.

everyone's welfare, standing for the *sum of all possibilities and alternatives to the human spirit* (Rădulescu, 1994, 301): HOMO SOCIOLOGICUS.

The prince's intellectual abilities, resembling an encyclopaedia built during his youth, "benefitted" from the chance of a double "spiritual living" of the great scholar: the joy of rebirth and enlightenment, alike, a maximisation of human reasoning.

Cantemir's intention was not to be the only one to enjoy the "heights" reached by other peoples' minds, as well as by his own: he profoundly and sadly understood that the revalorisation of Antiquity, even "spread" over several centuries had remained somewhere as the "cultural baggage" of a minority. Moreover, this minority, regarded as enlightened, did not show any desire to become more than "self-sufficient", which narrowed the circle of humanistic benevolence.

A skilled connoisseur of humankind values, on the one hand, though deeply affected by the mass ignorance, on the other, Cantemir assumed, in a providential manner, his role to shape-up the "making-of" of his own cultural personality, at the same time with the awakening and enlightenment of all the people living in his age and well beyond.

"The Cave Myth", brilliantly coined by Plato, seems to have represented the "creative obsession" of the Moldavian scholar: freeing people from the "claws of their own ignorance" seems to have been his Renaissance and Enlightenment-like mission to which the so-called "academy-man", as Blaga used to call him, had committed himself to.

A human condition which Dimitrie Cantemir was aware of for his own accomplishment, and which became a challenge for others, *Homo sociologicus* was the main character in his work, "offered" and "bided" to everyone in all its splendour. Powerful, intelligent, learned,

visionary, forerunner of ever new horizons of knowledge, highly ethical... and especially REAL...; so real the prince-philosopher was, that he asked everybody the quintessential question of destiny: if he succeeded in reaching the compulsory heights of human kind, why should "I" not reach them?

Every man's emancipation from the "bonds" of their own intellect was conceived done in a generous manner by Cantemir: by means of a complete "species solidarity", the prince-philosopher offered the necessary key called KNOWLEDGE.

The real society, based on knowledge and the supreme value of the GOOD, was Cantemir's "social project": where *Homo sociologicus* had always been his focus. It is only this type of core, harmonious, strong, intelligent society that, later on, deserves to have a real science "dedicated" to it – namely sociology. Before this "science-dedication" Cantemir dedicated himself to this world to which he had been, and still is, a role model. Let us imagine today, three centuries later, a society whose members have reached a level of knowledge similar to Cantemir's: if these standards were coupled with everyone's special character, we would have the image of the "ideal city-state" conceived by Plato, wouldn't we?

Through his whole work Cantemir, aimed at "reaching" higher than Plato his knowledge mentor – "required": that is, to build the ideal city-state inspired from the famous work "The Republic". His purpose was to "save" the whole world from non-existence or half-existence. For Cantemir, there was an essential difference between those who are aware of and "exercise their human condition", and those who have the illusion of being a human being.

In other words, if Plato conceived the ideal-state, led by philosophers as a purpose in itself, Cantemir envisaged a slightly different "world" of the sort; he would start by the "human becoming" of

each individual: once fulfilled, the individual would find himself in a citadel filled with wise people, not only led by other wise people.

Here, at this “junction point” of Cantemir’s work, one witnesses the “leap” from the humanist pattern to the Enlightenment pattern.

Cantemir, the humanist, became larger-than-life to himself; he felt unchallenged even by bright minds of the era represented by Leibniz, and also by the whole brightness of the humankind culture which, to a great extent, he had known in relation to the “endless ocean of ignorance” of the great majority of people in his era; ignorance generated a strong sense of darkness, strongly threatening to become almighty, in a time when enlightened minds were naturally prone to disappear.

Light, as much light as possible, asked all the humanists, being aware of their own superiority – light for the poor ignorant owners of a totally unused reasoning.

Dimitrie Cantemir, being one of the founders of the Enlightenment, meant to “enflame” the light of REASON for his own people first of all, and for all the others, in the end.

His great merit, from this point of view, was that he did not limit himself to discretely diagnose the “state of darkness” in the majority’s mind, thus going further, and offering the “cure” for reaching the real human condition. Cantemir’s work is a pioneering one in placing the **human reasoning** in the right place so that, from this correct position, it could play its predestined role: human-being fulfilment.

Almost a century apart from Cantemir, a great thinker of the *Enlightenment* stated that:

The Enlightenment represents the starting point of man to escape the minority status he himself is guilty of. Minority is the inability to use reason without external impulses (Kant, 2011, 29).

