

## Aspects of Anthroponomy in Romanian Formulaic Expression

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### Abstract

Romanian popular literature possesses a very rich stock of formulaic expressions (proverbs, sayings, proverbial expressions, precepts, teachings, verbal stereotypes). These expressions have multiple ways of valorising anthroponomy. The paper aims to examine historical anthroponyms which may be found in the formulaic expressions from a pluridisciplinary perspective: linguistic, cultural-historical, and a perspective that will focus on mentalities.

**Keywords:** *popular literature, onomatology, historical anthroponym, paremiological expression*

Romanian culture records the privileged position owned by the different categories of formulaic expressions within the artistic creativity forms. The first attempts to gather and record the rich paremiological material are previous to the first signs of interest in folk literature. Dinicu Golescu, Iordache Golescu and Anton Pann, in particular, were among the first scholars who exhibited, by means of their paremiological collections, this important part of the Romanian cultural patrimony. Continuing this tradition which had already been outlined in the middle of the nineteenth century, Iuliu Zane assembled his monumental collection, *Romanians' Proverbs (Proverbele Românilor din România, Basarabia, Bucovina, Ungaria, Istria și Macedonia. Proverbe, zicători, povățuiri, cuvinte adevărate, asemănări, idiotisme și cimilituri, cu un glosar româno-francez)*, which has remained until the present day a milestone in the uncovering of the paremiological treasure specific to the Romanian cultural space.

The paremiological stock of Romanian folk literature aroused the specialists' interest in its documentary value. Since the Age of Enlightenment, Timotei Cipariu worked on the material provided by this source in order to identify some peculiarities of the Romanian language (Mușlea, 1964, 163-199). One should not overlook the references made to this fund of paremiological expressions by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu in his work, unique in the Romanian philology, *Cuvente den bătrâni*. Later, the documentary value of this exceptionally rich paremiological material, has been constantly exploited with the diversification of the approach perspective and the research directions: linguistic (I. Jordan, 1975; C. Tabarcea, 1982; S. Dumistrăcel, 1997; O. Chelaru-Murăruș, 2007), folkloric (P. Ruxăndoiu, 2003) and even philosophical.

The formulaic expressions in Zane's collection display a heterogeneousness of the plurifunctional verbal structures invested with different semantic value. Among these, the proverbs and the sayings seem much more individualised as a formal structure and

from the point of view of their functionality, taking into account the variety of the wordings which can be invested with a paremiological value (teachings, proverbial expressions, verbal stereotypes etc.). Moreover, a series of works devoted to the formulaic expressions draw attention to the difficulties of devising a taxonomy by defining and identifying marks for each category. We mention only two examples: first, in the collection elaborated by Iuliu Zanne, the material is distributed according to the thematic criterion, not by the formal one; second, in the chapter about “isolated structures” from *Stilistica limbii române*, Iorgu Iordan deals with verbal clichés and sayings without making a distinction between them (Iordan, 1975, 266-267). The fact that the fixed phrase “proverbs and sayings” has been frequently used both in paremiological anthologies and in some specialised studies reveals the inability to accurately establish the differences between these categories. In a reference work, Pavel Ruxăndoiu outlined the broad spectrum of the virtual forms of materialisation of the structures with a paremiological value:

Proverbs and the sayings represent [...] two distinct forms strongly crystallised (or with tendencies to strong crystallisation, but not definitely bounded to the transitory or marginal forms), between them there existing a large zone of intermediary forms or forms with possibilities of double functioning. Beyond sayings there can be placed idiomatic phrases, expressive formulas, fixed expressions, the boundary area being represented by linguistic metaphor, and beyond proverbs there are precepts, teachings, proverbial expressions extending over into the fable and the parable (Ruxăndoiu, 2001, 30 our translation).

Formulaic expressions emphasise the diversity of the Romanian onomastics, which may become significant when revealing historical, social, cultural background and, implicitly, in the identification of some identity marks. In this respect, this study aims to analyse the way in which anthroponyms may function as clues of the Romanian traditional identity and may reconfigure an essential coordinate of our identity profile.

It has to be specified from the very beginning that the corpus which served the analysis in this study is based on the monumental collection, in ten volumes, made up by Iuliu Zanne (1895-1912), which has provided, up to the present, the most substantial paremiologic material. Our option for this collection has been motivated by the inexistence of other scientific research studies aiming to record Romanian paremiological expressions, comparable in amplitude to Zanne’s work. This option has lent our study a historical character: the corpus compiled by I. Zanne included both cult sources (the chronicles written by M. Costin and I. Neculce, collection of parables elaborated by I. Golescu, the work *Etymologicum Magnum Romaniae* written by B. P. Hasdeu) and folkloric sources (A. Pann, Gr. M. Jipescu). The simple enumeration of these sources indicates the delineation of the traditional Romanian cultural reality in a time interval corresponding to the beginning of the twentieth century. As a consequence, in our research, the delimitation of the paremiological material within the active fund from the one which has already entered the passive fund has been beset with difficulty; at the same time, the identification of the potential resignifying paremiological expressions, updated in contemporary communicational contexts has proved to be a challenging task.

