

THE CARPATHIANS AS ARCHETYPAL MENTAL SPACE OF THE ROMANIAN PEOPLE

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ABSTRACT – For geographical regionalisation, the mental criterion we proposed in 2002 proves to be really helpful in establishing the limits of functional territorial systems. Secondly, it stores their structure and evolutionary features, especially the social (cultural) and behavioural ones. The Carpathians appear as the *Romanian primordial archetypal mental space* and this is also an unquestionable proof of the formation, evolution, and continuity of the Romanian people in the Carpathians and in the territories neighbouring this mountain chain.

Key words: Carpathians, mental space, archetype, tradition, mythology.

Many opinions exist on the role of the Carpathians in the ethnogenesis and in the evolution of the Romanian people. First of all, these belong to geographers, but also to historians, sociologists, ethnologists, and even to philosophers. Each group of specialists tried to emphasize the role of the Carpathians starting from their specific concepts and methodology.

Starting from the Romanians' presence on both sides of the Carpathians, the geographers' researches focused on explaining a rather paradoxical situation: why the Carpathians, unlike other European mountain chains, were not a barrier to separate the people situated on the two mountainous slopes, but a strong ethnic binder of the Romanian people. The ridge of the Pyrenees separates Spain from France, the Alps separate the Italians from the Swiss or the French, the Scandinavian Mountains are a clear limit between the Norwegians and the Swedes, the Himalayas separate the Indians from the Chinese and the Andes separate the Chileans from the Argentineans, etc. The contributions of several great Romanian geographers (Simion Mehedinți, Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ion Conea, Tiberiu Morariu, Grigore Posea, Lucian Badea, etc.) are significant. Their natural shelter function, their high accessibility, their varied soil and underground resources were considered essential for the humanisation of the Carpathians and the conservation of their specificity (since prehistory, permanent communities appeared and developed irrespective of the hardships characteristic of that time).

We believe that the arguments our predecessors have brought are consistent and more than sufficient and revealing in order to prove a factual reality: the territories inside (the Transylvanian Depression) and outside the Carpathians are Romanian territories.

In this article we want to open another casuistic field, little explored by now, but with a very nuanced and new argumentation potential: the way in which the Carpathians have become an *archetypal mental space of the Romanian people*.

THE ARCHETYPAL MENTAL SPACE GENESIS

Like any other phenomenon, the mental spaces coalesced only under certain conditions favourable to their genesis and appearance. The Carpathians, more than any other European mountainous group (we take into account the long mountain chains such as the Alps, the Pyrenees, the Balkans and not massifs where, on a small surface, similar conditions may appear, e.g. in the French Central Massif) were a favourable physical support for intense humanisation: large internal and external depressions, large valleys, plenty of passes that are easy to access, large platforms, and varied and rich soil and underground resources, etc.

In such a natural environment, the Dacians were the first in Ancient Europe to capitalise the polyvalent attributes of the Carpathians. The Dacians built, under the leadership of Burebista, a powerful centralised state bordering on the Bug and the Forested Carpathians. According to many ancient sources, the Dacians, the ancestors of the Romanians, were very attached to the Carpathians. *Florus* wrote that "*the Dacians never left the mountains*" (daci montibus inhaerent), *Pliniu cel Bătrân* underlined that "*the Dacians inhabited the mountains and the woods*" (montes uero et saltus ...Daci). In the 4th century *Iordanes* wrote that the land of the Dacians lay on a large mountainous territory. "*situated on the other part of the Danube,*

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Dacia is surrounded by a mountain chain” (Dacia sita trans Danubium corona montium cingitur) (Istoria Românilor, II, 2001).

As a matter of fact, the localisation of Sarmizegetusa Regia, the Dacian state capital, in the Orăștie Mountains, as well as the localization of numerous fortresses (Colțești, Blidaru, Piatra Roșie, Cugir, Deva, Petrodava, Piatra Craivei, Vinogradov, etc.) in the massifs of the other Carpathian groups supported this idea. For instance, the Romans built Sarmizegetusa Ulpia Traiana, the polarising provincial centre of Dacia north of the Danube, in an intra-Carpathian depression of Hațeg.