Kant himself offered the world his approach to *Enlightenment*, to a world which he characterizes as being low on knowledge, demanding to let aside laziness and forwardness, and value its “reasoning”.

Kant had, aside from the *Enlightenment* creators, a century of “delay”, that is an “enlightened century” as the representatives of rationalism such as Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz, as well as Empirics represented by Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume has succeeded to place man and the man’s desired society on the good TRACK.

The essential direction of the German *Enlightenment* was drawn by Leibniz and Christian Wolff, who was called the “Germans’ educator” whom he especially brought the necessary “light” for the “collective”, as well as individual “reasoning”.

Contemporary with Leibniz and a connoisseur of his work, Cantemir took over the mission of the “Mentor of Romanians” in a huge and even super-human intellectual demarche: he brought, as we had already mentioned above, “in front of his people” all the greatness of Antiquity, its high ideals, the high human splendour and, later on, through his own model, he “presented” his people the reality and “contemporaneousness” of the superior-man based on his intelligence and character; afterwards, he presented to his “conquered people” the “technology” with which they could attain their human condition themselves. “Behind” these words there resides an impressive both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary work regarding its content.

Homo sociologicus Dimitrie Cantemir “enriched” his contemporaries and their followers through his works with superior reasoning – which “functions” and not only “exists” – reasoning which, in its endless functioning, is a triple knowledge generator: *knowledge of God, self knowledge and environmental knowledge*.

He, who thought and worked hard intellectually – for his people in the first place and the whole human kind, in the second place – was justly called *the golden bridge between the Orient and the West*. What is more, based on certain arguments hereby presented and having paraphrased the above ideas, one may say that Cantemir was the golden bridge between humanism and *Enlightenment*.

The history of philosophy comprises humanism and its most important representatives. The entire Romanian *academia* and the *Romanian Academy* have the moral duty to lay Cantemir in the right place within history.

The same history of philosophy includes the *Enlightenment* and its pioneers; in the same manner, the *Romanian Academy* has the moral duty to claim Dimitrie Cantemir's place among these illustrious personalities.

If the history of philosophy employed criticism, one could appreciate that Plato is synonymous to humanism and Aristotle is synonymous to *Enlightenment*. How important were those who are exaggerating known as the fathers of these philosophies? They are dignified pursuers, as in a true "wise men relay" of practising the cult of "human greatness", they are "real priests" of the "humankind temple". Cantemir was one of them; no doubt there is more value we have to acknowledge to these humankind geniuses.

On the whole, as a meta-science philosophy, remains the creation of Antiquity, besides other nicely, but scarcely spread sciences by Plato's Academicians, for almost a millennium. Once these last pioneers disappeared, together with their disciples, there started the era of darkness in humankind thinking. The chance was that, soon enough, there appeared the "light-soldiers", the geniuses who took over the intellectual tradition of Antiquity first for themselves and later for all the other humankind minds.

Dimitrie Cantemir, the "Academia-Man", a "light soldier" in his turn, young Homo sociologicus, had done his first intellectual demarche, in order to create the superior man in every reasoning human being, in his work *Divanul sau Gilceava ințeleptului cu lumea sau Giudețul sufletului cu trupul [The Wiseman's Lounge or Haggle with the World or the Quarrel of the Body with the Soul]*, issued in Iași, in 1698, when he was twenty-five.

Reasoning – a sociologic category – characteristic to the social actor is defined by Cantemir to its core; Cantemir identifies the "divine-substance" which gives the human being the chance to be his own master and the master of the world, that was given to him: *Man as emperor over all world's things given to him* "says" the prince-philosopher to us, leading us all from the very beginning of the worshipping he will bring to the human being along his entire work.

This emperor-man is, or should be, first of all, highly religious; here is the sociologic nature of the religious man:

"God's world,
Made to be trusted."

That is, the humankind should be aware that Man is, first of all, created by God and his master is God. The awareness of the human being of his condition is the step forward that Cantemir took in highlighting the religious man's personality; he is prior to the Moldavian scholar, but had "perceived" his condition of having been "created" without being aware of it.

The moral beauty of the religious Man was a major concern for Cantemir who urges him that:

"After death may your name last not in wrongdoing,
But in well doing."

That means you should be a soldier of the Good because God created you for this reason:

“With the gifts you were given,
Towards the Good and not the Bad you
should turn”;

This is the precise mission of man to do
Good in this world.

The religious man is taught about God’s
supreme power:

“God changes
And moves kingships.”

Being, at the same time, the supreme
judge whom man owes his love and
cherishing:

“True towards God,
Love is given what it desires.”

