

ROMANIAN INTELLECTUALS AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN TRANSYLVANIA

The European Enlightenment touched Romanian intellectuals in Transylvania in diverse ways in the latter decades of the eighteenth century. But the depth of its influence depended not so much on the novelty and persuasiveness of the ideas propagated by *philosophers* and *Aufklärer* in the West as on the convergence of these ideas with goals already formulated by Romanian intellectuals themselves. To put matters another way, the reception of the Enlightenment by these Romanians was a work of selection and adaptation, rather than of wholesale borrowing and imitation, and, thus, we may properly speak about an original phenomenon, about Romanian Enlightenment. It was very much part of the European-wide movement of ideas of the time, but it also possessed qualities of its own, which reflected the specific course of social and intellectual development in Transylvania during the eighteenth century. It was the work of intellectuals, and thus it is with them that this paper is mainly concerned.

My purpose is to suggest what the reaction of the Romanian intellectual elite was to the European Enlightenment and, in so doing, identify the main features of the Romanian Enlightenment. The leading representatives of this elite formed a small, relatively cohesive group, whose activities spanned the period from the 1770s to about 1820 and whose years of greatest creativity coincided with the reign of the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II (1780-1790) and the decade of two afterwards. It was precisely in Joseph's reign that far-reaching political, economic, and social reforms imposed from Vienna intersected with a rising national consciousness in Transylvania. Joseph's reforms reinforced the efforts of Romanian intellectuals to restore the Romanians to a position history told them they had once enjoyed in Transylvania's political and social life. But they were also engaged in an enterprise whose grandness they could only dimly grasp: a synthesis of East and West, which was to be the hallmark of modern Romanian nation building.

I

Romanian intellectuals in the later decades of the eighteenth century entered into a closer communion with Western European thought than any previous generation. They were for the most part graduates of Romanian Greek Catholic secondary schools, which flourished at Blaj, the Greek Catholic see in Transylvania, and of Roman Catholic institutions of learning in Transylvania and in Vienna and Rome¹. Here Roman Catholic reformers, imbued with the new, enlightened spirit of the times, served as mediators between the Central European Enlightenment and Romanian intellectuals. They were, in part, responsible for giving the Enlightenment in Transylvania a peculiarly Austrian imprint.

The young Romanians who frequented these schools were unusually receptive to the ideas of the Enlightenment, especially in their Austrian incarnation. Particularly striking was their optimism about human progress. They were also deeply conscious of their own leading role in Romanian society, and they were certain that change most come from above, from the enlightened, by which, of course, they meant themselves. They were practical men little given to abstract speculation, for they were absorbed in the immediate problems of Romanian society: political emancipation and education.

The range of interests displayed by Romanian intellectuals knew no bounds. They were polymaths who produced an astonishing variety of works – histories, grammars, theological and philosophical tracts, church sermons, and schoolbooks – all intended, as they themselves put it, to promote the “general welfare”. Their wide-ranging preoccupations were illustrative of a new trend in Romanian society – the secularization of the intellectuals, a process well underway, despite the fact that the majority were priests. They also had greater commerce with European currents of ideas than

¹ Iacob Mârza, *Școală și națiune (școlile din Blaj în epoca renașterii naționale)*, Cluj-Napoca, 1987, p. 47-192; Remus Câmpeanu, *Intellectualitatea română din Transilvania în veacul al XVIII-lea*, Cluj-Napoca, 1999; Cornel Sigmirean, *Istoria formării intelectualității românești din Transilvania și Banat în epoca modernă*, Cluj-Napoca, 2000, p. 15-25.

previous generations, a circumstance reflected in their elaboration of an idea of ethnic community approaching modern nationhood².