According to many researchers, historians and geographers, in certain historic periods, the shelter function of the mountainous landforms had an important role, even a decisive one, in the conservation and the perpetuation of the native population. This is particularly true during the troubled, Brownian period, of the peoples’ migration between the 4th - 9th centuries when, on the contemporary territory of Romania, there came: the Goths, the Gepidae, the Huns, the Slavic, the Bulgarians, and the Avars. The Carpathian ring surrounding the Transylvanian hilly territory – an authentic natural fortress – became a real fortress with buttresses in all the four cardinal points. *It is in this shelter that the Dacian-Roman ethnic metamorphosis upon which the Romanian ethnogenesis relied took place.* Capitalising the economic and the strategic opportunities offered by the morphological contact between the mountain and the tablelands, between the mountain and the depressions or the valley corridors, the ethnographical mental spaces of the “lands” (the “lands” of Năsăud, of Lăpuș, of Chioar, of Hațeg, of Amlaș, of Făgăraș, and of Bârsa) appeared. Duplicate entities appeared on their outer space as similar mental spaces which were also known as “lands”: the “lands” of Oaș, of Sylvania, of Beiuș, of Zarand, of Severin, and of Vrancea. This phenomenon was also illustrated by the intra-mountainous mental spaces of the following “lands”: the “lands” of Maramureș, of the Moți, of Almăj, of Lovișteea, and of the Dorne (P. Cocean, 2002).

All these ethnographic mental constructions, whose structure and intimate articulation were constructed along centuries in the Timok Valley and in the Slovak Carpathians, share the fundamental features of the Carpathian archetypal space. The quantitatively significant presence of the Vlachs, the Aromanians in the southern extremity of this space and of the Volohi in its north-western area is a pertinent and unquestionable proof of this archetypal space. The centre, the reference system is in the Transylvanian Alps that is in the most massive and highest branch of the Romanian Carpathians.

“The moving of flocks” and *“the colonisations”* are a proof that this mental space has been consolidated during a very long period, at first within the Carpathian chain which is the limit the Transylvanian Depression. Those pendulous or definitive migrations of the people of Maramureș, or from the Southern Group of the Eastern Carpathians, Mărginimea Sibiului and the Land of the Moți, synonymous to the swarming out of the Carpathians, had political, economic, and social causes. It is a sure fact that these migrations would have been impossible if no important population reservoir existed. *“The moving of flocks”* and *“the colonisations”*, which started when the peoples’ migration ended, as well as their permanent threat, had the role of radial dispersion of the ideal vectors of the Carpathian archetypal mental space features down to the lower hilly and field areas. Let us not forget the sense of univocal migration: from the mountains (the ethnic and phylogenetic reference space) down to the lower, outer areas. The movement was from a nucleus positioned in the centre to the peripheries limited by the Bug, the Tisa, the Morava, and the Timok. Coming from a unique source, the vectors had an identical message. Only thus are we able to explain the homogeneity of the Romanian language, as well as the homogeneity of our traditions, customs, and popular mythology.

The original mental space extension to the hilly and field regions is also revealed by the migration of the capitals of Moldavia and of Romania (the eastern and the southern part of nowadays Romania, respectively). These capitals migrated from the mountain areas to lower ones (the Moldavian Tableland and the Romanian Field), i.e. from Baia to Suceava and to Iași, and from Curtea de Argeș to Târgoviște and, later on, to Bucharest, respectively. This phenomenon should be explained by the gradual political and military fortification of the medieval Romanian states and by the decreasing strategic dependency on the mountainous natural buttresses (this was the case of the „popular Romanians” and of the village communities).

THE CARPATHIAN ARCHETYPAL SPACE STRUCTURE

We know, from a series of previous studies (P. Cocean, N. Ciangă, 1997; P. Cocean, 2002, 2004, 2005) that the mental space, through an intimate man-place connection, becomes an indestructible entity, a territorial aggregate where man and nature mix down to the level of the most intimate relationships. This is a factor generating stability, cohesion, and maximum material and spiritual productivity for the respective territory. The above-mentioned “lands” are such mental spaces, included into the ethnographical type, all of them being supported by the rocky buttresses of the Carpathians. In their case, one may notice a rigorous conservation phenomenon of the essential, primordial strata (language, national consciousness, and religious faith) and also the rigorous conservation of the diversifying and multiplying hypostases of certain adjacent strata (traditions, customs, handicrafts, activities, and folklore).

