

Learning Citizenship. Remarks about the Beginning of Studying Civics in 19th Century Romanian School

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In spite of the fact that educating its subjects/citizen in an appropriate way has been one of the early concerns of the modern state, in the 19th century Romanian schools civic education did not have a clear cut place as an education discipline. It became an independent discipline in the curricula only after World War I.

Civic values as part of religious education

During the 19th century civic values were taught mainly in the framework of other disciplines, such as geography, history, and reading/literature.¹ Yet, throughout most of the 19th century, the discipline which contributed most to the civic education of the pupils was catechism (religious education).² Besides specific themes, the religious education was expected to teach the pupils responsibility towards God, towards themselves and towards the Fatherland. The paramount and diversified importance assigned to religious education explains why the first textbook competition organized by the Wallachian School Administration in 1833 was that for writing an appropriate catechism to be used in the elementary schools.³ The competition was won by the catechism schoolbook written by the historian Aaron Florian⁴. His textbook has been a bestseller for more than half a century, having been published with only minimal changes in 28 editions till 1889.

Not only the textbook written by Aaron Florian, but also all other textbooks used in the Romanian schools during the first part of the 19th century provided a behaviour model based on Christian values: pupils were taught to fulfil their religious deeds and to integrate in the Orthodox community, "to behave merrily towards all other people, piously, forgiving, to provide the hungry, to dress the nude, to help the ill"⁵. Being a good Christian was thought to be a basic element of a good citizen. The schoolbooks insisted on the connection of religious, civic, and political affiliation. The pupils were taught to obey five sacred authorities: "towards God, towards the Fatherland and the mastery, towards those who have born them, towards the moral parents, i.e. the old priests and teachers"⁶. Thus, Christian morality included "patriotism" and subordination towards the "mastery". Aaron Florian's catechism is most explicit in this point: "The duties of the subjects toward the mastery are paramount: because after God, here on earth the mastery cares for the welfare and happiness of all people (...) the mastery makes and maintains the peace in the country (...). The mastery defends our life, our fortune and any thing from enemies and malefactors"⁷. In this paternalist system, the pupil was taught that it was his duty to "honour the mastery, to obey to it, to be faithful to

it second towards God, because from it come all improvements in a country"⁸; of course, this means from a practical point of view "to fulfil without objection all orders the mastery issues through its dignitaries"⁹. It meant also to show to the state dignitaries "deep respect and obedience"; and whenever "it would happen to meet such a dignitary, they [the pupils] should uncover their head from far away, and when coming nearer they should greet by bowing their head"¹⁰.

Although the political system changed dramatically during the mid-19th century – in 1866 there was enacted a liberal constitution, which insisted on the civic rights and freedoms – the schoolbooks continued for a long time to teach the same values as during the first part of the 19th century. Aaron Florian's textbook is symptomatic. The new editions published in the 1860s and 1870s included only minor changes, which did not alter its basic concept. Even in the late 1870s the schoolbook taught about "the duties of the subjects towards the mastery"; only in the 1880s "mastery" was replaced by "government" and "authorities", but this terminological change was not supported by a more substantial adjustment. The individual continued to be considered a subject, and not a citizen who pays taxes for a state which should accordingly serve him. On the contrary, in the framework of this paternalistic relationship, the pupils were taught that the subjects should be happy when paying the contributions towards the state and pray to God to keep the mastery "in peace and quietness in order to make the subjects happy"¹¹.

Contributions of other disciplines to the paternalistic model

The model provided by the catechism schoolbooks was strengthened by the messages delivered by other disciplines. For example, during reading lessons the pupils were taught that "the greatest crime is that made by those who plot against the Prince mastering the state, or who agrees with the enemies of the Fatherland against it. The same punishment is deserved by those who publicly defame, stand against the laws and the orders of the mastery, mock them, or dare even to tear and to dirty the writings including them, and which are displayed on the streets and on public buildings"¹². The main idea was that "each good citizen gladly obeys to the laws and pays the contributions demanded by the state because these are for the welfare of all"¹³.

This paternalistic model was strengthened by the devotion exercises towards the ruling prince. In fact, these adulation exercises even amplified after 1866, when the political elites agreed that the foreign prince Carol I was needed to

strengthen the modern Romanian state. Therefore, from the beginning of the new reign, the school administration insisted that the youth should be happy that the prince has saved the fatherland, and remember that in 1866 they had received prizes from "the first Romanian monarch, from the famous house of Hohenzollern"¹⁴.

