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Vlad, Laurențiu

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The English Political Model in Barbu Catargiu's Public Discourse*

LAURENȚIU VLAD

INTRODUCTION

Local historiography has often insisted on the models that have influenced Romanian civilization in the 19th and 20th centuries, in its various manifestations, cultural, economic, social or political. In a brief article of 1993, Lucian Boia outlined the destinies of some Western models which had come in contact with the Romanian culture; a Belgian model, seen as an appendage of the French, an English one, which in his opinion was completely marginal, and others that enjoyed a more or less brilliant fate (German, Italian, etc.)¹. Please note that each of the topics mentioned above enjoyed special attention in Romanian historiography; see for instance the studies authored by Aurel Filimon, Gheorghe Platon and even my own, dedicated to the Romanian-Belgian relations; those by Dan Berindei, Pompiliu Eliade, Nicolae Iorga and Nicolae Isar for the French case; those by Zigu Ornea regarding the German influences on the political and literary thought of the Junimea group; those by Eugen Denize and George Lăzărescu, on the cultural and political interferences between Italy and Romania, etc.

The English model had its own researchers in Romanian historiography; let us only mention Alexandru Duțu, especially interested in the cultural influences², and Vlad Georgescu, whose work focused mostly on the political

* A Romanian language version of this article in *In Memoriam Grigore Ploeșteanu. Studii și evocări*, edited by Vasile Dobrescu Cornel Sigmirean and Corina Teodor, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 2014, pp. 268-281.

Lucian Boia, "Les Roumains et les autres. La Quête des modèles dans la société roumaine des XIX^e et XX^e siècles", in *État des lieux en sciences sociales*, textes réunis par Alexandru Duțu and Norbert Dodille, Institut Français de Bucarest – l'Harmattan, București-Paris, 1993, pp. 39-45/pp. 41-42.

² For example, Alexandru Duțu, *Explorări în istoria literaturii române*, EPL, București, 1969, pp. 86-115 ("Primele contacte literare anglo-române"), pp. 144-179 ("Eminescu și romantismul englez"), pp. 245-277 ("Etapile receptării operei shakespeariene"); *Modele, imagini, privesți. Incursiuni în cultura europeană modernă*, Ed. Dacia, Cluj-Napoca, 1979, pp. 112-137 ("Perceperea reciprocă: relații intelectuale româno-engleze în perioada interbelică").

realm³. In fact, in the present article, which belongs to a larger project, we seek to deepen the suggestions made by these two illustrious scholars, especially concerning the political facet of the English model. Thus, I chose to demonstrate, by means of a small case study, the manner whereby the English model can be traced in the political discourse of Barbu Catargiu, who was the first prime minister of the single government of the two United Principalities. To outline this beneficial contamination, we examined his political pamphlets (*État social des Principautés danubiennes*, Imprimerie de Bols-Wittouck, Brussels, 1855; *De la Propriété en Moldo-Valachie*, Imprimerie J. Kopainig, Bucharest, 1857; *Encore quelques mots sur la propriété en Moldo-Valachie*, Imprimerie A. Ulrich, Bucharest, 1860)⁴, the project and memoirs of 1857, which Ioan C. Filitti attributed to him (*De l'Organisation du pouvoir; Des Différentes classes de la population en Valachie et de leur position légale respective*)⁵, as well as the parliamentary speeches, reunited and edited for the first time by Anghel Demetrescu in 1886⁶.

FROM DUMITRACHE STURDZA TO BARBU CATARGIU

Around mid 19th century, the English model had already been present for several decades in the public realm, and especially in the political and institutional imaginary of the Romanian Principalities. In the following section, we shall review a few moments of this history, while, for a better understanding

³ For example, Vlad Georgescu, *Ideile politice și iluminismul în Principatele Române, 1750-1831*, Ed. Academiei RSR, București, 1972, pp. 70, 71, 116 etc.; *Istoria ideilor politice românești, 1369-1878*, Jon Dumitru Verlag, München, 1987, pp. 130, 148, 170 etc.

⁴ Romanian-language versions of the latter two booklets exist. The French- and Romanian language version of the latter booklet have also been published, signed “X”, in three consecutive issues of the *Conservatorulu Progresistu*, vol. I, no. 5, 19 January 1860, pp. 18-20; no. 6, 22 January 1860, pp. 22-23; no. 7, 26 January 1860, pp. 27-28.

⁵ See Ioan C. Filitti, “Încă un proiect de reprezentare națională la 1857”, *Revista de Drept Public*, July-December 1935, pp. 257-263, and “Un Mémoire de 1857 sur les classes sociales de la Valachie”, *Arhiva pentru Știință și Reformă Socială*, issue dedicated to Dimitrie Gusti, XIII, 1936, pp. 154-164.