Their attachment to Europe notwithstanding, the aspirations and projects of Romanian intellectuals were grounded in the realities of the Romanians' situation in Transylvania. They were always keenly aware that the Romanians were not recognized by the constitution of Transylvania as legitimate inhabitants of the country, but were merely tolerated. Thus, the intellectuals could not enter into the system of the three "recognized" nations (the nobility, essentially Magyar, the Saxons, and the Szeklers) and the four "received" churches (Calvinist, Lutheran, Unitarian, and Roman Catholic), which had gradually come into being since the fifteenth century, had survived the Habsburg conquest at the end of the seventeenth century, and still dominated Transylvanian political and economic life. The Romanians were excluded from these governing structures on both social and religious grounds. First of all, the great majority, over ninety percent, were commoners, peasants, who had no place in diets and councils of state, and, second, they were Orthodox or Greek Catholic and thus stood outside the pale of acceptable Christianity. In striving to aver come these disabilities, the Romanian intellectual elite was guided by a single dogma – the idea of nation, which they themselves were responsible for defining in historical and linguistic terms and which gave their diverse activities cohesion and direction. The practical expression of this dogma – the struggle for national emancipation – endowed the Romanian Enlightenment in Transylvania with its salient characteristic³.

At the forefront of the intellectual elite stood three men: Samuil Micu (1745-1806), Gheorghe Șincai (1754-1816), and Petru Maior (1760-1821). They were members of the so-called "Transylvanian School," who in masterly histories and pioneering grammars defined the uniqueness of the Romanian ethnic community and thereby justified their demands for the inclusion of the Romanians in the ruling estates of Transylvania. They were encyclopedic in their interests, didactic in their vocation, and, in a sense, national in their application of reason and learning. They came from the ranks of the Romanian gentry, and they were Greek Catholic priests.

Their commitment to the idea of nation gave all their activities a distinctive color. Samuil Micu⁴ was the first to set down at length the so-called theory of Dace-Roman continuity, which formed the core of the modern idea of Romanian nationhood. In such works as *Scurtă cunoștință a istoriei Românilor*, composed in 1796, and his four-volume masterpiece, *Istoria și lucrurile și întâmplările Românilor*, composed between 1800 and 1806, he argued that the Romanians of the eighteenth century were the direct descendants of the Roman colonists who had settled in Dace in the second century. He also insisted that the Romanised population had inhabited this territory uninterrupted until the arrival of the Magyars in the tenth century⁵. His colleagues, Gheorghe Șincai⁶ in *Cronica Românilor* (1808) and Petru Maior⁷ in *Istoria pentru începutul Românilor în Dacia*

² Characterizations of the intellectuals are to be found in Zoltán I. Tóth, *Az erdélyi román nacionalizmus első százada, 1697-1792*, Budapest, 1946, p. 298-304, 347-375, and Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered: Romanian Intellectuals in Transylvania and the Idea of Nation, 1700-1848*, Bucharest, 1999, p. 97-143.

³ Among general works on Romanian intellectuals and their involvement in the Enlightenment, one may consult: Dumitru Popovici, *La littérature roumaine à l'époque des lumières*, Sibiu, 1945, which places the Romanian Enlightenment in Transylvania in a general Romanian context; Dumitru Ghișe and Pompiliu Teodor, *Fragmentarium iluminist*, Cluj, 1972, which offers perceptive essays on the leading figures of the Romanian elite of Transylvania; David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum. Din istoria formării națiunii române*, revised edition, București, 1984, which places the ideas and work of the elite against a broad social and economic background, and Keith Hitchins, *A Nation Discovered*. The following should also be consulted: Lucian Blaga, *Gândirea românească în Transilvania în secolul al XVIII-lea*, București, 1966, p. 62-108; Alexandru Duțu, *Coordonate ale culturii românești în secolul XVIII*, București, 1968, p. 293-327, and Ion Lungu, *Școala ardeleană*, București, 1978.

⁴ The fundamental work is Pompiliu Teodor, *Sub semnul luminilor: Samuil Micu*, Cluj-Napoca, 2000. See also: Dumitru Ghișe and Pompiliu Teodor, *Samuil Micu și filosofia wolffiană*, in Dumitru Ghișe and Pompiliu Teodor, *Fragmentarium iluminist*, p. 20-100, and Zoltán I. Tóth, *Klein Sámuel és az erdélyi román felvilágosodás*, Kolozsvár, 1947.

⁵ Samuil Micu, *Scurtă cunoștință a istorii Românilor*, Cornel Câmpeanu ed., București, 1963, p. 42-44, 58-61.