Religion, in Cantemir’s opinion, was
faith and profound love towards the
Creator, a living whose rules should be
strictly established from the point of view
of the state created by the human being:

“He who sees other than God
Would highly suffer.”

And the true believer is encouraged to
hope:

“The believer’s hope
Is not useless.”

The merits, from different points of
view of the same work are well known, and
there is a special approach for the
relationship between the prince-writer and
reader whom he suggests a passive role, in
order to pay attention to the world’s
sayings, teaching and experience.

A few years later, in the *Istoria
ieroglică [Hieroglyphic History]*, more
precisely, in the “Sentences” – a part of it,
things change: in this work, the reader is
actively “involved” in the process of his
own becoming.

The “leap” from the passive-reader,
who was “called” to “assist” only to the
dialogues between the Wiseman and the
World, but who, as a reader, was
“rewarded” and “invested” with the neces-
sary reasoning to understand the “fight”;

thus he was also “gifted” with the under-
standing of his “condition” as a “created
human being” towards the active reader,
this time “called” to “take part” in his own
“construct”, the leap was not abrupt: the
reader was “prepared” by two fundamental
works: *Metafizica [Metaphysics]* and *Mic
compendiu asupra întregii învățăături a
logicii [Small compendium on logics]*.

The “bridge” given to the reader who
was in a continuous process of becoming,
and which represented the starting point for
Cantemir the philosopher, was, first of all,
meant to adequate the ideas from Plato’s
homonymous works, “filter” them through
the Christian spirit, in order to prove the
Christian *homo religious* how much trust
and how much grounds he can have in his
divine reasoning.

Here is the added value allotted – rather
quickly in time – by Cantemir to his reader,
superiority he had given him, the “jewel”
added to the “spirit crown” of the Christian
whom, first of all, he „asks” in the
“Sentences” not to contemplate his own
“condition”, but to “act” to his own human
“construct”.

The analysis of the “Sentences” by
sociologists is compulsory, as it will defi-
nitely identify the elements of a variable
sociology of knowledge, besides any
sociology of action. Here and now, in this
general context, in order to willingly
“provoke” sociologists, the following
quotation from Cantemir’s work could be
mentioned:

*What knowledge of things represents to
knowledge?*

The same is the light for the mind,

*The same is the ignorance of things for
the consciousness darkness.*

Thus, you, the reader, have to choose:
either use your consciousness to the full,
and in time you may assist to your own
continuous process of “enlightenment” of
your existence generated by your own
intellectual strive, dedicated to
KNOWLEDGE, that you found out in

Divanul sau Gâlceava înțeleptului cu lumea sau Giudețul sufletului cu trupul [The Wiseman's Lounge or Hassel with the world or the Quarrel of the body and soul], or choose to stay and “wallow” in your own ignorance “providing” your own darkness and non-existence.

We rarely find in specialised literature of sociology such a significant, concise and substantial approach to man and his world, such a firm and noble counsel for action towards the human being, in order to find his own light, his own becoming, his own human condition and such a precise and essential solution for the religious Man in search of his fulfilment as self-maker of a human being.

The double antithesis knowledge – non-knowledge of things, light – darkness of the mind, presented and so much directly or indirectly “exemplified” by Cantemir in his whole work, and also here in the “Sentences” can be considered as the quintessence of the knowledge sociology and action sociology.

Had there not been any fascination, the magnet and magnetism represented and continually generated by Cantemir’s work, the present study could stop here subjectively noting that the study has already brought a lot of arguments meant to contradict Petre Andrei who says, among others, that: *...The social problems are accurate but the sociologic and systematic research of life is the product of new times and belongs especially to Western Europe.* If up to this point of the present study Cantemir’s work may not matter for this author and his followers... The type of *Homo sociologicus* he had suggested to world culture, the theory of the ideal society – that of people aware of their own mission, the “light of reason” revalorized as the core of a real philosophic trend – *Enlightenment* – to which he had fully contributed, that is, an entire culture given to the world under the shape of this trend, the total approach of religion to mankind,

as a part of his spiritual “building”, and not least, communication and the state of communication vital for each man – all are remarkable intellectual skills for the creation of a new science. We have only made reference to only two of these skills necessary for the appearance and existence of sociology: that is philosophy and educational science. *In principle, Cantemir's educational belief operates with the values of traditional morale combined with a series of maxims belonging to antic Greek and Roman moral philosophy, preferably Stoic philosophy* (Pascu et al., 1993, 204).

