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THE IMAGE OF THE PAST IN CIRO SPONTONE'S 'HISTORIA DELLA TRANSILVANIA'

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This paper is focused on the image of the past of the Other in the early modern European writings as exemplified by Italian discourse about Transylvania in the narrative by Ciro Spontone.

The article analyzes the use of such categories as "antiquity" and "past" applied to the territory and people in Transylvania. The examination of discourses on people`s origin has demonstrated that references to the past were instrumentalized to create cultural hierarchies from the most civilized Saxons to ultimate barbarians Tatars. For this Spontone mainly used two intellectual frameworks, namely, the Roman antiquity, associated with civility, and Scythian origin.

Key words: Early Modern Period, 16-17th centuries, the Other, discourse, image of the past, Europe, periphery, Transylvania, Spontone, early modern ethnography.

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[1] National Research University Higher School of Economics (Saint Petersburg). Department of History. Associate Professor. E-mail: ekhvalkov@hse.ru

[2] National Research University Higher School of Economics (Saint Petersburg). Department of History. Senior Lecturer. E-mail: flevin@hse.ru

[3] National Research University Higher School of Economics (Saint Petersburg). E-mail: adkuznetsova_5@edu.hse.tu

Introduction

Renaissance and post-Renaissance ethnography was often focused around the image of the European or non-European Other.[5] The long-term engagement of the Italian and otherwise Western travelers and colonists in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe as well as the presence of the Italian intellectuals in the entourage of the Western political actors dealing with diplomatic affairs in the East enhanced the ethnographic interest. Since the times of Marco Polo, William of Rubruck, Ruy González de Clavijo and the authors of the first manuals of trade (the most famous of them probably being the *Pratica della mercatura* by Francesco Balducci Pegolotti), the geography, ethnic groups, languages, traditions and history of the Eastern European population were in the focus of the late medieval and early modern ethnographic writing for political, commercial and intellectual reasons. Moreover, intellectuals of that time were highly interested in antiquity whatever they defined it as. In many cases people who were engaged in studying the ancient past were also the ones to write ethnographic accounts. These two fields of inquiry were in a close dialogue with each other.[6] Particularly, that meant that the past of the Other was examined, reevaluated, contested and framed into a broader world history related both to the Biblical and to Classical narratives.

The present study addresses the problems of the understanding of antiquity/past in the early modern writings about the Other; particularly we examine *History of Transylvania (Historia della Transilvania)* by the Italian author Ciro Spontone. Spontone travelled to Transylvania in 1601 as a secretary of Giorgio Basta, and as a result of it he wrote *History of Transylvania*, published posthumously in 1638. This work represented not only Spontone`s opinion on the past and present state of Transylvania; it also reflected views of many Italian soldiers and civilians who served in this region.[7] In this article we focus on the use of antiquity/past for the purposes of legitimization, building up the discourse of civilization vs. barbarity, the mechanisms of construction of the

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[5] See on the Other e.g.: Harald Hendrix, "Imagining the Other: On Xenophobia and Xenophilia in Early Modern Europe," *Leidschrift* 28-1 (2013): 7-20. Joan-Pau Rubiés, "Ethnography and Cultural Translation in the Early Modern Missions," *Studies in Church History* 53 (2017): 272–310. Peter Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). *The New World in Early Modern Italy, 1492–1750*, ed. Elizabeth Horodowich and Lia Markey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). On the medieval Other see also: Luigi Andrea Berto, "The Muslims as Others in the Chronicles of Early Medieval Southern Italy," *Viator. Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 45, 3 (2014): 1-24.

[6] Kathryn Taylor, "Ancients and moderns in sixteenth-century ethnography," *History of European Ideas*, 46, no. 2 (2020):114.

[7] Tamás Kruppa, "Hungary and the Hungarians in Italian Public Opinion during and after the Long Turkish War". In *A Divided Hungary in Europe: Exchanges, Networks and Representations, 1541-1699; Volume 3: The Making and Uses of the Image of Hungary and Transylvania*. Edited by K. Teszelszky. (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2014), 103.

discourse related to antiquity, multiple antiquities and the function of the image of antiquity/past in Spontone`s account of the Other.

Ciro Spontone and his 'Historia della Transilvania'

Ciro Spontone's *Historia della Transilvania* (1638) is a classical account about the Other and their past written by a Western European intellectual.[8] Spontone was an Italian politician and writer, who served the Duke of Mantua Vincenzo I Gonzaga and participated together with him in 1601 in war against the Ottomans in Hungary. Spontone was born in Bologna around 1554 – 1556 in a noble family, well-bred in the intellectual milieus and received Renaissance Humanist education since his childhood. He was at the service of Cristoforo Boncompagni, Archbishop of Ravenna, of Ludovico Bentivoglio, bishop of Policastro, of Jacques of Savoy, 2nd duke of Nemours, and of Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of Savoy. There he began his literary activity and published extensively poetry and treatises, as well as some texts linked to the topical issues of the Italian politics of the day. Later he served in 1586/1587 – 1593 to Rodolfo Gonzaga, Marquis of Castiglione delle Stiviere, where he wrote refined texts including political and philosophical treatises and prosaic and poetic dialogues magnifying his patron and full of political implications.[9]

Rodolfo Gonzaga died in 1593, and Spontone was called to the service of Vincenzo I Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua, where he made a stellar career, was appointed viscount and commissioner of Rodigo, and knighted, continuing at the same time his literary and publication activity, almost all of his works being highly politicized and instrumental and comprising constant political reflection. It was Vincenzo I Gonzaga with whom Spontone went on a military expedition to Hungary against the Ottomans during The Long Turkish War or Thirteen Years' War (1593 – 1606), and among other numerous works written during this period, he wrote his *History of Transylvania*; as well as most of his works bearing dedications to princes and military commander,

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[8] See: Girolamo Tiraboschi, *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Modena: Società Tipografica, 1792). Giovanni Fantuzzi, *Notizie degli scrittori bolognesi* (Bologna: Stamperia di S. Tommaso d'Aquino, 1790), 32-34. Luigi Rossi, *Gli scrittori politici bolognesi contributo alla storia universale della scienza politica.* (Bologna: Società tipografica già compositori, 1888). Gianluigi Betti, *Scrittori politici bolognesi nell'età moderna* (Genova: Name, 2000).

[9] See e.g.: Ciro Spontone, *Nereo poema di Ciro Spontone et alcune altre sue rime* (Verona: appresso Girolamo Discepolo ad instantia di M.A. Palazzolo, 1588). Idem, *II Bottrigaro overo del Nuovo verso enneasillabo dialogo del sig. Ciro Spontone. Al... sereniss. sig. principe di Parma & di Piacenza &c* (Verona: presse Girolamo Discepolo, ad istanza del sig. Flaminio Borghetti, 1589). Idem, *La corona del Principe* (Verona: Discepolo, 1590).

this one was dedicated to Giorgio Basta, Count of Huszt, a famous military commander in that war.

The discourse on the historical past of the population of Transylvania in the text of Spontone covered the ancient history of the ethnic groups which inhabit the region, which he introduced to the wider European audience. Starting from the chorography, he further shifted to the history of the Transylvanian ethnicities, and here in many respects his accounts can be seen as partly antiquarian – he was interested in the origins of the ethnic groups that inhabited Transylvania, their customs and traditions – and, although being a somewhat uncritical compilation,[10] fitted into the broader array of the Renaissance antiquarian narratives.

The sources of Spontone will be discussed below; however, it worth mentioning here that he was an eyewitness and direct participant of the Long War and of the corresponding political processes, and therefore much of his discourse was based on his own personal experience; at the same time, being a man of contemporary Renaissance Humanist scholarship and a prolific writer, Spontone quite obviously used certain political rhetoric, images of the past, *topoi*, and repetitive schemes of description common to the intellectual milleus to which he belonged.

Spontone tried to trace the history of Transylvania, its geographical position, population, religion and traditions since ancient times, so he heavily relied on the classical and, even more, post-classical late antique and medieval ethnography, as well as reproduced sometimes the data of ethnographic knowledge contemporary to him, while writing about the Scythian origins of the Transylvanian population. To a certain extent the accounts of Spontone can be classified as a Renaissance ethnographic narrative, a systematized picture of the history of the region. He produced a specific vision of the ethnic groups of Transylvania, putting them in a kind of cultural hierarchy stretching from the most civilized Saxons to the most barbarous Tatars, which are naturally most savage, cruel and ferocious of all the folks inhabiting Transylvania. He constantly came back to the barbaric image of the Tatars already present in the beginning of their description. Thus he connected the vision of the Tatars to a consistent representation of utmost barbarity and savagery.