⁶ Dumitru Ghișe and Pompiliu Teodor, *Gheorghe Șincai și idealul luminării*, in Dumitru Ghișe and Pompiliu Teodor, *Fragmentarium iluminist*, p. 101-178; David Prodan, *Gheorghe Șincai*, in *Rumanian Studies*, Vol. I, 1970, Leiden, 1970, p. 35-44. The only full-length biography is by Mircea Tomuș, *Gheorghe Șincai. Viața și opera*, București, 1965. It may be supplemented by the introduction by Manole Neagoe to Gheorghe Șincai, *Hronica Românilor*, Florea Fugariu, ed., Vol. I, București, 1967, p. V-CVII.

⁷ The fullest account of his life and career remains Maria Protase, *Petru Maior: un ctitor de conștiințe*, București, 1973. A more recent evaluation of Maior's career is the introduction by Ioan Chindriș to his edition of Petru Maior, *Istoria bisericii Românilor*, Vol. I, București, 1995, p. 5-75.

(1812), the most influential historical work of his own and the following generation, added their own refinements to the theory.

All three found in language indispensable evidence to support their theory of Romanian nationhood. They were motivated to investigate the origins and nature of the Romanian language in part by the desire to refine it and thereby render it capable of expressing new ideas and of introducing new generations to advances in learning. But mainly they sought evidence to reinforce their historical arguments about the noble ancestry and the ethnic distinctiveness of the Romanians. Most of what they wrote was intended to demonstrate the Latinity of the Romanian language and, by extension, to prove the Roman origins of the Romanian people. These works ranged from Micu's and Șincai's *Elementa linguae Daco-Romanae sive Valachicae* (Vienna, 1780), in which they replaced the traditional Cyrillic alphabet with the Latin and introduced an orthography that was etymological rather than phonetic, to Petru Maior's preface to the so-called *Lexicon de Buda* (Buda, 1825), in which he argued that Romanian was derived from Vulgar Latin and appealed to all patriots to join together in restoring their language to its original form by replacing Turkish, Slavic, and other „foreign” words by words of Latin origin⁸.

The primacy of the ethnic nation in the thought of the elite about community was strikingly evident in their brief foray into politics between 1790 and 1792. They had been moved to action in order to gain a hearing for the Romanians (and themselves) during the constitutional upheaval in Transylvania following the death of the Emperor Joseph II in 1790. In the imposing *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* Micu, Șincai, Maior, and many of their colleagues drew up a compelling statement of ethnic distinctiveness and a forthright demand that the Romanians be received among the privileged nations. The first part consisted of a lengthy exposition of the theory of Dace-Roman continuity, which provided the historical and legal justification for the restoration of the Romanians' ancient rights in Transylvania⁹. Of particular interest here are the demands that Romanian nobles, peasants, and clergy, both Orthodox and Greek Catholic, enjoy the same rights and privileges as the nobles, peasants, and clergy, respectively, of the other nations; that the Romanians be accorded proportional representation in county, district, and communal government and in the diet; and that the Romanians be permitted to hold a national congress of nobles and clergy under the chairmanship of the Greek Catholic and Orthodox bishops, where ways of satisfying the demands of the Romanian nation could be determined¹⁰. All the hopes of the elite for official recognition of their nation were dashed when the Imperial Court in Vienna rejected the *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*. The Court's decision and the reaction that followed the accession of the conservative Francis II to the Habsburg throne in 1792 discouraged significant Romanian political activity for nearly decades.

II

The Romanian elite's preoccupation with national identity and its striving for political rights intersected with the enlightened absolutism of Joseph II. It was a decisive encounter. Joseph's projects of reform had an exhilarating effect on Romanian intellectuals. By reorganizing and centralizing his vast realm, he shook the established order in Transylvania to its foundations and convinced the Romanian elite that there was room for the Romanians in structures that up to then had systematically excluded them. Joseph's reforms touched every facet of Romanian social and economic life and won for him the Romanian elite's enduring admiration¹¹. In a sense, he made them a part of the general movement for reform by relaxing the censorship and encouraging a wider discussion of his decrees, all with the end in mind of curtailing the powers of entrenched, conservative opponents of change led by the privileged nations of Transylvania.