⁶ *Discursurile lui Barbu Catargiu (1859-1862, 8 June)*, collected and annotated by Ang. Demetrescu with a gloss on the Katargiu family and a biography of the speaker, Tipo-Litografia Eduard Wiegand, București, 1886. A second edition by Petre V. Haneș (see the foreword on pp. IX-XXXI) was published at Institutul de Arte Grafice și Editură “Minerva” in Bucharest in 1914. A partial edition, *Cazul Barbu Catargiu – O crimă politică perfectă*, was curated by Stelian Neagoe at Ed. Scripta, București, 1992. Several speeches can be found in the newspapers, namely *Conservatorulu Progresistu* and *Unirea*.

of the context, we shall briefly evoke certain details of the English cultural presence by the Lower Danube.

Around 1802 Dumitrache Sturza had been drafting a project entitled "Plan or model of republican aristo-democratic government", which aimed to become Moldavia's Constitution⁷. Logothete Sturdza spoke on that occasion about the parliamentary system that was "customary in England", "a free country, with a paradigm worthy of being copied"⁸.

Towards the end of the second decade of that century, in 1818, Nicolae Rosetti-Rosnovanu travelled to England to get familiar with the island's political realities; we also know that he pursued a significant correspondence with a number of English political leaders⁹ and that he knew the studies of economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo¹⁰. Their works were also known by another member of the Moldavian political elite of the second quarter of the 19th century, prince Nicolae Suțu, both through their French translations, and through the economic literature of the Hexagon, heavily influenced at the time by Adam Smith and David Ricardo's thought (Nicolae Suțu would have thus read them in the translations and studies by G. Garnier and J.B. Say)¹¹.

In the 1920s, after a careful study of the island's legal norms, Ionică Tăutu shared the idea that the English political institutions were superior to the French¹². In addition, his reflections upon the idea of liberty seemed tributary to John Locke's conception thereof, as limited, civil liberty¹³. References to John Locke and to other political thinkers, who also subscribed to the natural law and to the social contract theories, etc., are legion in this period. We find them, rather chaotically, with Eufrosin Poteca (in his speech at St. Sava College in 1825)¹⁴, with Costache Conachi, who also referred to Newton¹⁵, and with other scholars, contemporary with Ionică Tăutul, who had seen the handbooks of

⁷ Emil Vîrtosu, "Napoleon Bonaparte și proiectul unei republici aristo-dimocraticești în Moldova", excerpt from *Viața Românească*, no. 6-7, June-July 1947.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 34; apud. Vlad Georgescu, *Ideile politice și iluminismul...cit.*, p. 70.

⁹ Vlad Georgescu, *Ideile politice și iluminismul...cit.*, p. 70. Vlad Georgescu also considered the Rosetti-Rosnovanu fund (CCLIV/100) at the Central National Historical Archives in Bucharest.

¹⁰ Olga Constantinescu, "Concepția lui Nicolae Rosetti-Rosnovanu asupra industriei", *Revista Arhivelor*, no. 1, 1963; apud. *Ibidem*.

¹¹ See, for example, Ion Veverca, *Nicolae Suțu. Viața, activitatea și opera întâiului economist ideolog din România, 1798-1871*, Ed. Asociației generale a economiștilor din România, București, 1936, pp. 66-67.

¹² Emil Vîrtosu, "Les Idées sociales et politiques de I. Tăutu", *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, no. 2, 1965, p. 279; apud. Vlad Georgescu, *Ideile politice și iluminismul...cit.*, p. 70.

¹³ *Idem*, *Istoria ideilor politice românești...cit.*, p. 130.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 128.

¹⁵ See Paul Cornea, *Originile romantismului românesc*, Ed. Minerva, București, 1972, p. 230.

ethics and philosophy from the Princely Academies in Bucharest and in Iași¹⁶. Let us not forget Ion Heliade Rădulescu, who planned to set up a world-class library, as he announced in *Curierul Românesc* (no. 28, 1846), which was to include translations of John Locke's works, but also of other celebrated philosophers like Bacon and Hume¹⁷.

Costache Conachi was a professed admirer of the English "politifisit" ("political") system, as we can see in the annotations of his translation of Xavier Bourguignon d'Herbigny (*Revue politique de l'Europe en 1825*), *Priviri politicească a Evropii, din anu 1825*¹⁸. In the text itself, but also in the translator's notes, one practically sang an ode to political England, which had influenced the entire Europe (and it was believed that such influence would endure for the years to come), France, Italy, Germany and America, in terms of civilization, education, but above all in the construction of a realm of public freedoms and constitutional design¹⁹.