Nonetheless, things become much more complicated, if one tries to figure out, to which extent Spontone relied on the native local sources, whether written or oral. The native sources were not completely silenced by Spontone, but were rather poorly used and his knowledge of non-Western sources is rather superficial. Why did not Spontone make extensive use of the native

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[10] Indeed in many respects his attitude to the sources he used is seemingly uncritical.

sources (although we cannot say that he fully disregarded them)? The first reason is the linguistic one – apparently, Spontone did not learn indigenous vernaculars. After all, he did not need it – he could comfortably communicate with the educated Saxons and Hungarians in Latin (or probably some widespread European vernacular); whereas he most likely had little or no motivation to communicate with the Wallachians (apart from those who were Roman Catholics and could understand Latin) or, a fortiori, with the Tatars. Moreover, we can find a certain bias: the Roman and Saxon components for Spontone were associated with civility and well-being, while the 'Scythian' one – with relative barbarism, and the Tatar one – with utmost barbarism.

Spontone's approach was similar to the approach of the Renaissance antiquarians of his time, combining extensive use of classical works and limited use of native sources. Spontone's antiquarian research was aimed at gathering indigenous evidence and most likely he thought that he strived to impartiality. His reception and interpretation of sources was fairly uncritical, and the whole narrative was determined by the intention to present a picture of cultural hierarchy of societies stretching from the most civilized to the most barbaric societies and establishing a cultural distance among them, as well as between the author / audience and the Other.

However, Spontone did not show any sign of treating the native sources (either written or oral ones) skeptically as untrustworthy or seeing them as explicitly inferior to Biblical, Classical, or other ones; moreover, he apparently relied on the native sources, especially narrating the history of the Mongol conquests. However, it is not given for granted that Spontone actually read any Oriental / Eastern sources: the information originating from them could equally have been transmitted to him orally or through the Western accounts which reproduced their data. He did not discuss the reliability of the sources, and also did not seem to care much about their authenticity or critical approach towards them, at least he did not say explicitly about it.

The meaning of antiquity: multiple pasts

The Early Modern period marked a particular interest of Europeans in their ancient past. This was also an issue for people from previous times, but in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern period this interest became more professional due to the rise of Humanism.[11] What we now understand as classical antiquity was named "the time of the *antiqui* or "Ancients" by Petrarch; *antiquitas* or "Antiquity" for humanists after him."[12] However, this term was not as

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[11] Karl A.E. Enenkel and Konrad A. Ottenheym, *Ambitious Antiquities, Famous Forebears: Constructions of a Glorious Past in the Early Modern Netherlands and in Europe.* Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, Volume: 307/41. (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019), 14.
[12] Ibid, 89.

obvious as it may seem for us now. Dealing with the notion of Antiquity in the Early Modern writings, we apparently deal with the temporal dimension of antiquity and the problem of multiple antiquities, since the concept itself was quite heterogeneous. The antiquities found in the studied sources are blurred, fluid and volatile in terms of the very definition of concept, its geographic and chronological frames, its continuity and variability, and the borders between the past and the present. In some of the writings this term could apply not only to the times of Greeks and Romans, but also to what we now refer as Early Middle Ages, up to 800 A.D., the reign of Charlemagne, or even around 1100 A.D.[13]

In the early modern ethnographic accounts, the meaning of the concept "antiquity" and related terms related to the Other vary to a considerable degree. Further, there is a following problem: did the given author, Ciro Spontone in our case, distinguish between "antiquity" and "past", how did he define this distinction (if he did at all), and which terms did he prefer in description of one and the other? Did he apply an antiquarian approach? Was he interested in the material remnants of the past and in historical linguistic studies? To which extent were the native antiquities relevant and authoritative for him, or were they used just as background material, or not involved at all? Did the author apply the biblical scheme of universal chronology and the chronology of classical antiquity, the most authoritative for the early modern intellectual, and did he try to fit the local antiquity into this chronology? Which chronological frames and gradation of antiquity did he apply, and where did the antiquity / past (distant past?) start and end for him?

Thus we have to figure out, what Spontone implied under the "antiquity" / "past", where he placed the antiquity / past of the given people or ethnic group in question, whether this antiquity / past was perceived by him as static or dynamic, and whether he distinguished between the past and the present.

The vocabulary of Spontone applied to the description of antiquity varied to a high extent. The past was often referred to in an indirect way. References to antiquity and / or past are found in Spontone's 'History' pretty often. Spontone often referred to 'our times' (*questi tempi*, *nostri tempi*) and 'times passed' (*tempi andati*, *anni andati*), i.e. immediate or remote past. The discourse on antiquity (and the respective words like *anticamente*, *antichi*) was however also present in his writings.

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[13] Karl A.E. Enenkel and Konrad A. Ottenheym, *Ambitious Antiquities, Famous Forebears*, 93.

Early modern ethnography actively used biblical chronology and Mosaic account of history, which linked peopling of the world with origin from Noah.[14] However, for Spontone, biblical as well as classical chronology, albeit present, were still of secondary importance. The rather implicit definition of antiquity of Spontone was fairly broad. He often spoke about the "before" and "after" times, but this "before" and "after" were relative and linked to different periods rather than to some particular event or process (e.g. the Christianization, or the periods of reign). There was a certain chronology based on waves of invasion and settlement, as well as a chronological gradation of the ethnic groups that invaded and populated Transylvania, but, first of all, chronology was in this case of secondary importance, and, second, as it will be discussed below, the chronological model of Spontone was the direct reflection of his cultural hierarchy, the first newcomers standing on the top of the pyramid of civilization, and the most recent newcomers being the most barbarous. Still, there was no explicit cultural definition of antiquity and the nations were not divided into 'more ancient' and 'more recent', but rather into more civilized and more barbarous.

Spontone seemingly saw some kind of distance between the Self (and the culture and society to which he belongs) and the Saxons, however, he did not underline it too much, as well as the temporal difference. For Spontone, the history of the Saxons of Transylvania was basically the history of uninterrupted continuity without any signs of consistent temporal periodization and significant references to the correlation between 'past' and our time or the beginning of 'our time'. This was in general terms a history of a successful cultural rise with no references to cultural decline. It was, however, different in the case of the Székelys, Hungarians, Wallachians, and for sure Tatars, who, according to Spontone, remained completely untouched by the civilizing influence of Roman and post-Roman European Christian civilization (see below).

Further, he was not very much motivated to distinguish between the antiquity of the past and the antiquity still present in Transylvania in the life, language, customs and institutions of the given societies, although a deeper research can be done here. In some cases Spontone referred to antiquity while speaking about ancient customs, traditions, laws, and institutions of Transylvania;[15] given his background as a councilor and a diplomat this interest towards legal and institutional history can be seen as instrumental.

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[14] Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism. Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11.

[15] "Ma veggendo, che Sigismondo s'era avveduto de fredolenti suoi artifici, suscitò, e sparse voce per tutto, che governandosi la Moldavia a nome del Transilvano, risultava in dishonore, et in carico della Corona di Polonia, dalla quale per antico instituto solevano i Vaivodi di quella esser eletti, ricever le leggi, e la successione." "But seeing that Sigismund had become aware of his fraudulent tricks, he stirred up and spread the rumour throughout the country that,

Was Spontone referring rather to the "antiquity" and / or "past" of the territories or ethnic groups that he described? Spontone's discourse on antiquity covered both Roman and barbarian antiquity (e.g. the origins of the Transylvanian Saxons, Székelys, Hungarians, and Tatars). It looks like the author was taking as a starting point the past of Transylvania, a historical region, he moved on from the chorographical description to the description of the past of the peoples that inhabited it and their origins. We face multiple antiquities here. One can try to study how Spontone wrote about certain ethnic groups and find out the discursive causation and conditionality of the category of "antiquity" and / or "past" in his writings in relation to the broader ethnographic discourse of the Early Modern period.