Joseph's reforms affected the civil and economic status and the daily religious and educational life of the Romanians in myriad ways. His decree of *Concivilität* of 1781 set the tone of all his reforms in Transylvania. It mandated equal rights of citizenship for all the inhabitants of the *Fundus regius*

⁸ Petru Maior, *Dialogu pentru inceputul limbii române între nepot și unchiu*, in *Lexicon Valachico-Latino-Hungarico-Germanicum*, Buda, 1825, p. 64-68, 72-73.

⁹ I have used the text published in David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*, p. 455-465.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 465-467.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 227-244.

(the area mainly in southern Transylvania where the Saxons enjoyed autonomy) regardless of ethnicity, and thus it allowed the Romanians to acquire landed property and enter the guilds and thereby take part in political life. Joseph displayed his concern for the peasants and antipathy toward the noble estates by issuing two decrees emancipating the serfs. In 1783 he forbade landlords to take from peasants land that they worked and in 1785 he granted the serfs personal freedom. His Edict of Toleration of 1781 granted non-Catholic freedom of worship in their own homes and the right to build churches and open schools in communities where they numbered at least one hundred families. Its effects were felt especially among the Orthodox. Joseph gave great impetus to Romanian education by ordering the establishment of an elementary school system for Greek Catholics in 1781 and for the Orthodox in 1786¹².

All Joseph's measures won enthusiastic praise from Romanian intellectuals. Samuil Micu and Gheorghe Șincai applauded his abolition of serfdom and other measures on behalf of the „unfortunate commonality”¹³, and Petru Maior joined his colleagues in expressing gratitude for Joseph's work on behalf of education¹⁴. Yet, there was a fundamental contradiction in their appraisal of what they took to be Joseph's contributions to the revival of the Romanians. Joseph's initiatives indeed seemed in harmony with their own aspirations, but his ultimate goal was to consolidate the heterogeneous lands he ruled into a centralized monarchy, and to do so he relied on the bureaucracy and the army and expanded the use of German. He had no intention of promoting ethnic self-determination among his non-German subjects. If he granted civil rights to Romanians, if he eased the burdens of Romanian peasants and moderated the discrimination against the Orthodox, and if he promoted the education of Romanians, he did so in order to make them more useful subjects and more valuable contributors to imperial greatness.

The Romanian elite, by contrast, sought rights for the separate nationalities, for the Romanians in the first instance, a goal that Joseph could hardly sanction, since to do so, in his view, would be to create a state within a state. Nonetheless, Joseph's reforms showed the elite how tightly the ideals of the Enlightenment were interwoven with their own advocacy of nation. They perceived in his brand of absolutism striking evidence of how reason and knowledge could be harnessed to accelerate change and thus ensure the progress of their nation. It was primarily this blending of Enlightenment theory and practice emanating from Central Europe, on the one hand, and the aspirations of the Romanian elite to nationhood grounded in Transylvanian realities and the Romanian tradition, on the other hand, that gave form and substance to the Romanian Enlightenment.

III

The Romanian elite shares many of the certainties and aims characteristics of the Enlightenment as a whole. First of all, they were fully committed to reason and knowledge as the levers of man's progress in general and of the Romanians' rise out of economic and cultural backwardness in particular. Like the *philosophers*, they also assumed a critical attitude toward existing institutions and beliefs, especially those that blocked the progress of the Romanians. They did so from the general perspective of philosophy, which they revered as both the foundation of knowledge and as a practical means of investigating the nature of man and his role as a social being. Samuil Micu, for example, saw in philosophy the theoretical framework within which he could elaborate his ideas about the origins and identity of the Romanians, while Gheorghe Șincai used the “truths of philosophy” to combat superstition among the common people. For these reasons both were enthusiastic translators of foreign works of philosophy. These translations may even claim certain originality, since many pages are, in affect, reworking adapted to the special circumstances of the Romanians. They thus offer precious insights into the nature of the Romanian Enlightenment.

