



The International Magazine *Carmina Balcanica* and the Intercultural Dialogue

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Introduction. Western and/vs. Eastern culture

The Southeastern European space has been analyzed through the “anthropogeographical constants” as well as through the prism of a common historic destiny, destiny which lead to political, religious or cultural similarities for the countries in this region. This “natural citadel of a large geographical entity,” as defined by Victor Papacostea, and of a large historical entity, shall we add, has determined multiple cultural interferences.

Balkans, Balkanity, Balkanism! The last word has acquired—over time—a rather pejorative connotation. And the stereotypical thinking of a haughty/proud/arrogant Western world continues to associate it with a certain stigma. Spirituality, arts, teachings and all other forms of higher expression found here should justify rather a complimentary way in which the world of the Levant is regarded and understood. There are actually already solid arguments for this. All European civilizations have originated from the Balkanic space. The idea of Democracy was born at the foothills of Athens. The concept of a Constitution appeared for the first time in Greece. The Christianity has spread throughout Europe due to the apostolic work started in Greece as well. In an interview, the Romanian Academy member Răzvan Theodorescu noted that, although the First World War was started in Sarajevo, one should not forget that Sarajevo is the place considered at one point the *New Jerusalem*, where three civilizations, Judaic, Christian, and Muslim, were coexisting. And more examples could be added. It is forgotten that what is now seen as a land of intolerance was in the past a true model of coexistence.

Every time the West European intellectual sets out to analyze European culture, his/her analysis will almost always focus on Western European culture. Thus, for a Westerner, the cultural Europe is one and its features are definitely set by Western culture alone. Eastern Europe has the only merit of continuing

models, mental constructs, their aesthetics or tendencies beyond the borders of Western cultural spaces. All it can do is to add colour to the picture! This attitude is based on the hypothesis that the European's sensitivity, despite the diversity of the spaces he/she occupies, is different in the East and in the West and only historical asynchrony let the West significantly outrun the East. Things tend to look this way but they are not what they look like. Moreover, the wealth and originality of the Western cultural products together with the scarcity and frequent lack of originality of the Eastern cultural products seem to rightly justify this attitude.

If we can speak of a consciousness common to all Europeans, since we all claim common ancestors in thinking—Greek philosophy, Judaic Christianity and Roman civilization—we cannot speak of a sensitivity common to all Europeans without approximating and simplifying things. Sensitivities arise from deeper recesses and their strange alchemy combines elements according to rules that are by no means common to the whole of Europe. The Westerner's sensitivity is undoubtedly different from the Easterner's and the difference is a major one. If we objectively consider the crucial events in European history we can easily notice that the European's creative core was preserved for almost one thousand years in Eastern Europe, in the Byzantine Empire.

What can the South-East bring to the Western civilization? This is a question that is not at all rhetorical, and prof. Mircea Muthu—the one who asks it—offers also some very interesting answers. Here is one of them: “Accompanied by the cohabitation of the three cultural substrata—archaic, medieval and modern—the Southeast can help Europe relearn its own past and, last but not least, to remodel its projects for the future.[...] The phenomenon can be illustrated by the imaginary, influenced by the epic that links, in the same pulsatory rhythm, Kazantzakis to Ivo Andrić, to Ismail Kadare and to Sadoveanu etc. [...] Beyond the accent changes, the archaic and folkloric remains particularize an area of confluences, whose vitality is the result of some paradoxical alloys between the old and the modern.”

In his paper published in *Carmina Balcanica* no. 6/2011, acad. Răzvan Theodorescu also wrote about “the cultural paths,” about their dynamics, which is able to explain, in the most part of it, the multi-millenary evolution of this area, reminding of Herder's famous aphorism, according to which history is nothing else but a geography in motion. “They are or remind, R. Theodorescu continues his idea, of *the corridors* where, especially from South to North, there circulate cultural goods, ideas, innovations, soldiers, scholars as well as the ferments and the germs of the civilization which gather together Byzantium, Bulgaria, Albania, Serbia, Hungary, The Romanian Countries without forgetting the Dalmatian, Italo-Pontic, Polish-Lithuanian and micro-Asiatic areas, in one and unique cultural, vivid and active organism.”

***Carmina Balcanica* and the Intercultural Dialogue between West & East**

Starting from the point of view expressed by the great Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga—the Orient, by including “Eastern Europe (...) takes part in building of the European civilization”—we intend through the literary journal, suggestively entitled *Carmina Balcanica* (founded in 2008),¹ to reveal not only the cultural identity of each country from this space but also the prominent features of the Western-Eastern dialogue. In other words, we intend to emphasize the contribution of the Balkan space (geographically extended to the South and to the East) to European culture and civilization.

Although its title is *Carmina Balcanica*, our publication is not dedicated exclusively to poetry. It is yet linked to poetry in a special way, as poetry is a fundamental and privileged act of the human spirit, capable of conferring on the artistic fact a hue of *ideality* that cancels distances and enables *encounters* beyond the particular limits of each language. According to this idea, *The Melancholy of the Unique Unicorn* meets Ioan Cucuzelos’ Byzantine melos; the charm and strangeness of the churches in Nesebar (the old Nessambria), or the subtle stony embroidery of the frames in the palace of Brâncoveanu (Mogoșoaia) find themselves in a secret dialogue with the voice in *Neagoe Basarab’s teachings*; similarly, the fabulous Byzantine silverwork, now in the Venetian shrine in San Marco, called *Pala d’oro*, resonates in the intoxicating *Song of the Sphynx...* from Enescu’s *Oedip*; Barbu’s Isarlak *dream* hides also the stained-glass window glitter of the Romanian-Greek Xenachis’s music. According to Martin Heidegger, *any art is essentially Poetry (Dichtung)*. Therefore, we think that prose, essay, architecture, painting, sculpture, graphics, music, dance have a *poetical nature (dichterisch)*. In this sense *Carmina Balcanica* is connected to *Poetry*. In this sense we have asked those who got involved in this project to reveal the existing unity in the forms of expression that can be found here, rendering thus consistent the spiritual identity of the Danubian-Balkan area. We think that this identity is really capable of such an ostentation that includes the extinguished (yet not totally) splendours of the Byzantium.