Spontone started from antiquity of the Transylvania as a territory: "Transylvania, which in ancient times was called Dacia, and in our times is so called because of the gracious passage of the forests, often making the triumphal Palms of the ancient Emperors of Rome sprinkled with blood, was a worthy subject of the rarest and clearest pens of the Historians of those Centuries."[16] Through the phrase "la Transilvania, ch' anticamente appellata Dacia" we can see that antiquity there meant times of the Roman Empire. The Roman past was still visible in this territory, because some ancient cities were still used by new inhabitants. For example, Spontone wrote about Brassovia (Greek 'Stephanopolis', Alamann 'Kronstat', Latin 'Corona'), which was in his opinion identical to ancient Dacian Sarmisegetusa, becoming Ulpia Traiana Augusta after the conquest and death of King Decebalus,[17] and moved on to speak about the people who inhabited the region. This was also true for Albagiulia: "is the town where the prince lives, deriving its name from Julia, mother of Antoninus Pius; [...]. The Romans, if the ancient historians are to be believed, carried no arms further, at a time when it was already divided by the middle of the said river, when it was called Apullon and communicated glory and pure valour to a city as ancient, as great and as

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by governing Moldavia in the name of Transylvania, he was dishonouring and charging the Polish Crown, from which, by an ancient institution, the Vaudois of that country were elected and received the laws and the succession." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania*, 41.

[16]"La Transilvania, ch' anticamente appellata Dacia, ne' nostri tempi vien così detta per lo gra transito delle selve, rendendo ben spesso asperse di sangue le trionfali Palme sublimi de gli antichi Imperadori di Roma, fù degno soggetto delle più rare, e celebri penne de gl' Istorici di quei Secoli." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania*, 3.

[17] "Brassovia, che da Greci Stefanopoli, da Alamanni Cronstat, e da Latini Corona vien nominata, è, come riferiscono alcuni, l'antica Zarmizegetusa, Città Regal della Dacia, la quale dopò la volontaria morte del Re Decebalo sotrì il nome di Vulpia Traiana Augusta." "Brassovia, which the Greeks call Stefanopoli, the Alamanni Cronstat and the Latins Corona, is, as some report, the ancient Zarmizegetusa, a royal city of Dacia, which after the voluntary death of King Decebalus took the name Vulpia Traiana Augusta." Ibid, 5.

famous, in whose crumbling walls are found ancient medals, and precious copper, silver and gold articles of very high distinction"[18].

Although we can see that Albagiulia was still inhabited, its conditions were not good; it was closer to ruins, within "le cui diroccate Mura" ("whose crumbling walls") one could find remnants of Roman past. Spontone wrote about Roman ruins again while mentioning Torda, where one "can admire the remains of the Ancient Romans, in which they held legions to afflict the harsh peoples of Dacia."[19] Thus, Transylvania was portrayed as a territory full of ruins of the times of the Roman Empire, ghosts of ancient glory. It was a rhetorical gesture, because the focus on ruins also helped the author to create an atmosphere for his history, as he himself wrote, it was a tragic theatre for his stories about various deaths and unfortunate events.[20] There Spontone drew on a popular image of Transylvania and Hungary among Italians in his time – these territories were portrayed as divided, full of revolts and heresy.[21]

One should take into account that Spontone's *History of Transylvania* was written in the époque of territorialization in early modern Europe and growing interest in the history of territories. Seemingly, his work was indeed dedicated to the territory rather than to the population (after all, it was called 'History of Transylvania'); however, closer reading reveals that – at least as much as the antiquity and historical past is concerned – Spontone was interested rather in people and ethnic groups that inhabited Transylvania. Starting from topography and chorography, he further dwelled on the description of the ethnic groups as single entities with distinct paths (although in the same perspective of the theory of the ascent of mankind) and distinct antiquities, the territory of the region serving rather as a background for their presentation. Ethnicity for him prevailed over territory, the narrative was ethnicity-centered rather than territory-centered; still the ethnicities pertained to the same territory.

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[18] "Albagiulia è la Città, dove fà il Prencipe residenza, la qual tolse il nome da Giulia Madre d'Antonino Pio; [...]. Li Romani non più oltre portarono le lor arme, se creder vogliamo a gli Antichi Historici, ne i quali tempiera già divisa per mezo da detto Fiume, quand'ella co'l nome di Apullon riferiva la gloria, e'l prisco valore d'una Città, antica altretanto, quanto grande, e quanto famosa, le cui diroccate Mura ritrovansi Medaglie antichissime, e pretiosissime di rame, d'argento." Ibid, 7.

[19] "Torda, ove s'ammirano gli vestigi de gli Antichi Romani, in cui tenevano le leggioni per affrenare gli duri Popoli della Dacia." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania*, 7.

[20] "Essendo, che in questo Regno già succintamente descritto, oltre gli gravi incendi, e rovine, rappresenteransi, quasi in Teatro lugubre, e tragico, notabili, e varie mortalità, successi infausti, infelicissimi avvenimenti, portati in breve spatio di empo dall'incostante scambievolezza delle mutabili attioni humane." "In this Kingdom, which has already been briefly described, in addition to the serious fires and ruins, there will be, almost as if in a gloomy and tragic theatre, notable and various deaths, inauspicious successes and unhappy events, brought about in a short space of time by the inconstant exchange of changeable human actions." Ibid, 8.

[21] Tamás Kruppa, "Hungary and the Hungarians in Italian Public Opinion during and after the Long Turkish War", 103-104.

Therefore, the Roman past was not the only past in Spontone`s work. He proceeded by describing present inhabitants of Transylvania, starting from the Saxons and ending with the Tartars. He gave brief accounts about every 'nation', and the main place was dedicated to the time they came to Transylvania. These stories will be examined below; here we would like to have an overview of them.

Firstly, the Saxons were called descendants of Alamanni who entered this territory in the times of Charlemagne. Then, the Székelys (*Siculi*) and Hungarians originated from Scythians who had left their lands in search for a better life and ended up in Transylvania. It is hard to date this process, although Spontone also calls Székelys "*vere reliquie del Re Attila flagello di Dio*"(*true relics of King Attila the Scourge of God*)[22]. The Tartars here represent a particularly interesting case. Their roots were also traced to Scythians, however, the position of Tartars in the Spontone`s cultural hierarchy was different from that of Székelys and Hungarians.

Spontone had a clear vision of a developmentalist picture of the history of mankind, for example, the progression from nomadic to sedentary life, which we will discuss below. However, his images of the societies were still fairly static; Spontone almost did not make an attempt to trace the development of the Székelys, Hungarians and Wallachians, not to say Tatars; whereas the Saxons in his account were represented as rather more civilized if not initially, then at least from the times they inhabited Transylvania, or the times of Charlemagne. He saw both the continuity and some difference between the past and the present of the societies in question, but it looks like he was generally rather not interested in studying them in diachronic perspective and in looking for significant change in their culture. Both the antiquity and the present times of the Saxons were equated with the stage of civility (although to a slightly different extent), while both the antiquity and the present times of the Tatars were equated with the stage of utmost barbarity. We can assume that the times of the Roman empire and, probably, the reign of Charlemagne were for Spontone a part of Antiquity, but it is unclear where there was a boundary between antiquity/ancient past and other chronological periods. Spontone focused on creating cultural hierarchies rather than elaborating chronology.

However, what is interesting here, is that Spontone provided a reader with the story about the Tartars being servants of an Indian ruler and said that it was in "prischi tempi"[23], pristine times.

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[22] "La seconda è quella de' Siculi, creduti, e stimati vere reliquie del Re Attila flagello di Dio, la cui Regione è detta Siculia." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania*, 4.
[23] Ibid, 9.

Where do we locate this epoch? Was their exodus from Scythia also a part of these pristine times? Then how did he denote a period when the Tartars entered Transylvania?

Another interesting point here is that Spontone also did not provide a reader with a history of Saxons, the most civilized people. In early modern discourse the barbarians had no history because they were still in the primitive original condition. They were still warlike, some of them still nomads, and they did not go through stages. Conversely, the civilized nations were believed to change over the spin of time.[24] Still, we have Saxons already civilized, already preferring agriculture over nomadism. The answer to this can be that Spontone traced them back to Charlemagne's reign implying that it was he who civilized them or at least it was his influence.