The Carpathian matrix of the Romanian primordial mental space is constructed by several occupations/activities, traditions and customs, mythological aspects, and, on the whole, by a civilisation specific to such a mountainous territory (figure 1). It is obvious that all these come from a strong, profound, and exclusive feeling of owning the mountains.

Occupations are the first and the most eloquent man/community – space connection. They cannot miss from the process of earning one’s existence; otherwise, the permanent humanisation of the respective space would be impossible. Therefore, occupations will reflect, due to their diversity and amplitude both in space and practice, several highly nuanced features of the natural environment and of the creative, innovative potential of a dynamic factor: the anthropic one.

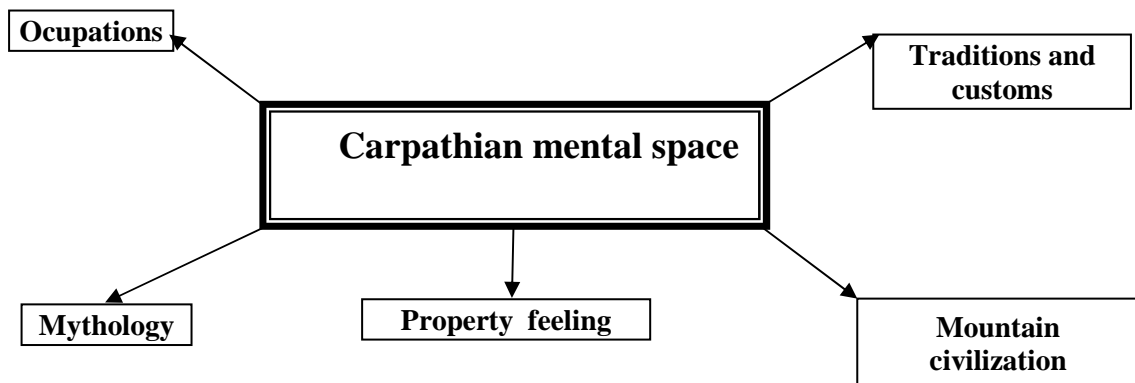


Figure 1. *Defining components of the Carpathian archetypal mental space*

The Romanian people are characterized by an extremely diversified set of occupations/activities: from agricultural to industrial occupations, from wood processing to handicrafts. This is a proof of the people’s perspicacity in capitalising the opportunities of its ethnogenetic space. This situation seems to have nothing unusual as similar examples are to be found in the case of other peoples, too. Still, the specificity of these activities consists of their quantity and of their spatial and temporal distribution. Their persistence and consistency (as an existential support) has led not only to continuous improvement, but also to their step-by-step transcendence, in multiple hypotheses, into spirituality. From this point up to framing of a mental space with specific features was only a matter of continuity, of essentialising (distilising), and improving the man-place relationships.

Therefore, we consider that the Romanians’ exemplary occupations (agriculture, mining, and wood processing) resulted from the people’s long and permanent interaction with the territory they inhabited. These are the three typically *Carpathian activities* that were supported by the abundant resources of the mountain chain which has the characteristic of a secure shelter.

Thus, agriculture has relied on *animal breeding*. Besides being a people of shepherds. This syntagm should not be accepted in its pejorative connotation as it is an unfair one. The same branch was dominant for

a couple of centuries in the agricultural production of Great Britain, Holland, Denmark, and Germany, as in the respective countries there were no favourable phenological conditions for extensive farming. The Romanians, forever attached to the Carpathians, capitalised the large and fertile mountainous and alpine grass lands for animal husbandry (e.g. sheep, goats, cattle, and horses). At the same time, they specialised in derived activities focusing on available raw materials (e.g. milk, leather, and wool). An illustrative sublimation of the above mentioned activity into the Romanian spirit is the “Miorița” ballad, the pearl of the Romanian oral creation having over 2,000 variants in Moldavia, in Wallachia and in Transylvania. Similarly, the Dacian and the Latin autochthonism of pastoral terminology all over the Romanian Carpathians (I. Conea, 1993) is an irrefutable argument for the millenary continuity of this activity in the Carpathians.