Prof. Mircea Muthu wrote a series of works in which he offered, brilliantly we could say, an identification of rhythms and trajectories of thinking and expressing that are essential for Southeastern spirituality as *forma mentis*. His works firmly contour the *concept of Balkanity* that allows the perception of those elements that impregnate the psychology, mentality and, inter-relatedly, the artistic creation in the specific forms of *Southeastern man’s sensitivity of yesterday and of today*. In this respect, *Carmina Balcanica* is also an attempt to give substance to that concept. It is another reason why we intend each text to be presented also in

1 <http://www.carminabalcanica.org/Magazine.html>

its original language, but also in a language (English) capable to open the door towards *communication/knowledge/encounter* with the Western European world.

Within a dispute of the elements, which are obviously different, there is still an essence that includes also us, the inhabitants of the Levant, with our mutual identity in the same old and harmonious original lands. The historian Nicolae Iorga explained the numerous similarities that emphasize the unity of the Balkanic peoples by the old *ethnic element of Thracian origin, previous to the Latin, Slavic, Turanian and even Hellenic expansions*.

From the point of view of *consumer society*, the West exaggerated the individual against integration, sense against intuition, science against religion, etc. This type of unilateral development became alarming and caused a series of social, ecological, moral and spiritual crises. By contrast, we could say that the Levant has a spiritual experience and traditions that differ from the Western ones. We have examples in the Greek religious tradition created poetically—therefore, a notable unity of poetry and religion—the Orthodox coordinates of Christianity, the *mystical incandescence* of Dionysius the Areopagit, the hesychast of the Atonian hermits; all these offer us the image of some defining contrasts.

Nevertheless, the Westerners (Paul Valéry, Ortega y Gasset, Martin Heidegger) have felt and talked, for some time now, about a *diminishing of culture and of spiritual freedom*, which is more and more obvious in the Western world. In *Carmina Balcanica* we also think that time has come to rethink and become aware of these real warnings.

According to the practicableness of the Western civilization, as soon as the simply aesthetical and spiritual elements install the domination of the *transparency* which is in fact the work of art, the reception is blocked, paralyzed, deafened: the *artistic object* vanishes or totally disappears.

Carmina Balcanica also tries a re-configuration of the image of the Levant as an eminent land of poetry. Many ancient Greek poets were known under the name of *the Thracian*. According to tradition, the cult of Muses originates in Pierida, and Orpheus—the symbol character of Thracia—as well as his master, Linus, lived somewhere near, at the foot of the mountain Haemus. Here, in the Balkans, the tragedy was born, as well as the endless tragedies of some unhappy histories. This is how, probably, beyond all differences, beyond our original Thracic, Hellenic, Latin or Slavic oldness, *Poetry*—as understood in our magazine—is our possible (re)-unifying element, above history and languages. This is another *element* that *Balkanism* could mean. Or *Balkanity*! It was stated before, in different ways: *Poetry* can be considered also a reason for the development of History in the past and, possibly, in the future. Therefore, we do not think it is a simple cultural phenomenon. The fundamental similarities through which it can reveal us to the world represent *the profound truth of a spirit* that visits us all, and, at the same time, the unique impress of an old civilization that still exists in us.

The diversity, by origin, of authors who publish—in each issue—is conjugated with a given theme regarding a country from yesterday and from today: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Turkey, and also regarding the culture of the minorities living in Romania—Albanians, Bulgarians, Germans, Hungarians, Turks, etc. Essayists, poets, literary critics, regardless of origin, will reflect upon their cultural and spiritual territory.

Although the journal is published in Romania, it is not intended specifically for the Romanian readers but rather—as it would have been expected from similar publications, to readers from all over the world: the Balkans and beyond. That is why the invited authors are encouraged to submit material in their maternal language. That is why there is an English version for all the submitted materials as we try with every essay, poem or literary analysis to surpass the geographical boundaries and make it relevant for all those interested in the Balkans, a space plagued by political conflict and yet culturally and spiritually united through diversity.

Conclusions

The international publication *Carmina Balcanica* is intended to reflect the cultural musicality and harmony of the Balkan space. From a mosaic of literary expressions, it is hoped that the journal will slowly crystallize the cultural identity of each represented country and their place, as a unified space, on the cultural and spiritual map of Europe.

In short: what do we hope to achieve in *Carmina Balcanica*?

Two things: to deal with the characteristics of an Eastern soul that, we believe, has a particular individuality, then to stimulate the artistic creation that can adequately express this soul.

Eugen Simion, one of the most important Romanian literary critics, on the occasion of an international conference underlined that “Europe’s prosperity depends on the richness and diversity of its national cultures. [...] Culture should not be a dividing wall; it should bring Eastern, Western, Southeastern, Central, and Northern Europeans closer together.”

Therefore—through the magazine’s pages—the editors’ intention is to create an *intercultural dialogue*. And this dialogue—as Eugen Simion also emphasizes—“*should not take place only between the East and the West, but also between the East and the East.*”