For Spontone, "antiquity" of Transylvania mostly could be applied to the Roman past (e.g. he spoke about the ruins of the Roman settlements); speaking about inhabitants of Transylvania, he referred to the times of their origin without special name for the period: the origins of the Transylvanian Saxons from the Alemanni, who migrated to Transylvania in the Carolingian times, or the origins of the Székelys, Hungarians, and Tatars from Scythia. However, there were few cases when the word "antique" seemed to refer to something else, not to the ancient Romans. Sometimes Spontone mentioned antique laws or prescriptions: 'consuetudine antica'[25], 'antiche leggi del Regno'[26], 'per antico instituto'[27]. Spontone wrote about multiple pasts, and territory and every people had its own antiquity/past which did not overlap with others.

Thus we can see that antiquity / ancient past was not explicitly associated with a particular period, and the image of antiquity / ancient past was exploited in order to explain the present state of the people of Transylvania.

Antiquity / past and cultural hierarchies

Studying the early modern writings which comprise the discourse of antiquity one unavoidably faces the axiological dimension of the latter. The past could in some instances be described in a neutral or seemingly neutral way; however, more often it was used in an instrumental way in order to build a certain discourse relevant to the époque of the authors of the sources. Was

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[24] Keith Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility: Manners and Civilization in Early Modern England.* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2018), 180.

[25] Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania*, 325.

[26] Ibid, 325.

[27] Ibid, 41.

the past a neutral category in the descriptions of the Other? Which were the characteristic features of the representation of the antiquity / past of the Other? How were they used as tools of legitimization and how was the discourse of civilization vs. barbarity constructed (if it was)?

It was already mentioned that Spontone described the ancient past of peoples to explain their present condition, namely, to create cultural hierarchies. Spontone, being a fully-fledged member and a typical representative of Renaissance Humanist intellectual environment, had a fairly clear idea of unidirectional social development from barbarity to civility; and clearly according to him different societies advanced on this way to different extent. In this respect the universal chronology and the cultural periods of different societies did not overlap; clearly, for Spontone the Saxons were the most advanced among the societies of Transylvania, while the Tatars were the most backward, Székelys, Hungarians and Wallachians being in between.

Notably, Spontone saw as one of the landmarks of the progress from barbarity to civility the shift from nomadism to the sedentary lifestyle, which was followed by construction of the established settlement with civil and political forms of life (see below his discourse on the Saxons, Székelys, Hungarians, Wallachians, and Tatars). Here Spontone again drew on the widespread idea that people went through different stages, however, again, the author did not elaborate this idea and explicitly mentioned only two stages.

References to the origin of these peoples were the main criteria on which Spontone built his cultural hierarchy of civility and barbarity. Speaking about Transylvania, Spontone focused specifically on the Saxons. He said that the Saxons of Transylvania could boast of being the glorious descendants of those venerable Alemannic tribes who, in the time of Charlemagne, came there and established the 'German colonies (*Colonie Tedesche*)'; he also stressed that their dialect was 'Alemannic,' they had 'leggi Imperiali' and lived 'in the German style (*alla Tedescha*)', and therefore the region was called 'Zainven Burgen', i.e. 'seven cities, from seven inhabited by Saxons'.[28] As in some other cases, Spontone deemed the Alamanni to be more civilized than other

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[28] "Si vantano i Sàssoni di quella Provincia habitatori, d'essere gloriosi rampolli di quelle honorate stirpi Alamanne, che ne' tempi di Carlo Magno vi si condussero, per renderla popolata, e ripiena di Colonie Tedesche, In prova di che adducon non solo la lingua, e'l nome, ma le leggi stesse, e i costumi, chiamandosi Essi Sàssoni, parlando quasi schietto Alamanno, osservando anco il più delle volte le leggi Imperiali, e vivendo alla Tedescha, da' quala Provincia vien detta Zainven Burghen, ch'altro non suona al nostro Idioma, che Città sette, dalle sette habitate da essi Sàssoni." "The Saxons of that Province, who are its inhabitants, boast that they are the glorious descendants of those honoured Alemannic tribes who, in the time of Charlemagne, came there to populate and fill it with German colonies, In proof of this they adduce not only the language and the name, but also the laws themselves and the customs, calling themselves the Saxons, speaking almost straightforwardly Alamanno, observing even more often than not the imperial laws, and living in the German style, from which province is called Zainven Burghen, which does not sound to our language other than seven cities, from the seven inhabited by the Saxons." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania,* 4.

barbarous tribes based on the fact that they adopted agriculture and a sedentary lifestyle, unlike other barbarous nomads.

Going on with his discourse of 'civility vs. barbarity', Spontone wrote that Cibinio (called in Italian in this way after River Sibinio that surrounds it), the key city of Transylvania, located in the middle of a vast plain, was called Hermanstat by the Saxons, which name derived from the name of its founder, a certain Hermano; again, the citizens (sic), who were Saxons, were 'wise', 'agreeable, generous, and civilized'.[29] Again here we face the discourse of civility, linked also to the notion of civility and citizenship. This concept and its legal practice in medieval Europe is actively discussed in contemporary historiography.[30] The definition of citizenship varied to a considerable extent in different European regions; moreover, in some cases there could be different categories of citizens (like *civis*, *burgensis*, *habitator* etc.).

In a similar way Spontone described Zebeso, or Sashebeso, which had 'ancient fortifications' and was 'very noble because of the beauty of its buildings and eighteen royal villages' (he also referred to 'happy districts' in line with the Latin rhetorical tradition). Mentioning the fish ponds and fishery, which 'in addition to pleasure and sweet delight, brings considerable relief to the inhabitants of Saxony' and stresses the central position of 'this City, in which their predecessors founded their first colonies'.[31] The whole discourse about the central position of the city and the

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[29] "Cibinio, principal Città della Transilvania, che posta nel mezo d'ampia Campagna, nè da Colline, nè da Montagne signoreggiata, vien da Popoli, e habitatori di essa detta Hermanstat, questo nome prendendo da un Hermano, che primiero pose i suoi fondamenti, ma da gl'Italiani vien chiamata Sibinio, nome d'un Fiume, che le sue muraglie circonda, e le sue campagne felicita: Ella è circondata di grosse mura, disesa, e munita di bastioni, attorniata di cingenti fosse profonde, e larghe, che di peschiere in uso converse da providi Cittadini, pesci riserbano in quantità grande, e in qualità celeberrimi; e finalmente ella è habitata dà Sàssoni sudetti, comodi, generosi, e civili." "Cibinio, the principal city of Transylvania, which is situated in the middle of a large countryside, ruled neither by hills nor by mountains, is called Hermanstat by the people and inhabitants of the city. It takes this name from a Herman, who first laid its foundations, but by the Italians it is called Sibinio, the name of a river that surrounds its walls and enriches its countryside: It is surrounded by large walls, uncovered, and small with bastions, surrounded by deep and wide pits, which are filled with fish ponds, used by providential citizens, and which provide fish in great quantities and of the most famous quality; and finally it is inhabited by the Saxons, who are comfortable, generous and civilized." Ibid, 5.

[30] See on the medieval Italian concept of citizenship: Derek Heater, *Citizenship: the civic ideal in world history, politics and education* (London/New York: Longman, 1990). Albert Pollard, "History and Citizenship," in *Factors in Modern History* (London, 1932). Ennio Cortese, "Cittadinanza. Diritto intermedio," *Enciclopedia del diritto* 7 (Milan, 1960), 138. Walter Ullmann, "The rebirth of the citizen on the eve of the 'Renaissance period'," in *Aspects of the Renaissance: A Symposium. Papers Presented at a Conference on the Meaning of the Renaissance*, ed. A.R. Lewis (Austin, 1967), 5–25. Julius Kirshner, "Civitas sibi faciat civem: Bartolus of Sassoferrato's doctrine on the making of a citizen," *Speculum* 48 (1973): 694–713. Michael Ignatieff, "The myth of citizenship," *Queen's quart. Kingston* 94/4 (1987): 966–985. *Città e diritti di cittadinanza, Atti del Convegno ACLI di Milano (1989),* ed. F.Totaro (Milan: Angeli, 1990). Alison Brown, "City and citizen: changing perceptions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries," in *City states in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy,* ed. by A. Molho, K. Raaflaub, J. Emlen (Stuttgart, 1991), 93 – 111.