Mining has been practiced in the Carpathians since prehistory. Herodotus mentioned in one of his writings that the Agathyrsi exploited the gold in the Mureș Corridor. But those who transformed mining into an ordinary activity were the Dacians. Let us not forget that Dacia was the target of the Roman expansion especially because of its gold and silver mines and the bounty they took after conquering it filled the empty Roman treasure house. Mining was intense during the Roman administration and continued after its retreat (the numerous treasure hoards discovered in Romania and in other countries point to the existence of raw materials in Central and South-Eastern Europe, especially in the Carpathians) during the Middle Ages and up to the present day. As a matter of fact, the Dacian and Roman gold mining galleries in Roșia Montană are unique in the world due to the amplitude and ingenuity of their carving. This activity was inherited and also transmitted in time through generations. This is true for the Moți in the Apuseni Mountains and for other inhabitants in the other Carpathian groups of the Eastern and the Southern Carpathians (Morariu, T., Onișor, T., 1970, 1971).

Iron ore exploiting and processing is another century-old activity in the Carpathians. Iron was exploited in the north-western area of the Land of the Moți, from the Trascău Mountains, the Poiana Ruscă Mountains, and the Banat Mountains. In the last two regions, mining is still going on.

In the same category (mining), one should include the salt exploitation in the Carpathian area (e.g. the Transylvanian Depression: Ocna Mureș, Turda, and Ocna Sibiu; the Maramureș Depression: Ocna Șugatag and Coștiui), and in the Sub-Carpathian one (e.g. Ocnele Mari and Slănic Prahova).

Wood processing is a specific activity especially in the mountainous regions as a result of the following two causes: firstly, the abundance of wood and, secondly, its priority as one of the main existential sources in comparison to the hilly and field regions where its contribution to the economic profile of the settlements is significantly smaller. The same situation distinguishes the Carpathians and the Romanians in comparison to the other mountainous regions of other peoples is obvious. This is also because there appeared genuine *wood civilisations* in this mountain chain and in the ethno-genetic space of the Romanians. Examples of wood civilisations exist in Maramureș, Lăpuș, Sălaj, and the Apuseni Mountains (highly ingenious and diverse in their creativity). We refer to those architectural masterpieces which are the wooden churches (the highest wooden church in the world is in Săpânța), the wooden gates from Maramureș on the Mara, the Cosău, and the Iza, and the wooden household objects of the Moți in the upper basin of the Arieș. The fact that natives prefer to process resinous wood, which is more flexible and easier to carve, proves the indestructible connection of these civilisations to the mountainous Carpathian space where the conifers constitute a compact vegetation level at over 1,000-1,200 m.

Because of long practice and the consistency of the significance stored in time, *traditions* and *customs* have become real unwritten laws guiding the life of the individual and of the community. With the Romanians, they are very diversified as they are connected to life and work cycles as well as to people's social behaviour, etc. Among the most enduring, the most common and the most intensely practiced traditions and customs are those connected to the work cycle and the people's main activities, either agriculture or handicrafts.

The *Romanian pastoral festivals and fairs* are exclusively Carpathian and they take place on the mountain peaks and platforms every year. A well-known such festival is the „Girls' Fair” on the Găina Mountains. This event has united since times immemorial the inhabitants from the central area of the Apuseni Mountains, from the central basins of the Arieș, the Ampoi, the Crișul Negru, and the Crișul Alb. They are the obvious expression of the indestructible interaction between the mountain and its inhabitants. The alpine tablelands and the long mountain ranges and their peaks (I. Conea, 1993) function as the agora or the forum in the ancient towns where experience and opinions are shared and relations are built. The

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Romanian pastoral festivals and fairs ensured the homogeneity of language, traditions, and customs, as well as people's sharing the same belief on both mountain sides.

By means of the pastoral festivals and fairs, the mountain became more than a mere physical support or a secure shelter. It received the attributes of a spiritualised space, an altar (in case of the „Girls' fair” in the Găina Mountains). It embodied the spiritual connection of the young. Therefore, the personification of the mountain through toponyms which are unique in a geographical context, such as “Omul”(“Man”) or “La Om” (“To the Man”) are very frequent in the Carpathians.