Also towards the end of this third decade, in 1827 to be precise, Constantin Moroiu would draft the celebrated *Disertația pentru îndreptarea pușcării din București, cu o arătare pe scurt de sistima temnițelor englezești*, and four years later, Petrache Poenaru would also travel to England²⁰, as Iancu Alecsandri would in 1850²¹, followed by Alexandru Odobescu in 1852²². If Petrache Poenaru was mostly interested in industrial matters (he travelled by train, he visited the cotton mills in Manchester and the steam engine factory in Birmingham), while Alexandru Odobescu wanted to verify a typology of the English folk, Iancu Alecsandri studied their mores and the island's cathedrals²³.

In Moldavia the English parliamentary system was well known. In an issue of July 1829 of *Albina Românească*, the readers would learn that England was a monarchy whose king's powers, who was at the time George IV, were limited by a lawful constitution of 1215, named Magna Charta, and by the

¹⁶ Ariadna Camariano-Cioran, *Academiile domnești din București și Iași*, Ed. Academiei RSR, București, 1971, pp. 148, 200. See a newer approach, from a political science perspective, which we owe to Raluca Alexandrescu, *La Révolution mélancolique. Sur la construction et l'évolution du concept de démocratie dans la pensée politique roumaine moderne*, Ed. Universității din București, București, 2011, pp. 34-35 or "L'Individu et la démocratie au XIX^e siècle roumain", *Analele Universității din București. Seria Științe Politice*, vol. XV, no. 1, 2013, pp. 51-67/p. 57.

¹⁷ Paul Cornea, *Originile romantismului...*cit., p. 667.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 230. See also Dana Pantea, *Imaginea Angliei și a englezului în cultura românească din secolul al XIX-lea*, Ed. Universității din Oradea, Oradea, 2011, p. 134.

¹⁹ A fragment reproduced in Dana Pantea, *Imaginea Angliei...*cit., pp. 135-136.

²⁰ Vlad Georgescu, *Ideile politice și iluminismul...*cit., p. 71.

²¹ Cornelia Bodea, "Cu Iancu Alecsandri în Anglia și Scoția la 1850", *Studii*, no. 2, 1971, pp. 265-288; apud Alexandru Dușu, *Modele, imagini, privilegii...*cit., p. 134.

²² Alexandru Odobescu, "Călătorie din Paris la Londra (de la 3 până la 11 august 1852)", *Convorbiri Literare*, vol. LXVII, no. 1, 1934; apud Dana Pantea, *Imaginea Angliei...*cit., p. 92.

²³ See also the descriptions in Dana Pantea, *Imaginea Angliei...*cit., pp. 90-91, 94, 98-99.

Assembly of the Nation's representatives ("vechili" or administrators), named Parliament, made up of the Chamber of Peers or the Upper House, with 367 Lords or Peers, and the House of Commons, representing the folk ("obștia"), also known as the Lower Chamber, with 658 members²⁴. They would also learn that the Parliament met "towards the end of June, and in this interval debate the state interests, i.e., the Members of Parliament show by their rhetorical talents the sciences of political economics, meaning the government of internal affairs and diplomacy"²⁵.

A truly important role in outlining the intellectual climate where the English political model could make its presence felt, was the distribution of knowledge on the education, industry, etc. on the island. These pieces of information were frequent in the pages of *Albina Românească* (see the description of London in 1849) or of *Curierul Românesc*. Not to mention the experiences of the Romanian travellers, which we mentioned in passing before.

In this context, the data about the English "temperament" or "nature" in the wider context of the traits of the European nations, albeit often anecdotal, are also significant, as revealed in the press of Moldavia in 1846, in terms of cultural life ("In sciences, the German is pedantic, the Englishman is a philosopher, the Frenchman a bit of everything, the Italian in all things wonderful, the Spaniard pensive, the Romanian... that's still undecided"), in terms of intimate life ("In religion, the German is a non-believer, the Englishman is devote, the Italian formal, the Spaniard papist, the Romanian, a lover of formulae") or in the public arena ("As laws go, the German laws are so and so, the Englishman has bad laws, but keeps them well..., the Italians know the laws, but do not uphold them, the Spaniards would uphold them if they knew them, the Romanians are learning them only now."), etc.²⁶

Finally, for the sake of the current discussion, we cannot neglect the diffusion of English literature. Before either *Albina Românească* and *Curierul Românesc* were founded, both journals where European literature was republished insistently until the middle of the 19th century, the Romanians in the Principalities learned of Alexander Pope's work (*Essay on Man*), which comprised the thoughts of Hobbes, Locke, Newton and Shaftesbury²⁷. Pope was translated for the first time under the title *Research about Man* (*Cercaria asupra omului*), from a French translation, by Ioan Cantacuzino, probably in the

²⁴ The actual Romanian word ("mădulari") translates more commonly as "limbs" (translator's note). "Maria Britanie", *Albina Românească*, vol. I, no. 13, 11.07.1829, p. 51.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ "Caracteristica națiilor evropene", *Albina Românească*, vol. XVIII, no. 17, 28.02.1846, pp. 65-66.