[31] "Zebeso, over Saszebeso, ben ch'egli sia di fortificatione antica, e non bene intesa, nondimeno egli è nobilissimo per la bellezza delle sue fabriche, e per dicisette Borghi reali, in cui dividesi il felicissimo suo Contado. Questa per ritrovarsi nel piano di larghissima Valle, è circondata d'intorno di gratiose Peschere, popolate è ripiene di grati Pesci, ch'oltre il diletto, e'l dolce diporto, apportano a Sàssoni gionamento di non poco rilievo, mentre per sede lor principale

words about the colonies appealed here to the Ancient Latin history writing and the image of the polis of antiquity.

Building further his ethnographic discourse, after the Saxons Spontone mentioned the second ethnic group, the Székelys, living in Siculia and allegedly linked to Attila[32]– a commonplace in many historical narratives of his time, where the Hungarians were identified as Huns who came with Attila, or as Scythians (indeed, Spontone thought that the Székelys, like the Hungarians, descended from the Scythians, and links 'Scitulia' and 'Siculia'). Here Spontone used at least three different well-established discourses.

First of all, it was the fictitious Hun-Magyar kin relationship. The association of Hungarians and Székelys with Attila, who once ravaged Italy, helped to construct their negative image for an Italian public opinion.[33]Secondly, it was the popular stereotype of descendants from Scythians, who were obliged to be warlike. The origin from Scythia was a common place for those peoples who were considered to be less or completely uncivilized. Scythians were associated with nomadism, one of the first stages of human history, when people were almost all the time involved in the plunder and warfare.[34] Like the Hungarians, the Székelys, according to Spontone, associated their origin with those 'unbridled Scythians' (*Sciti indomiti*) who, wanting to find happier places than their own, descended and settled most of the area (*Clima*), 'but occupying a special part of Transylvania, called by them Scitulia, which later received the distorted name Siculia.' Spontone described them as fierce and fearless warriors, 'despisers of all dangers, greedy and thirsty for war, and not able to be confused by anything, thirsty for military glory. Their natural ferocity was enhanced by the peculiarities of the terrain in which they lived, most of which was located between the patterns of impassable mountains, both because of the density of the forest and because of the narrowness of the well-protected and visible passes.'[35] Thus, the first two stereotypes were

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essa Città riconoscono, nella quale i suoi predecessori piantarono l primiere loro Colonie." "Zebeso, or Saszebeso, although it has ancient fortifications, and is not well understood, is nevertheless very noble for the beauty of its buildings, and for the eighteen royal boroughs in which it divides its very happy county. It is surrounded by grateful fishponds, populated and filled with grateful fish, which, in addition to their delight and sweet pleasure, provide the people of Saxony with not inconsiderable sustenance, while their principal seat is this City, in which their predecessors planted their first colonies." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania,* 7.

[32] "La seconda è quella de' Siculi, creduti, e stimati vere reliquie del Re Attila flagello di Dio, la cui Regione è detta Siculia." "The second is that of the Székelys, believed to be true relics of King Attila, the scourge of God, whose region is called Siculia." Ibid, 4.

[33] Tamás Kruppa. "Hungary and the Hungarians in Italian Public Opinion during and after the Long Turkish War," 89.

[34] Keith Thomas, *In Pursuit of Civility,* 183-184.

[35] "Li Siculi, come gli Ungheri, riferiscono l'origine loro a quei Sciti indomiti, che desiderosi di più felici stanze, che le lor proprie, scesero a popolare gran tratto di quel Clima, ma occupando una special parte di Transilvania, chiamata fù da loro Scitulia, che poi con corrotto nome vien appellata Siculia. Questi sono feroci, intrepidi disprezzatori d'ogni

accompanied here with some kind of geographic determinism: the dark forests and narrow mountain passes were naturally created for the barbarous warriors.

As we can see, Székelys followed the Saxons in the Spontone's hierarchy of civility and barbarity. They were much less civilized than the Saxons and their nomadic origins seemed to him to be out of question. The origin of Hungarians and related groups such as Székelys from Huns who came with Attila was a historiographical commonplace of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period; however, their origin from Scythians represent a more complex thing. First of all, *mimesis* should be taken into account while reading the medieval and early modern authors: for instance, in the Byzantine narratives the peoples of the West (French, German etc.) could easily be called Galls or Celts; same worked the other way round: the ethnic groups of the Eastern Europe could be called in the Scythians irrespective of their real ethnic background, whereas Muslim people (even be they Turkic) could receive a marker of 'Persians,' 'Saracens,' 'Ismailites,' or 'Agarians.'

Thus, Spontone considered the Székelys to be the descendants of Scythians; same was true in his opinion for the Hungarians, who also descended from Scythians and were in many respects similar to the Székelys (quite an obvious intuition from the linguistic point of view!); moreover, Spontone surprisingly put Wallachians to the same group, distinguishing, however, the 'good' Catholic Wallachians from the 'bad' Greek Orthodox schismatic ones.

The third place in the Spontone's hierarchy of civility vs. barbarity (and should we probably say – in his axiology?) was occupied by the Hungarians, 'to which can be added some people with very different customs and laws, which under the name Wallachians inhabit partly good villages and partly secluded places of deserts, abandoning the customs of other peoples in order to preserve their natural ferocity, observing Greek religion and law.'[36] Thus, the Hungarians stood below the

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pericolo, cupidi, e disio si di guerra, e fuori di modovaghi, ambitiosi di militar gloria. Accresce la natural loro ferocità il sito del paese don' habitano, posto la maggior parte trà strettezze alpestri di Monti impenetrabili, sì per la foltezza de' boschi, com' anco per l'angustie di ben custoditi, e guardati passi." "The Siculi, like the Hungarians, trace their origin to those untamed Scythians, who, desirous of happier rooms than their own, descended to populate a large part of that climate, but occupying a special part of Transylvania, called Scitulia by them, which was then called Siculia by a corrupted name. They are fierce, fearless, despisers of all dangers, covetous and eager for war, and outrageously ambitious for military glory. Their natural ferocity is increased by the site of the country they inhabit, located for the most part in the narrow mountainous areas of impenetrable mountains, both because of the thickness of the woods and because of the narrowness of the well-guarded and watched passes." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania,* 4.

[36] "La terza è de gli Ungheri, à quali potrebbesi ancora aggiungere certa gente di costumi, e di legge differentissima, che co'l nome di Vallacca parte habita alcuni buoni Villaggi, e parte le riposte solitudini de' deserti, abbusando la prattica de gli altri popoli, per conservare la loro naturale ferocità, osservano questi la religione, e legge Grechesca." "The third is that of the Hungarians, to whom we could also add a certain people of very different customs and law, who, under the name of Wallachia, partly inhabit some good villages, and partly the secluded solitudes of deserts,

Székelys, but the Wallachians, whom Spontone likened to the Hungarians to a certain extent, were the worst, the most obscure, ferocious, and barbaric people in the region, not to say that being Greek Orthodox they were naturally schismatics and barbarians for our Catholic author.

The most inferior position in Spontone's cultural hierarchy and axiology was given to the Tatars, who were pretty much dehumanized. He said that the 'warlike Tatars came out of northern and cruel Scythia,' both showing climatic determinism and stressing the origin of Tatars from the land which was traditionally conceived of as the cradle of the new ways of militant nomads who attacked the civilized world. Scythia in this case (as well as in many others) was, apparently, more than a geographic term. Then the Tatars 'filled Persia, Armenia, Gorgonia and the rest of Asia with plunder, massacres and fires, and eventually took possession of them all.'[37] It is quite interesting that Spontone mentioned alongside with Persia and Armenia the region of 'Gorgonia', i.e. Gourgiana: the population of Gourgiana / Gurghania / Jurchenia of an Armenian ethnic background was called *iurgiani* and is sometimes found in medieval sources.[38]

Then, according to Spontone,[39] the Tatars passed through the Riphean mountains (Ῥιπαια ὄρη, Riphaei montes[40]), an alleged mountain range in Greco-Roman geography placed somewhere far in Northern Eurasia. Apparently, Spontone borrowed this fragment from some writings based on the cartography and geography characteristic of the Middle Ages and was not following the new advances of Early Modern cartography and geography, since by his times the North was studied enough not to leave any place to some chain of the mountains on the northern boundary of the world covered with permafrost where Boreas and probably the Hyperboreans were supposed to live. Apparently, Spontone was unfamiliar with Abraham Ortelius's "Theatrum Orbis Terrarum" (or preferred to ignore its data); neither he was familiar with the works of Willem Blaeu, Urbano

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abandoning the practices of other peoples, in order to preserve their natural ferocity, observing the Greek religion and law." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania,* 4.