¹² David Prodan, *Problema iobăgiei în Transilvania, 1700-1848*, București, 1989, p. 154-155, 171-180; Lucia Protopopescu, *Contribuții la istoria învățământului din Transilvania, 1774-1805*, București, 1966, p. 25-199; Angelika Schaser, *Josephinische Reformen und sozialer Wandel in Siebenbürgen*, Stuttgart, 1989, p. 59-82; Pompiliu Teodor, *Tolerance and the Transylvanian Romanians: From Maria Theresa to Joseph II*, in *Church and Society in Central and Eastern Europe*, Maria Crăciun and Ovidiu Ghitta eds., Cluj-Napoca, 1998, p. 184-206.

¹³ Samuil Micu, *Scurtă cunoștință*, p. 44; Gheorghe Șincai, *Hronica Românilor*, Vol. 2, București, 1969, p. 184, Vol. 3, București, 1969, p. 287.

¹⁴ Ion Lungu, *Școala ardeleană*, p. 285.

The interpretation that the Romanian elite made of the general principles of the Enlightenment reveals again and again their absorption with the problems of nation building. Faith in the power of ideas to change the fortunes of men combined with their devotion to their own ethnic community impelled them to undertake a sustained campaign to eradicate ignorance and superstition among the mass of the rural population. As sworn enemies of all that was irrational in an age of lights and progress, they could have little sympathy for the culture of the folk, with its magic spells and its stories and songs, all of which, they thought, clouded the peasants' thinking and doomed them to a perpetual state of backwardness.

The reaction of the elite to this side of popular culture is exemplified by Gheorghe Șincai's translations from German of introductory manuals of philosophy and science. He was eager to disseminate scientific knowledge, especially physics, in an accessible form among the common people. Even though he was well aware that peasants could read, he expected the priest, the schoolteacher, and other literate persons in the village to serve as interpreters. In any case, he was certain that if the peasants gained a proper understanding of physical phenomena, that is, if they could be made to see that the world around them operated in accordance with well-defined, natural laws, then, raised out of ignorance and superstition, they would surely perfect their agricultural practices and thus improve their standard of living and expand their cultural horizons. This was the credo he presented in *Învățătura firească spre surparea superstiției norodului*, a translation and adaptation made between 1804 and 1808 of *Volks-Naturlehre* by I. H. Helmuth. Through it Șincai was able to explain the true causes of natural phenomena and to deny the existence of miracles and the supernatural, all in an effort to further rational thinking and good since in the villages¹⁵. He wrote in a language that could be understood by broad public, and he replaced Helmuth's examples with stories and proverbs drawn from Romanian customs and folk wisdom in Transylvania. He was by no means alone in this endeavor. Samuil Micu raised similar objections to those popular customs and beliefs that discouraged clear thinking and thus, he thought, impeded material and spiritual progress. Like Șincai, he praised science and in his *Învățătura metafizicii*, translated and adapted between 1787 and 1790 and based on a manual of philosophy by Friedrich Christian Baumeister, a disciple of Christian Wolff, he showed how the causes of phenomena, or the "connection of things", as he put it, followed fixed laws operating in nature¹⁶. For his part, Petru Maior, who spent many years as a parish priest, used the pulpit to convey the same message, denouncing soothsayers and exorcists as bearers of false ideas and as threats to physical health and good order in the villages¹⁷.

Although Micu, Șincai, and Maior were conscious of themselves as enlighteners and thus thought it their duty to combat popular culture, they were, as we have seen, also intent on discovering and affirming a national identity. Consequently, they found themselves obliged to seek evidence of their Roman-Latin heritage in the very culture they disdained. Samuil Micu was at pains to prove that many of the customs and beliefs he observed among the peasants, or, as he called them, the "Romanians of Dacia", corresponded to those which the „ancient Romans of Italy had had”, such as elements of the marriage and funeral services, various charms and magic spells, and observances at Christmas and New Year¹⁸. He also noted that the common people were the true preservers of old Roman customs, while Romanians of higher social rank tended to imitate the habits of other peoples. Șincai, too pointed out the connection between "Roman beliefs" and the customs preserved in Romanian villages. Yet, although he Micu thus displayed a keen interest in folklore, they gave no thought to promoting or collecting folktales and songs, which they continued to decry as propagators of false ideas and wrong thinking.