²⁷ Alexandru Dușu, *Explorări în istoria literaturii române*, cit., pp. 92, 94-95.

last decade of the 18th century, although the manuscript in the Library of the Romanian Academy reads 1807²⁸.

What followed were translations published or left in manuscript of Defoe's or Young's works, etc.²⁹, after 1829, the contemporary press included translations of Byron, Scott, Shakespeare, Swift, etc. Let us mention that the translations of Byron are the most frequent from the English literature, and that he is among the twelve European authors most translated and first translated into Romanian in the first half of the 19th century, as shown in a top established years ago by Paul Cornea and a series of collaborators, in a classification dominated from afar by the literature of the Hexagon: Dumas (22 titles/45 volumes), Byron (19/26), Florian (18/20), Molière (14/18), Kotzebue (11/11), Sand (11/15), Voltaire (11/15), Marmontel (11/11), de Kock (7/10), Lamartine (7/7), Sue (7/20) and Chateaubriand (6/14)³⁰. By 1860, 385 titles had been translated from French, 83 from German and 56 from English (mostly from a French pivot and above all from Byron and Shakespeare's work – 5 titles)³¹.

BARBU CATARGIU – SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Rather a lot has been written on Barbu Catargiu's personality. Let us first recall the editors of his speeches and political projects, who were also his biographers, namely Anghel Demetrescu, Petre V. Haneș, Ioan C. Filitti and Stelian Neagoe, whom we have mentioned before in our remarks to the presentation of the primary sources of our study. Let us add to the list: Ștefan Antim (*Studii și portrete*, Craiova, 1936, pp. 14-19), Al. Vernescu (*Barbu Catargiu. Studiu istoric rezumativ*, Buzău, 1928), Marin Nedelea (*Prim-Miniștrii României, 1859-1918*, București, 1994, pp. 9-16), Vistian Goia (*Destine parlamentare. De la Mihail Kogălniceanu la Nicolae Titulescu*, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, pp. 19-24), etc., who had sought to draw up different pictures of the conservative politician, without ignoring his political

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 100-101, 103.

³⁰ See "Traduceri și traducători în prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea", in Paul Cornea *De la Alecsandrescu la Eminescu*, EPL, București, 1966, pp. 38-76/p. 49.

³¹ *Ibidem*; data from Lucian Boia, "Sur la diffusion de la culture européenne en Roumanie (XIX^e siècle et début du XX^e siècle)", in Florin Țurcanu(coord.), *Modèle français et expériences de la modernisation. Roumanie, XIX^e-XX^e siècles*, Institutul Cultural Român, București, 2006, pp. 1-29/pp. 16-18.

thought. Victor Slăvescu³² and myself³³ attempted to present Barbu Catargiu through his political correspondence; as for his assassination in June 1862, the debate was never settled among the arguments brought forth by I.G. Valentineanu (1897), Alexandru Lapedatu (1933, 1939), Nicolae Iorga (1939), Traian Ionescu-Nișcov (1940), Valeriu Stan (1970), Gabriel Ionescu (2004), etc.

Other contributors writing about Barbu Catargiu, especially from the perspective of his political ideas, were: Ioan C. Filitti, Aneta Spiridon, Marin Nedelea, Alexandru Pașol (who unfortunately plagiarizes several paragraphs by Aneta Spiridon, especially in the final part of his study), Ioan Stanomir, etc.³⁴ and, certainly, all the historians who dealt in the period when the conservative leader was at the forefront of the public scene (Dan Berindei, Vlad Georgescu, Anastasie Iordache, Apostol Stan, etc.).

Barbu Catargiu was the great “vornic” Ștefan’s (first royal counsellor and governor of home affairs) and Stanca Văcărescu’s son. He was born on 26 October 1807 and was taught in the Greek school where his taste for the classics was whetted, and his readings of Aristotle, Plato, Xenofon could be traced within his speeches and political essays. A few years in Paris followed, where apparently he devoted himself more to painting, without concluding at least in this direction any programme of studies; one of his biographers said that “in the years of juvenile exuberance, like all the youth of his time, he had also brought countless sacrifices on Aphrodite’s and the Graces’ altars, he had tasted even the dregs from the charming glass of lust, he had wasted too much time in public gardens and at balls, with parties and serenades, in toilets and amusements”³⁵. Back in his country, without any degree, but with significant life experience, young Catargiu made himself known as author of theatre critique, being one of the members of the Philharmonic Society (1834).

³² “Scrisori inedite ale lui Barbu Catargiu, ian.-oct. 1861”, *Arhiva Românească*, VII, 1941, pp. 1-28.