[37] Ibid, 9.

[38] The etymology of the Armenian Գուրգեն and Georgian გურგენ, 'Gurgen' is not completely clear; possible hypotheses include: 1. Persian گرگ 'Wolf' or 'wolfish'; 2. Hebrew *gur* + *gen* 'son of lion'; 3. Turkic *kara gün* 'black day'. *Iurgiani* would commonly have Armenian names and could come from Greater Armenia. See: Andrey Ponomarev, "Naselenie i territoriya genuezskoj Kaffy po dannym buhgalterskoj knigi – massarii kaznachejstva za 1381 – 1382 gg.," in *Prichernomorie v Srednie veka 4,* ed. S. Karpov (St. Petersburg: Aleteja, 2000), 317-443. Also mentioned in the Russian chronicles: "Sice zhe mi sluchisya videti nedostojnomu i sushchim s mnoyu vo svyatem grade Ierusalime. Est' ubo tamo cerkov' voskresenie Hristovo… tamo est' Adamlya glava; a sluzhba tamo Gurzijskaya, Gurzi sluzhat, a za neyu Venecyjskaya sluzhba, Venecy sluzhat… a pod Golgofoyu nizu na zemli Iverskaya sluzhba, Iveri sluzhat." *Patriarshaya, ili Nikonovskaya letopis'* [Patriarchal Chronicle], *Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisej* 12 (1901).

[39] Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania,* 9.

[40] The word probably derives from 'ῥιπή'. Mentioned by Alcman, Sophocles, Aristotle, Hippocrates, Callimachus, Plutarch, Vergil, Apollonius of Rhodes, Claudius Ptolemaius, and Pliny the Elder; in the Middle Ages widely known most likely thanks to such compilers as Martianus Capella, Orosius, and Isidore of Seville.

Monti, Giulio Alenio, nor did he know about the Sir Hugh Willoughby's and Willem Barentsz's expeditions to the Novaya Zemlya, about the expeditions of Sir Martin Frobisher, John Davis, Robert Bylot, William Baffin, and Luke Foxe to the Baffin Island, and even about the functioning of Russian Mangazeya. If, however, he did, we have to either suggest an uncritical borrowing from older accounts, or to think of this place in Spontone as a tribute to established literary tradition, and to think of his Riphean mountains as of a literary topos transferred from the medieval literature to the well-known Ural Mountains (indeed some authors of the seventeenth century did apply to this real chain the old-fashioned term).

After crossing the mysterious mountains, the Tatars, according to Spontone, 'occupied the beautiful Sarmatia,' in Russia they mixed with the 'Poles and Kuns', the latter being one of the names for Cumans (*Kypchaks, Polovcy*), although some sources distinguished them, a Turkic nomadic folk that came to the Black Sea steppe from the Volga area and replaced or subdued Pechenegs (presumably Oghuz Turks), and also gave their name to the whole area between Danube and Irtysh – it became *Desht-i Qipchaq* in Turkic, Cumania in Latin and Greek, and the Steppe of Polovcy in Russian.[41] In 1238, the Cumans were defeated and subdued by the Mongols, although some of them found asylum in Hungary. However, the Turkic people (Cumans and others) outnumbered the Mongol invaders and therefore quickly assimilated them in terms of language. The Cuman idiom was widely spoken and prevailed in *Desht-i Qipchaq* throughout northern Asia up to the borders of the Gobi, as testify the Western sources.[42] There is an extant manual of the Cuman language source left, the *Codex Cumanicus*, which was composed in order to help the Latin monks in their mission. Finally, the amalgamation of different Turkic tribes and Mongols resulted in shaping of the Tatar ethos, as well as some others.

Further, having increased in numbers, the Tatars (here already perceived as a political community rather than an ethnic one) 'ended up in the regions of Gothia and Denmark'.[43] One has to identify the source of the Spontone's delusion, since the Mongol invasion of Europe in the thirteenth century did not reach further than Moravia and Poland. Spontone provided an interesting vision of the rise of the Tatars. He said that 'some write that in early times these people were subjects of an Indian king who wanted to subordinate them to military service, and when they were

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[41] See: Elena Skrzynskaya, "Polovcy. Opyt istoricheskogo istolkovaniya etnikona", in *Rus', Italya i Vizantya v Srednevekov'e* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2000), 36-90.

[42] Wilhelm Heyd, *Histoire du commerce du Levant au Moyen âge* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1885), 241-242.

[43] Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania,* 9.

raised by a Canguista[44] who became their captain, they conspired against their own king, armed with tree trunks and lightning; attacked the kingdom from all sides, sparing neither gender nor age, and took the life of their master and his sons, except for a young girl who was their sister, and whom they gave in marriage to their captain.'[45] Apparently, this account was an aftersound of the defeat and massacre of the Tatars by Temüjin, future Genghis Khan, and the mentioned lady is either Yesugen or her sister Yesui. The imagination of the medieval authors or local informants, on whom the narrative of Spontone was based here, however, transferred these events to enigmatic India. Thus, what Spontone reported here was a distorted version of the rise of Genghis Khan.

Further Spontone related the history of the Mongol conquest of the Khwarezmian Empire. 'Having already taken possession of the kingdom and pretending to be the rulers of the universe,[46] they sent a proud embassy to the Corasmites, the people of Asia, bordering on them, so that they would send tribute to them annually, and not fulfilling their will, waiting for the extermination and common interests of the country.[47] 'The ambassadors[48] were killed and cut to pieces;[49] the battle[50] was fierce and the Corasmites were defeated, so they fled to the Caspian Mountains[51] and were

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[44] Distorted 'Khan Genghis'.

[45] Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania,* 9.

[46] Temüjin took the title of Genghis Khan in 1202.

[47] "Uscirono i Tartari bellicosi dall' Aquilonare, e rigida Scitha; e di rapine, e straggi, e incendii per tutto empiendo la Persia, l'Armenia, e la Gorgonia, e le restanti dell'Asia, finalmente di tutte s'impatronirono. Indi passati i Monti Rifei; occupata la Bellace Sarmatia, s'insanguinarono nella Rascia de' Polacchi, e de' Cuni; e augumentati in gran moltitudine, e in esserciti numerosi, si ultimarono sin ne' consini della Gothia, e della Dania. Scrissero alcuni, che questa gente fù tributaria ne' prischi tempi d'un Re dell'India, che volendola al militar carrico sottoporre; sollevata da un Canguista, che lor Capitano si fece, congiurati contra il lor proprio Re, armati le mani di tronchi d'alberi, e di saette; da ogni parte assalito il Regno, non perdonando a sesso veruno, nè ad età, tolser di vita il loro Signore co'suoi Figlivoli, eccettuatane una Fanciulla loro Sorella, la qual diedero in moglie al lor Capitano. Impatronitisi già del Regno, e arrogando d'insignorirsi dell'Universo; ispedirono orgogliosa ambasciata a Corasmiti genti dell' Asia, con essi medesimi confinanti, ohe mandassero loro tributo ogn'anno, e non facendo il loro volere, aspettar dovessero l'esterminio, e'l commune interito del Paese." "The warlike Tartars came out of Aquilonar and Scythia, and filled Persia, Armenia, Gorgonia and the rest of Asia with robberies, massacres and fires, and finally took possession of them all. Then they passed through the Riphean mountains, and occupied the beautiful Sarmatia, and bled in the Rascia of the Poles and the Cuni; and, having increased in multitude and in numbers, they completed their conquest of Gothia and Dania. Some have written that these people were tributaries in the early days of a King of India, who, wishing to subject them to military service, were raised up by a Canguista, who made himself their Captain, and conspired against their own King, arming their hands with tree trunks and thunderbolts; assaulting the kingdom from every side, forgiving neither sex nor age, they cut off their Lord and his sons from life, with the exception of a young girl who was their sister, whom they gave in marriage to their Captain. Having already taken possession of the kingdom, and pretending to be the rulers of the universe, they sent a proud embassy to the Corinthians, the people of Asia, who were bordering on them, to pay them tribute every year, and not doing their will, to wait for the extermination and the common interest of the country." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania*, 9.