The important year 1716 must become a reference year for the European sociology, as the prince-philosopher brought a new fundamental “category” to the “intellectual dowry” of this science: the making of the first classic **complete monograph**, through his work “Description of Moldavia”, written in Latin and translated in 1718 into Romanian; even if Cantemir answered through this referential work for sociology, to geography and socio-geography under the commissioning of Berlin Academy, it is obvious that the load of scientific information, the extensive data related to the history of Moldavia, with its laws, customs, religion and language was carried in his heart and spirit. There is a lot of love for his country and its people; a lot of longing for his country was present in his work, and the prince-philosopher made known the fundamental data of his people to the whole world.

In short, about the journey of this manuscript: his son Antioh had commissioned a bookseller from Hague to print it; Bishop Innocentius Klein gets, in the same period of time, the Romanian manuscript of the book. After Antioh Cantemir’s death, the Thomson committee buys the manuscript which gets to Petersburg, and from there, back to Berlin, in order to be published for the first time in the *History and Geography Magazine*, between 1769-1770. It is well known that the second

printed edition of the manuscript was issued in 1771 in Frankfurt. Indeed, this over a hundred years "journey" of the manuscript represented one more chance to be studied and used as model of monograph for those who studied sociology.

In the Romanian specialised literature, no other monograph has ever succeeded in taking its place, and with a little courage and respect towards the scientific truth, neither the European literature has yet overcome the model "reached" or "comprised" by the *Description of Moldavia*.

Moldavia neighbours Transylvania in the West and the Romanian people in the south, the Poles in the North and the Turks in the East Dimitrie Cantemir "used to say" to everyone, and thus he fixed the borders of his country. *Moldavia has four larger waters: the Danube, the Nistru, the Prut and the Siret*, and then he described them all and their positions and role for the country's economy and defence. In the same manner, with a lot of love and parsimony he presented the other important waters crossing his Moldavia: rivers, brooks, lakes as symbols of life, because *the water of the Prut is heal for all diseases*.

Extended land, crossed by waters, blessed with mountains, hills, plateaus, valleys, Moldavia was rich in land and counties: the Iassy County, the Cîrligăturai County, the Romanului County, the Vasluiului County, the Tutova County, the Tecuci County, the Putna County and other counties and lands described from geographic, historic and economic points of view.

Regarding the height of the highest mountain, the Ceahlău, Cantemir used to say that *we can infer it from the fact that that it is from Acherman, a city-state as far as of 60 hours distance, that during nice weather and at sunset he can see the mountain as clear as if it were close to you, which is highly improbable for other mountains even for famous peaks, as far as I can see* (Cantemir, 2004, 62).

The geographic part ends with the presentation of the plains and forests of Moldavia, wild and domestic animals, with special mention of the horses from the plain also present in the saying: *young Persian and a Moldavian horse are more praised than all the other horses* (idem, 75).

The political part describes the governing form of Moldavia, it speaks about the election of the lords, their powers and relegation, the squirearchy, the Moldavian army and, not last, the laws and judgement:

...After hearing everyone's thoughts, knowing someone's guilt, the Landlord asks the Prelate which punishment should be applied to him according to the political and church rule. First of all, the Prelate shows the decision of the laws and after that he refers to God's mercy which this judgement cannot stop. The squirearchy do the same and after this the Landlord expresses his thoughts and decides either to free or send to death or other punishment for the accused (idem, 187). *The landlord had great power for judgement and he took into consideration the hierarch's opinion as the judicial procedure allowed landlord's mercy.*

The importance shown by the Moldavian landlord to the Prelate in the judgement court shows the place of the church in the state structure and the relation between the "lord house" and "God's House".

The popular traditions are also described in the *Description of Moldavia* especially related to baptism and weddings. These customs, dating beyond Cantemir's description, were occasions to highlight richness of the Romanian language:

Our ancestors and fore-fathers while wandering through the forests and winds, found this country, where we also live, eat and indulge in its milk and honey. Thus, through this example the praised squire went hunting in the fields, forests and mountains where he found a ferrous animal, which being shy and honest, did not stay with him but ran and hid and while you

followed it, it brought us to this house. Thus, you have to give it to us and show us where this animal ran, this animal which we with so much diligence and sweat have dashed from the wild (Cantemir, 2004, 234).

It is easy to see the metaphor, its use, the allegory and the “return” to the people’s history, beauty and richness of the land mentioned in this context regarding fulfilment through man’s love.

The pride and love to describe the people he was part of as a Christian are found in the fragment referring to religion, the church command and Moldavian monasteries, which were of two types: big and small monasteries with hundreds of hermitage nearby.

The *Description of Moldavia*, in its final part, talks about the origin of the Moldavian language and its origin in Latin, as well as its relation with Italian, where the most important mention is that:

The people of Muntenia and the people of Ardeal have the same language as the people of Moldavia, but they speak in a coarser voice... (Cantemir, 2004, 266).