Characteristic for the mood after 1866 is the case of I. P. Eliade, who published a pedagogical schoolbook for the future teachers. For such a selected audience, Eliade insisted that the pupils should be taught "to obey the laws", because "the laws are identical with the Fatherland; they are made by the country by means of those who represent it. The respect for the laws and magistrates should be planted deep and early in the hearts of the youth, so that it should become their second nature"; yet, despite acknowledging the new constitutional state order of Romania after 1866, I. P. Eliade insisted on the same page that teachers should not separate "the august name of the Prince from the sacred image of the Fatherland. The Prince is the representant of the Fatherland, or better said he is the personified Fatherland"¹⁵. Assaulted by such instructions, and used to singing twice each week hymns for the prince and his wife¹⁶, it is obvious that the future teachers did not perceive clearly that there had occurred a major change in the political system of the country, and that being a citizen of a constitutional monarchy, where civic rights were enforced by the constitution, was different from being the subject of an autocratic ruler. If the teachers were unclear about such an issue, one might wonder whether the elementary school pupils – most of them living in traditional villages and having illiterate parents – perceived such a difference.

Civic education and the paternalistic political system

It is obvious that this setting of the civic education provided in elementary schools was connected with the paternalistic political system prevailing in the Romanian Principalities before 1859, and in the modern Romanian state, even after the enforcement of the liberal constitution from 1866. While the censitary vote system assigned a subordinate role for most of the population, the elementary school was designed to teach the peasant children that their main virtue was to obey the state and the ruling class. One could learn about rights and constitutional freedoms in the secondary school, but (or because?) most of the peasant children had almost no chance to reach this education stage.

Towards the end of the century the readers began to include passages from the Constitution, and to mention the civic rights together with the duties of each citizen. In fact, for the new generation of teachers and schoolbook authors, the constitutional system was the normal political system, and not just an unsure innovation. Moreover, events like the 1907 peasant rebellion and World War I made it clear that the social and political system had to be changed in

favour of the peasants. Yet, such ideas found a difficult way into the conservative setting of Romanian elementary education. One had to wait until the interwar period for the introduction of civics as a special discipline in the curriculum, and even this did not guarantee a change in the real teaching of civic values.

Therefore, our inquiry which has begun with the study of 19th century civic education will have to be extended to the first half of the 20th century, in order to investigate the tension between the new political framework and the already established tradition of a paternalistic civic education, which nurtured the authoritarian expectations of a large part of the Romanian interwar society.

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¹ See my analysis: Mirela-Luminita Murgescu: Între "bunul crestin si bravul român". Rolul scolii primare în construirea identitatii nationale românești (1831–1878), Iași 1999.

² Mirela-Luminita Murgescu: Behaviour Models and Collective Identities in the Orthodox Catechism textbooks used in the Romanian Elementary Schools (19th Century), in: Maria Craciun, Ovidiu Ghitta (eds.): Church and Society in Central and Eastern Europe, Cluj-Napoca 1998, p. 254–265.

³ V. A. Urechia: Istoria scolilor de la 1800-1864, vol. I, Bucuresti 1892, p.250.

⁴ Aaron Florian: Catihismul omului crestin, moral si sotial, Bucuresti 1834, 102p.

⁵ Catihis sau invatatura pe scurt a credintei ortodoxe pentru invatatura tinerimii de clasa a II-a rurala si clasa a IV-a rurala, hrsg. von T. Codrescu und D. Gusti, Iași 1859, p. 134.

⁶ Dimitrie Jianu: Mentor sau abecedar, Sibiu 1836, p. 49.

⁷ Aaron Florian: Catehism, p. 88.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 89.

⁹ Catehism elementar al religiei crestine dupa marturisirea dreptcredincioasei Biserici a Rasaritului, Bucuresti 1846, p. 59.

¹⁰ Alexandru Petrovici: Regule scolastice si morale cu câteva rugaciuni de scoala pentru trebuinta scolilor nationale din Printipatul României, Craiova 1850, p. 23.

¹¹ Aaron Florian, Catehism 1834, p. 91. Identical text in all following editions.

¹² Fr. Philip Wilmsen: Prietenul tinerimii. (Romanian Edition by G. Melidon), Iași 1856m p. 283.

¹³ Carte de citire. Partea a III-a pentru clasa a IV-a, Bucuresti 1876, p. 4.

¹⁴ "Buletinul Instructiunii Publice", July 1866, p. 580.

¹⁵ I. P. Eliade: Elemente de pedagogie si metodologie teoretica si practica, Bucuresti 1869, p. 352.

¹⁶ "Anuarul Scolii Normale Carol I", Bucuresti 1870.