[48] Meaning the ambassadors of Genghis Khan to Shah of the Khwarazmian Empire Ala ad-Din Muhammad II.

[49] Spontone retells the events that happened in Otrar, Khwarasmshah did so following the advice of Inalchuq.

[50] I.e. the lengthy Siege of Urgench.

[51] Jalal al-Din Mangburni Khwarazmshah's resistance to Mongols after Battle of the Indus in 1221 between him and Genghis Khan.

driven out and killed by the Tropolites.[52] The Tatars also took possession of Sappa, the main city of the Persian kingdom, after several invasions, and for a short time remained its owners; and, following their victories, they subdued King of Iberia[53] and Albania.[54] Fighting in Palestine with the Christians and the Sultan,[55] the above-mentioned Tatars, remained victorious and stubbornly conquered the city of Jerusalem,[56] desecrating these holy places with blood, rape and various robberies'.[57] It is still a hot topic and a debated point in historiography whether the Mongols really penetrated as far as Jerusalem; in fact they could have done it during the raid of 1299 – 1300, but anyways there was no great massacre; the discourse of Spontone here just continued the literary tradition of the Latin narratives of the times of the First Crusade. As one can see, describing the peoples who stand as far from civilization as possible, Spontone here did not spare rhetoric, stressing the cruelty and the warlike and ferocious nature of the Asian savages: this is one more example of the civilization vs. barbarity discourse.

Looking at the description of the peoples inhabiting Transylvania by Spontone, one gets a clear impression of a civility vs. barbarity discourse: the author started with the most civilized Saxons, moved on to yet Catholic and living in good conditions, but slightly more savage Székelys, linking them to the invasions of the Huns of Attila and thinking that they descended from the Scythians; then he moved on to the Hungarians, then to Wallachians, who 'inhabit partly good villages and partly secluded places of deserts, abandoning the customs of other peoples in order to preserve their natural ferocity, observing Greek religion and law;'[58] finally, he discussed Mongols,

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[52] Jalal al-Din Mangburni was killed in the area of Silvan, Diyarbakır, by an anonymous Kurd.

[53] George IV of Georgia / Lasha Giorgi, King of Georgia.

[54] Armenian principalities on the territory of the Caucasian Albania, mainly ruled by the Kiurikian dynasty.

[55] Mongol raids into Palestine; the 'Sultan' can refer to Al-Musta'sim-Billah Abu-Ahmad Abdullah bin al-Mustansir-Billah, or al-Malik al-Muẓaffar Sayf ad-Dīn Quṭuz, or Al-Malik al-Zahir Rukn al-Din Baibars al-Bunduqdari.

[56] It is still debated whether the Mongols really penetrated as far as Jerusalem in 1299 – 1300.

[57] "Furono morti, e tagliati a pezzi gli Ambasciadori; si venne all'arme, seguì fieramante il conflitto, e i Corasmiti fugati, e rotti; Per lo che fuggiti ne' Monti Caspii, quindi furono da Tropolitani discacciati, e uccisi. S' impatronirono ancora i Tartari, per alcune innondationi, di Saffa, principal Città del Regno di Persia, della quale in non molto tempo rimasero possessori; e seguitando il corso delle loro vittorie, si sottoposero Coum Re dell' Iberia, e dell' Albania. Guerreggiando nella Palestina i Christiani, il Soldano, chiamati i Tartari, rimasero all hora vittoriosi, e strenuamente ricuperarono la Città di Gierusalemme, con profanare quei Santi luoghi con sangue, stupri, e varie rapine." "The ambassadors were killed and cut to pieces, and the conflict was fiercely fought over, and the Kasmites were defeated and broken. The Tartars also took possession of Saffa, the principal city of the Kingdom of Persia, by means of some floods, and in a short time remained its possessor; and following the course of their victories, they subjected Coum, King of Iberia and Albania. In the war in Palestine, the Christians and the Soldiers, called the Tatars, were victorious, and strenuously recaptured the City of Jerusalem, profaning those holy places with blood, rape and various robberies." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania,* 9.

[58] "La terza è de gli Ungheri, à quali potrebbesi ancora aggiungere certa gente di costumi, e di legge differentissima, che co'l nome di Vallacca parte habita alcuni buoni Villaggi, e parte le riposte solitudini de' deserti, abbusando la pratica de gli altri popoli, per conservar la loro naturale ferocità, osservano questi la religione, e legge Grechesca." "The third is that of the Hungarians, to whom we could also add a certain people of very different customs and law,

who were for him the quintessence of cruelty, ferocity, and barbarity. The further from the 1. Roman heritage, 2. West, 3. Latin Christianity – the more barbarous.

Various early modern writers could stress differences and /or similarities in describing the Other, thus Europeanizing and / or exoticizing and isolating the antiquity of the society which they described. This intellectual trend was paralleled by the political process of the formation of early modern states in Europe. Thus, we can naturally put a question of comparison of the Other(s) in this context. Were the "antiquity" and / or "past" of the societies described by the intellectuals in question identical to their own "antiquity" and / or "past" or different from them? In the case of Spontone, it looks like he took a distance from the peoples of Transylvania; yet the shared Roman past makes us think that he saw some kind of 'common' antiquity.

Spontone's main two consolidating frameworks were the Roman one and the 'Scythian,' or nomad one. Spontone explicitly stressed the differences in the development of different parts of Transylvania and neighboring regions – the Roman expansion was fundamentally meaningful here. The effects of the Roman civilizing cultural influence were clearly stated, and the areas previously populated by Romans were (at least according to Spontone, who continuously and consistently underlined the Roman dimension of the history of Transylvania) also more civilized in his times, whereas where there was no Roman presence, in fact there was no civilization. At the same time, he applied a consolidating strategy while speaking about the shared Scythian origins of the Hungarians and Székelys; however, in Spontone's terms, the Saxons on the one hand and the Székelys and Hungarians on the other followed the universal ascent of man on different pace and, one would say, with different outcomes: the Saxons became the most civilized 'nation' in the area, which did not appear so obvious for the Székelys and Hungarians. The Tatars, conversely, were radically exoticized in a negative sense in the accounts of Spontone. His representation of the Tatars was the representation of the image of an utmost barbarity and violent transfer of power, most dissimilar from the civilized societies of Europe. Here Spontone explicitly followed the binary opposition between Roman / post-Roman / European civility and nomadic barbarity, which in certain cases could be overcome (like in the cases of Saxons) or partly overcome (like in the cases of Székelys, Hungarians and Wallachians), and virtually irreparable and irremovable in other cases (like that of Tatars).

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who, under the name of Wallachia, partly inhabit some good villages, and partly the secluded solitudes of deserts, abandoning the practices of other peoples, in order to preserve their natural ferocity, observing the Greek religion and law." Ibid, 4.

We find in the writings of Spontone a clearly evaluative dimension. Roman past and Roman antiquity for him equaled glorious, triumphal, worthy of admiration, and for sure worthy of writing about it, worthy of the attention of the historians of the past (…*fù degno soggetto delle più rare, e celebri penne de gl' Istorici di quei Secoli*) e.g.: 'Transylvania, which in ancient times was called Dacia, and in our times is so called because of the gracious passage of the forests, often making the triumphal Palms of the ancient Emperors of Rome sprinkled with blood, was a worthy subject of the rarest and clearest pens of the Historians of those Centuries'[59] However, it is yet to be defined whether this admiration by the shared Roman past implied for him some kind of hidden discourse on civilization and barbarity; in any case, if it did, it was not right on the surface in the beginning.

In many cases, however, Spontone used the discourse of 'civility vs. barbarity' in a direct way. For him everything 'noble' is by definition associated with the shared Roman heritage: thus, he says that there are 'other lands, *borghi*, and *contadi*, which are very noble,*'* because there one can admire the remnants of the ancient Romans, who held their legions there in order to control 'the harsh peoples of Dacia.'[60] Here we can see an open juxtaposition between the Roman civilization and the barbarous Other.