As enlighteners the elite showed a certain ambivalence toward the common people, the peasants. On the one hand, they genuinely sympathized with the hard life of the peasants, which they knew from their own long association with village life, and they were deeply involved in social activities designed to improve the lot of the rural population. Their pastoral ministrations, sermons,

¹⁵ Gheorghe Șincai, *Învățătura firească spre surparea superstiției norodului*, Dumitru Ghișe and Pompiliu Teodor eds., București, 1964, p. 73-89, 153-154.

¹⁶ Samuil Micu, *Învățătura metafizicii*, in S. Micu, *Scrieri filozofice*, Pompiliu Teodor and Dumitru Ghișe eds., București, 1966, p. 128-136.

¹⁷ Ovidiu Papadima, *Ipostaze ale iluminismului românesc*, București, 1975, p. 89-90.

¹⁸ Samuil Micu, *Scurtă cunoștință*, p. 84-88; Ion Mușlea, *Samuil Micu-Clain și folclorul*, in *Revista de folclor*, Vol. 1, No. 1-2, 1956, p. 249-257.

schoolbooks, and advocacy of learning all suggest their seriousness of purpose. They also felt a strong sense of community with the common people, using the term „nation” in an ethnic sense and encompassing all Romanians regardless of social class or religion. Yet, despite their compassion, they remained conscious of the immense gulf that separated the educated, themselves, from the peasants. They could not imagine simple villagers as the managers of their own destiny, let alone as part of the political nation. Instead, they prescribed a long period of tutelage, during which ignorance would gradually be eradicated and the common people would be made fit to take part in public life.

The elite had yet another reason for keeping its distance from the „commonality”. In their campaign to gain rights for the Romanian nation they emphasized its special qualities and nobility (insistence on Roman ancestry was meant to impress the Imperial Court in Vienna and Magyar nobles and Saxon burghers in Transylvania), and they presented themselves as its worthiest representatives. But peasant ignorance and irrationality undermined the ideal image they were so eager to cultivate, and they avoided identification with them. In effect, in the rigidly class-structured society of eighteenth-century Transylvania the rights that the Romanian elite sought were equality with the Magyar nobility and Saxon urban aristocracy for themselves and equality with Magyar and Saxon peasants for Romanian peasants. The notion of equality of classes did not occur to them, for they were not, after all, revolutionaries.

The massive peasant uprising in southern Transylvania led by Horea in the fall of 1784 provoked a crisis of conscience among Romanian intellectuals, which revealed all their ambivalent feelings toward the common people. On the one hand, they recognized the justice of peasant grievances, but, on the other, they condemned the destruction of lives and property as the height of irrationality. Samuil Micu’s reaction was typical. He praised Joseph II for having abolished serfdom, which he likened to „a form of pagan slavery”¹⁹ but in the next breath he called Horea and his cohorts „accursed men” and denounced their killing of landlords and burning of manor houses²⁰. Such an attitude was fully in keeping with the spirit of the times and sheds light on the aspirations of Romanian intellectuals. They had committed themselves wholly to reason and positive knowledge, which, they were certain, would regulate the society of the future, and they had assigned to themselves leadership of the struggle to create the new, enlightened era. But the „simple folk”, the „ignorant masses”, had ignored them and had taken matters into their own hands. The peasants had, then, sinned because they had failed to grasp the truth that they could not achieve their goal by themselves through „blind violence”, but would have to wait for the enlightened to secure it for them through just laws and benevolent institutions.