³³ “Din corespondența conservatorilor români, 1859-1861. Scrisori ale lui Ap. Arsache, C-tin. N. Brăiloiu și Barbu Catargiu”, *Analele Universității din București. Seria Științe Politice*, vol. V, 2003, pp. 3-13.

³⁴ Ioan C. Filitti, *Pagini din istoria României moderne*, București, 1935 (cap. “Un liberal clasic: Barbu Catargiu”, pp. 1-7); Aneta Spiridon, “Concepția economică a lui Barbu Catargiu”, în *Studii de Istorie a Gândirii Economice*, vol. VIII, București, 1970, pp. 62-123; Marin Nedelea, *Prim-Miniștrii României, 1859-1918*, Ed. “Adevărul”, București, 1994 (cap. “Barbu Catargiu”, pp. 9-16); Alexandru Pașol, “Ordinea și proprietatea la Barbu Catargiu”, *Studia Politica. Romanian Political Science Review*, vol. III, no. 2, 2003, pp. 339-391; Ioan Stanomir, *Spiritul conservator. De la Barbu Catargiu la Nicolae Iorga*, Ed. Curtea Veche, București, 2008 (cap. “1856-1862: inventând conservatorismul”, pp. 48-54 and “Cine zicea boier-zicea ostaș, zicea viteaz”, pp. 192-198).

³⁵ Anghel Demetriescu, “Barbu Katargiu”, în *Discursurile lui Barbu Catargiu (1859-1862 iunie 8)*, cit., pp. XX-CXVI/p. XCI.

At the age of 30, Barbu Catargiu entered politics, and became representative for Teleorman in the Regular Popular Assembly (“Obșteasca Obicinuită Adunare”). As his biographer Anghel Demetrescu emphasised: “In the summer of 1848, while avoiding to get involved in the revolutionary troubles, Barbu Catargiu wandered the roads of Europe, through Austria, France, then England and other states [...], seeking to meet their eminent men, to study their institutions, to notice their functioning and to draw conclusions for his own motherland”³⁶. As he returned to Romania, Barbu Catargiu knew all the honours of public life, becoming in 1857-1862 the leader of the Romanian conservatives, representative, minister and president of the Council for several mandates. He ended up assassinated in the afternoon of 8 June 1862; the event was widely discussed in the journals at the time, as well as later in the historians’ studies, without ever being fully elucidated.

ENGLAND IN BARBU CATARGIU’S POLITICAL IMAGINARY

“England” and “France”: “Which of these two states have been better governed so far?”³⁷

In his biography dedicated to Barbu Catargiu, Anghel Demetrescu wrote at a certain point, without justifying his remark with any particular quotation, that the conservative leader “preferred the English system and evolution, the normal development of the principles contained in the Convention and in the Regulation, while his political opponents favoured the French system and revolution”³⁸.

In the bibliographical sources we listed at the beginning of this article, namely in *État social des Principautés danubiennes*, a pamphlet published in Brussels in 1855, we found explicit mentions of the rhetorical questions asked by the Romanian political leader, on which of the two states, France or England, were better governed. His reasoning was unequivocal! In a polemic with the revolutionaries of 1848, reflecting upon the manner how, in his opinion, one should renew the Romanian society, Barbu Catargiu spoke firmly, in a good tradition of the political thought inaugurated in Europe by

³⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. XXXVIII-XXXIX.

³⁷ The subtitle recalls a sentence from B.K., *Proprietatea în Principatele Moldo-Române*, Imprimeria I. Kopainig, 1857, p. 55.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. LXVIII.

Edmund Burke, for the direction of “progressive, measured improvement, in accordance with the degree of civilisation of the country where they operate”, which, being “ground in justice and reason, were kept forever and prepared the path for new improvements”³⁹. The conservative leader rejected firmly the “violent or untimely reforms”, the “social convulsions, which left more traces of evil than seeds for the good”⁴⁰. In addition, he made an analogy, frequent at the time, and with a lengthy history, between the political body of the state and the physical body of the individual, closing rhetorically with the association and comparison of the two political models whose impact upon the autochthonous public imaginary at the middle of the 19th century was undeniable:

“Pour guérir un corps malade, il ne suffit pas de savoir que ce corps souffre, il faut constater le germe de sa maladie, il faut découvrir le siège de son mal.

Pour régénérer un pays, ce n'est pas assez non plus de savoir que ce pays est arriéré, qu'une classe d'hommes y est pauvre, y paraît malheureuse; mais il est de toute nécessité de chercher et de trouver la véritable cause de cet état rétrograde, de ce malaise dont on aperçoit les symptômes.

Autrement on frappe au hasard, et on tue le malade qu'on veut guérir, on désorganise le pays qu'on cherche à réformer. [...]