Albeit not yet showing explicitly the discourse of 'civility vs. barbarity', Spontone did not hesitate to underline that the Roman presence brought to this region high culture, which never spreaded beyond the zone of Roman expansion. Thus, speaking about Alba Iulia (Hungarian Gyulafehérvár), the place of residence of the Prince of Transylvania George I Rákóczi, called according to Spontone after 'Iulia, mother of Antoninus Pius', he said that the Roman expansion did not go beyond this area, and the city was great, glorious, and till the days of Spontone ancient medals and precious copper, silver and golden artifacts, as well as marble works of remarkable quality were still found there.[61]

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[59] "La Transilvania, ch' anticamente appellata Dacia, ne' nostri tempi vien così detta per lo gra transito delle selve, rendendo ben spesso asperse di sangue le trionfali Palme sublimi de gli antichi Imperadori di Roma, fù degno soggetto delle più rare, e celebri penne de gl' Istorici di quei Secoli, è situata del gran Danubio nella parte sinistra." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transilvania,* 3.

[60] "Sonovi ancora alcun' altre Terre, Borghi, Contadi pur nobilissimi, come Des, ove a maraviglia lavorasi il Sale esfosso da' cavi Monti; Torda, ove s'ammirano gli vestigi de gli Antichi Romani, in cui tenevano le leggioni per affrenare gli duri Popoli della Dacia." "There are also other noble lands, villages and counties, such as Des, where the salt extracted from the hollow mountains is worked to marvellous effect; Torda, where one can admire the remains of the Ancient Romans, in which they held legions to afflict the harsh peoples of Dacia." Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transilvania*, 7.

[61] "Albagiulia è la Città, dove fà il Prencipe residenza, la qual tolse il nomeda Giulia Madre d'Antonino Pio; Ella è posta nel declivio d'un Colle signoregiante spatio larghissimo di pianura[…]Li Romani non più oltre portarono le lor arme, se creder vogliamo a gli Antichi Historici, ne i quali tempiera già divisa per mezo da detto Fiume, quand'ella

The role of the ancient past and its legitimating potential

The text of Spontone definitely carried out a certain political agenda and political function. Legitimization of the claims to power and authority through tracing (often mythological or semi-legendary) origins from certain ethnic groups or famous people of the past is a characteristic feature of the early modern discourse. Spontone, writing about the Other in Transylvania, supplied in this way his patron (and, afterwards, other political actors and broader European audience, even though it was published only after his death) with the information about the societies and ethnic groups of this region, and expected the past to be instructive for the present.

Almost all texts of Spontone are highly politicized, and a researcher should expect the same in his *History of Transylvania* (moreover, Spontone himself does not claim impartiality). This is, however, not so explicit. Indeed, most of the works of Spontone bear dedications to certain monarchs, military commanders, or civil officers (see above about the dedication of the *History of Transylvania*). While being in Hungary during the Long War, Spontone produced several works, and two of them are particularly interesting in the context of the present study of his *History of Transylvania*. The first one, the 'The Report' ('*Ragguaglio'*),[62] bears dedication to Maximilian I, Duke of Bavaria, one the most ardent defenders of Catholicism and opponents of Reformation of the time. In the second one, 'Actions of the Kings of Hungary' ('*Attioni de re dell'Ungaria*'),[63] Spontone recounted the siege of Visegrád which concluded the first phase of the Mantuan expedition. Further research is required there, but probably some of Spontone's accounts on the Saxons, Hungarians and Székelys can be better understood in the context of his political and religious sympathies, as well as in the context of the Reformation and Counterreformation context.

In his work Spontone used the long-established discourse of a rich territory of Transylvania and Hungary, describing its fertile plains, forests full of animals to hunt, mountains full of gold, silver, and other precious metals.[64] Italian authors of that time reached for this topos not least to

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co'l nome di Apullon riferiva la gloria, e'l prisco valore d'una Città, antica altretanto, quanto grande, e quanto famosa, le cui diroccate Mura ritrovansi Medaglie antichissime, e pretiosissime di rame, d'argento, e d'oro assa sino, e pezi ben degni d'antichi marmi di lavoro giuditiosissimo." "Albagiulia is the City, where the Prince resides, which took its name from Julia, Mother of Antoninus Pius; it is situated on the slope of a hill overlooking a very large area of plain [... The Romans did not carry their arms any further, if we are to believe the Ancient Historians, in which time it was already divided by the middle of the said River, when it was called Apullon, and reported the glory and the pristine valour of a City, as ancient, as great, and as famous, whose crumbling Walls are found ancient medals, and precious copper, silver, and gold very fine, and pieces well worthy of ancient marble work judicious." Ibid, 7.

[62] Ciro Spontone, *Ragguaglio* (Bologna: Benacci, 1601).

[63] Ciro Spontone, *Le attioni de Re dell'Ungaria* (Bologna: Benacci, 1602).

[64] Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transylvania,* 3.

explain to their readers in the Western European countries and especially in Italy why they should care about the war taken so far away from them.[65]

However, Spontone stressed that now this territory suffers revolt and destruction. From the very beginning Spontone put Transylvania in the line of other European countries - France, Germany, Flanders, Polish kingdom, and Hungary. The image of all these countries was quite the same - all of them had prospered before, but in "our times" (*questi tempi*), they were divided and devastated because of protestant heresy.[66] Transylvania was no exception in this row. Thus, Spontone used an old stereotype of Transylvania`s rich natural resources with addition of the more current discourse of this territory as suffering discordance because its own people had abandoned Catholicism.[67] To create such an image, Spontone referred to antique ruins and produced cultural hierarchies mainly built on people`s ancient past.

The account of Spontone can be also placed in the rather universal context of ethnic diversity and the social development of history within mankind, which is also largely influenced by the biblical and classical ethnography. It is curious to have a look at the strategies which the authors apply in order to explain the accelerated or retarded development. In case of Spontone, both the circumstantial model and the model of natural disposition were applied: on the one hand, he recognized the civilizing Roman (or post-Roman, e.g. Carolingian) influence; it was thanks to this influence that the Saxons became the most civilized and developed nation in Transylvania; however, speaking about the Tatars, he seemed to dwell more in another explanatory model – the one of natural disposition towards barbarity.

The 'barbarity vs. civility' juxtaposition was often applied in Spontone's narrative as a rhetorical device in order to portray the Saxons as civilizing agents from the times of Charlemagne. Why was this rhetoric used, and what was its political agenda? The most obvious answer seems to derive from the political situation of the day; it is likely that Spontone's rhetorical tools were aimed at strengthening and legitimization of the Habsburg claims on Hungarian`s crown and establishing control over the area. The historical myth about the civilizing influence of the Germans in the East (a vision that already existed in the minds of the European intellectuals) could be both used in a didactic way as a moral lesson and as exemplum for imitation and to be instrumentalized politically

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[65] Tamás Kruppa, "Hungary and the Hungarians in Italian Public Opinion during and after the Long Turkish War", 98.

[66] Ciro Spontone, *Historia della Transilvania,* 1-2.

[67] Tamás Kruppa, "Hungary and the Hungarians in Italian Public Opinion during and after the Long Turkish War," 99.

as a usable past through the appeal to the antiquity. Finally, such narratives strengthened the feeling of the cultural superiority of the European audience.

Going beyond the immediate political agenda, can we see in the studied texts any alternative, other than political, interests in studying the past of the Other, linked to the current intellectual contexts, cognitive and educational projects? To a certain extent the examination of the ancient origins of the ethnic groups of Transylvania by Spontone can be placed into the framework of the early modern intellectual trend of reflection on the "national" antiquities and the historical past of the ethnic groups (within the broader frame of the history of mankind based on the biblical and classical sources). The educational function of the narrative of Spontone is clear: he introduced to the Western reader a region that was more or less poorly known previously. However, Spontone seemed to be hardly interested in elaboration of already existing chronologies; his concept of antiquity and ancient past was blurred.

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Contact details and disclaimer:

Evgeny A. Khvalkov

National Research University Higher School of Economics (Saint Petersburg, Russia). Department of History, Associate Professor; ekhvalkov@hse.ru