Thus, through this remarkable work, appreciated in the intellectual European circles, how Dimitrie Gusti’s assertion seems so grounded: *Sociology will be monographic or it will not exist at all* (Gusti and Stahl, 1980, 19). The *Description of Moldavia* allowed, through itself, sociology “to exist”, that is sociology obtained, thus, all the characteristics of a science, meta-science within social sciences which, in their turn, “gave” substance to sociology, that is the primary information, which later on, sociology “knows” how to correlate it and “reach” its quintessence.

Dimitrie Gusti’s cultural model was, even if not confessed, Dimitrie Cantemir: there are numerous common “intellectual data” in their works. Thus, within the science about society, the monograph was considered as essential by Gusti, the role of

the mass enlightenment, the importance of education and learning, the study of ethnology, the dynamics of the social life; all taken from Cantemir and maximised again, thus supporting the affirmation according to which he was considered the father of the School of sociology in Bucharest and a great follower of Dimitrie Cantemir the scholar-prince.

What has the prince-philosopher created for the good of philosophy, more than everything that has already been mentioned so far?

The Romanian science of history and especially the first historical treaty is known as *Chronicle of the old history of the Romano-Moldo-Vlachs*, at which he worked until the end of his life. His impressive work, extremely rich in arguments referring to the common origin of those who made up one people, with Latin origins, played a major role in bridging history from chronicles to annals and national historic fundaments as a science in itself. Cantemir remarkably and almost unequally proved, even on European level, the multi millenary epic of survival of a strong people and its entire culture.

The continuity of the Romanian people with their Dacian and Roman ancestors, their resistance to migrating peoples and openness to assimilation of influences, meant to make it stronger, fact proved by this fundamental work for the science of the Romanians’ history and it represented more than the “recovery of its own history”, it represented and can represent, anytime, the most important proof which generates our national spirit which, in its turn, will generate and can generate the unification of all Romanians.

The most important movement of the Romanian people was the union initiated by Cantemir, continued later on by the pioneers of *Școala Ardeleană* and partially accomplished in 1859, and later on fully accomplished in 1918. The social movement for the Romanian’s union was

described in his writings. Here, the union was for those who were born good, lifelong educated divided in the seven ages, willing to study and aware of their superior spirit.

About Dimitrie Cantemir, Lucian Blaga said:

Regarding his literary, philosophic, scientific, musical work, we can say without exaggeration that it equals the work of a scientific and literary entire nation. One hundred and fifty years before laying the grounds of the Romanian Academy, Dimitrie Cantemir is, due to his work and activity, its first symbolic representative.

Thus, in Blaga's sayings we can see the "cultural personality" of the one who was a member of the Academy of Berlin in 1714, prepared the grounds for the Russian Academy, the "academy-man" Dimitrie Cantemir who has the moral and scientific right to be placed near historians, philosophers, pedagogy experts, geographers, theologians, musicians, philologists, and sociologists in the right place in the encyclopaedias of these sciences initiated by him to a certain extent. This "mending" would be normal to take place in 2014 that is the anniversary of 300 years from his admission in the Academy of Berlin!

References

- Boudon, R. (2006) *Tratat de sociologie*. București: Humanitas.
- Cantemir, D. (1995) *Mic compendiu asupra întregii învățături a logicii*. București: Științifică.
- Cantemir, D. (2003) *Divanul*. București: Academiei Române, Univers Enciclopedic.
- Cantemir, D. (2003) *Sentenții*. București: Gramar.
- Cantemir, D. (2003) *Hronicul vechimei a romano-moldo-vlahilor*. București: Academiei Române, Univers Enciclopedic.
- Cantemir, D. (2004) *Descrierea Moldovei [Description of Moldavia]*. București: Semne.
- Gusti, D. and Stahl, H. H. (1980) *Studii critice [Critical Studies]*. București: Științifică și enciclopedică.
- Kant, I. (2011) *Manifestul iluminist [The Enlightenment Manifesto]*. București: Paralela 45.
- Pascu, S., Manolache, A., Pârnuță, G. and Verdeș, I. (1993) *Istoria învățământului din România [History of Education in Romania]*. București: Didactică și Pedagogică.
- Petre, A. (1997) *Sociologie generală*. Iași: Polirom.
- Rădulescu, S. M. (1994) *Homo sociologicus*. București: Casa de editură și presă "Șansa" S.R.L.
- Stanciu, I. Gh. (1977) *O istorie a pedagogiei universale și românești*. București: Didactică și Pedagogică.

Primit la redacție: decembrie, 2012