Religion and the place of the Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches in education and social life as a whole presented Romanian intellectual with another serious dilemma. As they pursued their campaign against superstition and the irrational in the countryside they displayed mixed feelings toward the Church. Highly critical of existing institutions in general, they had, nevertheless, spared the Church the searing attacks, which their counterparts in the West had directed against it. In the first place, Romanian intellectuals perceived no irreconcilable antagonism between themselves and the Church. Unlike their contemporaries in the West, they did not treat it as a bastion of obscurantism and an obstacle to progress. Instead, they recognized the vital role, which the Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches had played as defenders of the Romanian ethnic community. At the village level they assigned to the churches not only ordinary educational tasks but also primary responsibility for the moral upbringing of the peasantry. They entertained no illusions that their own brand of rationalism could serve as a substitute for the church’s simplified teachings about right and wrong and sin and redemption.

Despite their recognition of the church’s social role, Romanian intellectuals could not accept the dogmatism and creative restraints imposed by their hierarchies. Micu, Șincai, and Maior were, after all, engaged in freeing the mind from irrational ways of thinking and counted on reason and observation to solve society’s problems and ensure its progress. Although they were priests and never ceased to think of themselves as Christians, they could not reconcile the science and reason they had absorbed with all of the Church’s teachings and practices. Șincai and Maior revealed their state of

¹⁹ Samuil Micu, *Istoria Românilor*, Ioan Chindriș ed., Vol. 1, București, 1995, p. 123. This is the first published edition of Micu’s *Istoria și lucrurile și întâmplările Românilor*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 124.

mind by abandoning holy orders (they had been monks of the Order of Saint Basil), and Micu his by trying, unsuccessfully, to do the same. Şincai put their views succinctly in *Învăţătura firească*. In describing the movement of heavenly bodies and other objects in accordance with natural laws, he explained how God, as the prime mover, had designed these laws and set them in motion, but how, afterwards. He had refrained from interfering in their operation²¹. Yet, although Şincai and his colleagues professed deist thoughts, they never ventured beyond them to question the existence of the God Himself. Nor do they seem to have adopted the tenets of „natural religion”, that is, a system of beliefs that rejected everything that could not be rationally demonstrated. Instead, they made a clear distinction between the otherworldly pursuits of the Church and the immediate, practical goals of human beings. Most important among these goals for them was the affirmation of the ethnic nation, and they viewed reception of new ideas, the spread of useful knowledge, and the application of reason to social problems as indispensable for its progress. From their standpoint, then, the Church as an institution could no longer provide the leadership, and religion could no longer serve as the ideology of progress in a modern, enlightened world. All their writings make clear that the idea of nation had outgrown the bounds of religious dogma and theocratic privilege, which had predominated in the first half of the eighteenth century.

IV

If we are to assess accurately the response of Romanian intellectuals in Transylvania to the European Enlightenment and to define the nature of the resulting Romanian Enlightenment, we must recognize the dual objectives of the intellectuals: enlightenment and national emancipation. The currents of the Central European Enlightenment indeed brought them into a continuous intellectual communion with Europe. The generation of the Transylvanian School was, at least in part, a product of those very currents. But Europe alone was not the creator of the Romanian Enlightenment. Romanian intellectuals themselves made the crucial contribution. They added the rich heritage of Romanian (and Transylvanian) spirituality and culture, and they zealously shaped the tenets of the European Enlightenment to fit their own circumstances and goals. They were, as we have seen, eager to move closer to Europe and to prove their worthiness as Europeans, indeed Europeans descended from the Romans. Yet, at the same time their perspective was also national, and through their investigations of Romanian identity and their elaboration of a theory of ethnic origins they laid the foundations of the modern Romanian ideology of nationhood. In a sense, then, they combined, on the one hand, European cosmopolitanism and, on the other, burgeoning national sentiment, or, put another way, they used the reason and knowledge prized by the Enlightenment to further national emancipation.

Romanian intellectuals themselves were deeply affected by the European Enlightenment. It brought two fundamental changes to the way they thought and acted. First of all, enlightened ideas imposed a certain style on their work of nation building, which emphasized reliance on solid institutional foundations and rational, constitutional change. And second, the Enlightenment imbued the thought of Romanian intellectuals with a distinctly modern and Western spirit. Along with Romanticism and Liberalism later it drew them out of an essentially patriarchal and rural society and hastened their integration into a dynamic and urban Europe.

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²¹ Gheorghe Şincai, *Învăţătura firească*, p. 76-77, 81.