C'est pourquoi il est mille fois plus désastreux pour un pays d'avoir des bonnes lois qu'on foule aux pieds, que d'en avoir des médiocres qu'on respecte et même de n'en pas avoir du tout.

En Angleterre, on se soumet aux lois existantes même les plus contraires à notre siècle, et on n'en fait de nouvelles qu'avec beaucoup de circonspection.

En France, on a changé quatre ou cinq chartes depuis une soixantaine d'années.

Lequel de ces deux pays pourtant, nous le demandons, est le mieux gouverné?”⁴¹

Thus, for Barbu Catargiu the English government was the expression of political stability, of legal experience validated in time, the expression of respect for the order established over time, the expression of respect for the order established long ago. At the same time, it contained the expression of moderation in the public and social life, meaning strictly the data that define the conservative spirit of the 19th century. This was not a unique image at the time. At the beginning of the 1870s, Apostol Arsache, one of Barbu Catargiu's close collaborator, the one who would become prime-minister ad interim after the assassination of 8 June 1862, spoke about England as a country that had not

³⁹ See *État social des Principautés danubiennes*, Imprimerie Bols-Wittouck, Bruxelles, 1855, p. 29.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*. Excerpt also published in B.K., *De la Propriété en Moldo-Valachie*, Imprimerie J. Kopainig, 1857, pp. 48-49, respectively in B.K., *Proprietatea în Principatele Moldo-Române*, cit., pp. 54-55.

known politics done in haste⁴². Meanwhile in 1866 Constantin N. Brăiloiu, another one of Barbu Catargiu's road companions in 1859-1862, who survived him and continued to work toward the end of the 1880s among the hard core conservatives, would have had a similar approach. In an article published in the *Desbaterile* journal he emphasised the fact that the adoption of a Constitution must be a well thought, and certainly not hasty, political endeavour, attentive to the specific detail and to the experience of one's own or of the other, far from all sensitivities and ideological humours⁴³.

The Political Aristocratic Body and the Senatorial Institutional Corps

Around 1857, Barbu Catargiu was drafting a paper on the situation of the various social strata of Wallachia (*Des Différentes classes de la population en Valachie et de leur position légale respective*), as well as a project to organise the national representatives (*De l'Organisation du pouvoir*). In the comment to the first text we mentioned⁴⁴, the editor, Ioan C. Filitti, insisted that the future prime-minister of the United Principalities had imagined a bicameral representative system, with a Senate that considered itself aristocratic. This Senate would have been comprised only of the high boyars, aggregated in a distinctive political corps, to which they belonged naturally as owners of

⁴² Apostol Arsache, *Questiunea proprietății înaintea Adunărilor Legislative*, Imprimeria lui Adolf Ulrich, București, 1860, p. 39: "Nothing – says a German author (C.T. Waliker, cited by Apostol Arsache in a footnote – our note) – showcases better the powerlessness, the lack of attitude and the despotism of a statesman's theory, than the easy acceptance, justification and application of certain provisions by claiming a state of necessity; nothing weakens the institutions, the security and the freedom of a people more; nothing endangers further the respect and security of the throne. [...] Let us look towards England, where one talks so little of such measures, let us also look at other states".

⁴³ C.N. Brăiloiu, "Nerăbdările", *Desbaterile*, vol. I, no. 3, 1866, pp. 10- 11/p. 11: "Over the past seventy years, France has seen about twenty governments and just as many constitutions [...] For two whole centuries, England has maintained one and the same government [...] France proceeded impatiently in its reforms, in all emergency, with *a priori* theories, by constituent assemblies, a method that questions periodically the very essence and being of society [...] England, on the contrary, with its practical spirit, has always guarded itself from *a priori* theories, she does not know urgency and impatience in its constitutional proceedings, has not mandated any constituent assembly to draft a constitution, and all the reforms are done gradually, after long debates, after mature thought, after the reform enters, through preliminary discussions, and by intellectual battle, into each Englishman's blood and veins".

⁴⁴ Ioan C. Filitti, "Un Mémoire de 1857 sur les classes sociales de la Valachie", cit., p. 154-164/ p. 159 ("Des Différentes classes de la population en Valachie et de leur position légale respective").

considerable property, but also as persons who were experienced in politics, meaning that they had held high functions in the administration along time. Barbu Catargiu stated further (this time wrongly) that this was a type of organisation that would have existed in the Middle Ages; in his opinion, the Organic Regulation (“Regulamentul Organic”) being in his opinion responsible for the fact that a single Chamber had been created for the purpose of political representation, wherein the elected among the high boyars had been mixed with those ranks lower in status.