It is a known fact that *mythology* emphasizes for all peoples the specific features of their physical environment. The tight conditioning relation between the physical space and its projection into the collective mental space is both logical and lawful. The Romanian people are no exception to this rule. The kernel of its mythology is the Carpathian landscape and the variety of its components (the morphological, the hydrographical, the climatic, and the biogeographical components). This was anticipated by the Dacian mythology that is especially Carpathian: the Kogaionon was their holy mountain; the cave where Zalmoxe retreated for divine initiation was one of the more than 12,000 underground places of the Carpathian chain etc.

The mountain fairies (valve), the ghosts, the wolfmen, the dwarfs of the mountains (solomâții) from the fantasy folk creations in the Apuseni Mountains are the products of a terrifying and mysterious environment: slopes, precipices, caves, and rocky ridges. Similarly, the girl of the woods, the mother of the woods, the dragons, or the bad women (“gheonoaiele”) inhabit the same territories.

Besides, we must mention the most important poetic creation of the Romanian mythology: the “Miorița” ballad. Its genesis is connected to the Carpathian space, as the plot happens in the mountains. This landscape is metaphorically defined by its morphological features: “gura de rai” (“a depression”), “piciorul de plai” (“the tableland”), “se cobor la vale” (“they come down to the valley”). More expressively and directly, in a variant of this ballad from the Land of Lăpuș, the tragic episode takes place during a ritual “în vârful muntelui/pe *plaiul* Țibleșului...” (“on the mountain top/ on the Țibleș table land ...”).

The symbolism of “Miorița” and the perfection of its poetical edifice is the result of a long and intensely lived life where man and space (the two fundamental components of any mental space) coexist up to reciprocal identification.

The mountain civilisation is the result of the resilience phenomenon characteristic of the social system which adapts to the natural sustenance basis. This civilisation consists of the varied and complex material and spiritual values that define the man-territory interrelation types taking into account their level, duration, complexity. In the lands of Oaș, Maramureș, and Dorne, as well as in the lands of the Moți, Pădureni, Mărgineni, Lovișteni or Vrânceni (the people of the Land of Hațeg, the Sibiu region, the Land of Lovișteea, and the Land of Vrancea we find the proofs of a permanent civilisation, more expressive than in any other European regions. This mountain civilisation is characterised by creativity, innovation, adaptation to its natural basis, and people are aware of its role and place in the Romanian people's evolution.

Folk architecture undoubtedly points to the influence of landscape on the mental component. We mention the elegant belfry of the wooden churches from Maramureș, Lăpuș, or the Apuseni Mountains, the high roofs with their specific architecture, the wooden and stone buildings. Occupations, traditions, customs (such as the Romanian pastoral festivals and fairs), folklore, myths, as well as other elements define the Romanian Carpathian civilisation.

The feeling of property is extremely important for the Romanian mental space, in general, (P. Cocean, 2004) and it may also be recognised, *in nuce*, in the Carpathian archetypal mental space structure. A proof is the folk lyrics such as “**our** mountains are rich in gold”, where the adjective points exactly to the real owner. The same attribute is transferred to another fundamental component of the mountain landscape: the woods. For instance, a highly important existential condition is obvious in the line: “the Romanian is the brother of the woods”.

CONCLUSIONS

The appearance of a superior civilization, the Roman civilization, cannot be understood without its very important Dacian basis which was highly adapted to local territorial realities. Thus, an original mental space appeared: the Romanian one. This mental space was the result of a perfect symbiosis between the inherited natural component and the derived spiritual one (in the process of selective sublimation of the Dacian civilisation into the Roman one). Its resilience was thus ensured by a complex adaptation process to

the natural component and by the permanently adequate answers to the impact of outside alien factors. It is beyond any doubt that this space relies on the Carpathian territory as its material structure because of the transcendence of the Carpathian territory, in varied forms, into the Romanian spirituality. This Carpathian territory is more profound, more diverse and more significant than we could discover it to be for other peoples and ethnic groups (the Hungarians, the Ukrainians, the German, and the Jews) whose historical destiny was less connected to the Carpathians.

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