Therefore, the objective was to found an aristocratic Senate, similar to the House of Lords, as stated by Ioan C. Filitti⁴⁵, and later by Vlad Georgescu⁴⁶. Nowadays, Ioan Stanomir also referred to the project noticing „the correlation between the aristocracy [...] and the High Chamber”⁴⁷, this aristocracy being in fact an elite “that was being recruited from every layer of society” and that remained impervious to any influence of the state authority:

“Avant le Règlement organique, d'après l'ancienne constitution du pays, les grands boyards formaient réellement un corps politique. [...] Cette constitution et ces prérogatives lui ayant été enlevées par le Règlement organique, et la grande boyarie ayant été confondue par ce statut, pour ce qui concerne l'exercice des droits politiques, avec les autres classes inférieures de boyards dans une même assemblée, son autorité s'est trouvée amoindrie par le mélange d'un autre élément électif...

Ce qu'il faut pour lui rendre la vie politique, c'est de constituer la boyarie en corps homogène, ayant ses représentants élus par elle dans un sénat, c'est de n'y admettre que les véritables supériorités sociales, les grandes positions acquises dans l'administration, dans la magistrature, dans l'ordre militaire, dans la science, dans l'industrie et le commerce, ainsi que les illustrations de famille.

La boyarie se recrutant ainsi dans toutes les classes de la société, comme cela s'est fait toujours et ayant de plus dans un sénat ses représentants exclusifs, n'attendant pas, pour exercer quelque autorité, un emploi public que le chef de l'État peut lui retirer à volonté [...] et pourra exercer une influence sérieuse dans le gouvernement du pays.”⁴⁸

While evaluating Barbu Catargiu's conception of property, Aneta Spiridon also spoke about an aristocracy which, “following England's example, would have been able to ensure not only the continuity, but also the assimilation of the new social layers that became economically emancipated”; however, she

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 155 (Ioan C. Filitti's preamble).

⁴⁶ Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria ideilor politice românești...*cit., p. 170.

⁴⁷ Ioan Stanomir, *Nașterea Constituției. Limbaj și drept în Principate până la 1866*, Ed. Nemira, București, 2004, p. 299.

⁴⁸ Ioan C. Filitti, “Un Mémoire de 1857 sur les classes sociales de la Valachie”, cit., p. 159.

did not include any specific references to the writings or speeches of the conservative leader⁴⁹.

*“The Romanian people does not yet have the experience of nations like the English one, who has aged in liberties”*⁵⁰

Having read the political speeches and the booklets which sometimes reproduce in full the interventions in the House of Representatives, we can say that Barbu Catargiu sincerely appreciated the English economic model (the legal tradition, the balanced taxation, etc.), and the organisation of land ownership, which had a long history⁵¹; all these ideas are of course easily traceable to the conservative canon.

In the well-known debate on property and rural law with prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza’s partisans and with the radical liberals, in addition to the *argumenta ab auctoritate* of a functioning English model, Barbu Catargiu developed a series of justifications that referred to another registry of the conservative imaginary. For instance, when the left accused the conservatives’ reticence in settling the statute of property by administrative acts, governing acts and political actions, which would have led to weakening the national solidarity, the conservative leader retorted by saying that the small number of landowners (250.000) as compared with that of the inhabitants (almost 28 million) in “England” did not mean that the “nation is lost”. “Does patriotism sell by the yard?”, he asked in the sitting of the Chamber on the 29th of May 1862, and he immediately answered his own question:

“No, gentlemen, patriotism consists in moral and fraternal feelings, in bonds with mutual interests, and I believe that not a single Romanian would say: I am not Romanian, because I have less than someone else and because I am not free to rob the man who has more than I do”⁵².

⁴⁹ Aneta Spiridon, “Concepția economică a lui Barbu Catargiu”, cit., p. 116.

⁵⁰ This subtitle recalls a statement from *Discursurile lui Barbu Catargiu (1859-1862 iunie 8)*, the sitting of the 22nd of June 1861 (supplement to *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 144), p. 316.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, the sittings of 29 May 1860 (*Prot. Șed. Adun. Legisl. a Țerii Rom.*, Tom. I, pp. 399 sqq), pp. 194-195; the 22nd of June 1861 (supplement to *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 144), pp. 316-317; 29 May 1862 (*Analele Economice*, p. 61 sqq), pp. 446-447; 2 June 1862 (*Analele Economice*, p. 74 sqq), p. 467. Vezi și B.K., *De la Proprieté en Moldo-Valachie*, cit., p. 53, where the author states explicitly that Germany, Italy, Belgium, France and England could serve as models for the definition, functioning and organisation of ownership.

⁵² *Discursurile lui Barbu Catargiu (1859-1862 iunie 8)*, the sitting of 29 May 1862 (*Analele Economice*, p. 61 sqq), pp. 446-447.

Finally, in the same context, he denounced the failure of Utopian imaginaries and that of equalitarian phalanxes, which professed the restructuring of ownership according to artificial, invented models, rather than by systems validated by their functioning in time. At a sitting of the Chamber on the 22nd of June 1861, he wondered what had produced the thinkers of the Antiquity, like, in Greece, Pythagoras or Plato or, in Rome, the Gracchi brothers, Tiberius and Gaius, tribunes of the plebeians, “in England, Thomas More (England is present here, too – our note); in Italy, Campanella; in France, Saint-Simon” or “Proudhon, the extravagant”? And he continued in the same vein:

“What is the similarity with the societies of the Dulcerian, the Tertullianists, the Anabaptists, who were just as bizarre in their names as they were fierce in their principles? [...] Whenever they escalated to forceful imposition, they only left ruins behind, only a horrifying desert; and whenever they contented themselves with words, they ended up being ridiculed and forgotten, as they deserved.”⁵³

In conclusion, Barbu Catargiu supported the image of an England where the political, economic, and social systems had a long tradition of functioning and had produced effects. In his opinion, all the data of this experience were salutary for the “Romanian people”, which he “trusted completely”, although he was very little familiar with political issues. During the discussion and at the vote for the vote of no confidence against the Ștefan Golescu government during the sitting of the 22nd of June 1861, the conservative leader sang once more a praise to the maturity and the political and civic experience of the English society, criticizing the leftist drift, the „vicious”, non-patriotic turn, which took advantage of the Romanians’ natural inclinations. In fact, he insisted for the tradition of liberties in the English public space, a possible norm for the Romanian scene, too, which was only dawning. Also then, Barbu Catargiu brought again to the fore the idea of a traditional aristocracy (a political body!), which had shown its strength meanwhile in the public service on the banks of the Thames:

“We have sought to try this Romanian people, to see whether it has the maturity of the old peoples, and we have seen that, although it is maybe less mature than the other old nations, it is still more mature than we thought; and what is more: it is gentle, patient, and still possesses those patriarchal virtues. However, by the side of this people, I have seen persons who are foreign from the nation, persons who were raised abroad, where they had sucked the venom, rather than the milk of civilisation –; we have seen these persons who are no longer of the Romanian people, because they have abandoned their ancestors’ virtues and have chosen for themselves only the vices of the foreign societies: that is the kind of people, gentlemen, whom we have feared, and not the Romanian people, whose confidence will never leave us. I fear though that the Romanian people does not yet have the experience of the nations who have aged under liberties, like the English nation, which for centuries has grown accustomed to respecting the law. That nation indeed has privileged

⁵³ *Ibidem*, the sitting of 2 June 1862 (*Analele Economice*, pp. 74 sqq), pp. 459-460.

men in its midst, and, despite that, they are respected and one does not throw scandalous words upon them like in our country.”⁵⁴

Further, in a polemic with C.A. Rosetti, who had previously mentioned the act of will of the French aristocracy when it gave up its privileges, Barbu Catargiu also recalled “the chaos of the Republic” proclaimed in Paris in 1848, which “had brought along the socialist principles, the principles of communism, which had frightened Europe”, which had brought “anarchy and slaughter”, scattered thereafter by Napoleon, which returned its order, peace, and above all its freedom to the Hexagon, eliminating the “scandalous libel”⁵⁵.

A FEW CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, based on the data I have brought to the discussion, I can unequivocally say that in Barbu Catargiu’s political imaginary England represented a model of organisation of public, economic and social life in the United Principalities, being at once an argumentative frame of reference in the philosophical debates where the conservative leader was involved.

It was not a singular option: both his collaborators from the 1859-1862 period (Apostol Arsache, Constantin N. Brăiloiu), and other conservative leaders who left their mark in the public arena up to the beginning of the 20th century (Alexandru Lahovary, Titu Maiorescu, Alexandru Marghiloman, etc.), shared his convictions.

Essentially, the conservative canon, which defined Barbu Catargiu’s ideological identity, valued three dimensions of the English political model for which he had a strong affinity. First, the conservative leader praised the efficient governing of the state, an expression of political stability, of legal experience validated in time, of respect for the order established from the dawn of time, of moderation in the political and social life. Second, he firmly believed that this good government was owed to the existence of an aristocratic body, whose regular political action identified itself since long ago with fulfilment of public service. It was an independent entity, whose representatives in the institutional corps of the Senate of the bicameral English Parliament ensured continuity at the level of political authority. Finally, beyond the state’s architecture, the bicameral parliamentary institution, the political players, Barbu Catargiu also insisted upon the tradition of liberties in the English public space. In the conservative leader’s opinion, all these should have been models for the Romanian society and political life.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, the sitting of 22 June 1861 (supplement to *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 144), pp. 316-317.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 317-318.