Anthroponyms can be classified in four categories: generic, historical, folkloric and biblical anthroponyms.

Our research is focussed on the historical anthroponyms which appear with a significant frequency in paremiological expressions. In many cases, the historical character is recorded at the level of the collective memory by means of the surname,

especially in the case of an important boyard or a ruler (*Balș, Brâncoveanu, Ghica, Jianu, Sturza* etc.), by means of surname/first name, accompanied by a determinative which indicates the profession and functions as a nickname (*Stan Lăutaru, Gheorghe Lăutaru, Dobre Cimpoeșul, Bimbașa-Sava*) or, more rarely, only by means of a nickname (*Ciubăr-Vodă, Pârlea*). Sometimes the form of the anthroponym provides clues about the oldness of its oral diffusion: the paremiological expressions preserve either the phonetic popular forms of some anthroponyms – *Machidon, Cunițchie*, or the old inflectional genitive forms derived from the combination of the proper names with an enclitic definite article: *vacile Golescului, soiul Catargiului, averea Brâncoveanului*.

Taking into account the type of attestation (oral tradition, documentary attestation) and the fame the person designated by the name (first name, patronymic, surname) has, we can distinguish two subcategories of historical anthroponyms:

a) The paremiological expressions belonging to the first subcategory have a restrained diffusion, which is induced by the regional reputation of the persons designated by the anthroponym. This kind of fame is usually certified by the oral tradition: some persons are local heroes, re-evaluated in folkloric texts (balads, legends), others are persons who have lost anonymity at a certain moment. The names of the latter have been associated either with the memorable events they took part in, with a dominant quality or an imperfection, or with an excellent performance in their field of activity.

The expression *Vorba lui moș Albu* is connected with an oral history dating from the time of Cuza Vodă. The old man named Albu told the ruler who had come to punish the boyards' abuses: "Your Highness, no matter whom you are going to designate, injustice will continue to exist, because the wind has been blowing since the beginning of the Earth and as long as the Earth exists the wind will blow" (VI, 3). It is interesting that the expression does not record the words uttered by the old man, but his courage to address the ruler with memorable words.

From the way I. Zanne explains the saying *E de neam mare și are rude, în piață, pe Stan lăutarul și Dobre cimpoierul* we can understand that the two anthroponyms were referential for the musician: "1. When someone boasts about his origin or is praised by others for his relatives without deserving it; 2. It is ironically used when somebody asks about someone's origins" (IV, 487). In the same way function the names of some famous musicians from Moldavia that appear in the expression *Hogea Spătaru și Gheorghe lăutaru* (VI, 149), used as an answer to the question: "Who's coming?"

According to Zanne's explanations, the patronymic Babic, which appears in the expression *Coltuc de la Babic* (VI, 18), still preserved at the beginning of twentieth century, had a certain significance attached to it, around the city. Babic, an Armenian, had owned the best bread oven in Bucharest almost a century before. The boyards liked crusty bread very much, appreciating it as luxury food, that is why, they ordered from Babic only crusty bread. Starting from this contextual information, the name Babic refers to excellence, becoming equivalent to high quality.

The relationship between the name and the professional status has a greater relevance in the saying *o s-ajungă la Petrache* (VI, 260). When deciphering the meaning encoded into this saying ("he/she will end in prison"), we need to think of the notoriety of the former prison chief in Severin.

A series of paremiological expressions also preserve the names of the local heroes who benefited, at a certain moment, from popularity due to some exceptional deeds or due to some extraordinary qualities. The retention of these anthroponyms in the social

memory is also the result of their diffusion by means of the transmission channel specific to the oral culture, because the characters' deeds have been re-signified in folkloric creations such as legends and balads. The expression *a trăit ca Bimbașa-Sava* (VI, 20) is a reference to a very brave and courageous mercenaries' captain, who is mentioned in a popular historic song from the collection gathered by G. Dem. Teodorescu (Djuvara, 1995, 282-283). The fame of the legendary hero Harca, a warrior in the battles against the Turks at the beginning of the nineteenth century who also appears in a legend recorded in Drăgășani, generated the expression *a fi Harca* (VI, 148), as a reference to the dominant quality of the character, bravery. In the same register, the sayings *Popa Stoica din Fărcaș / Care sare șapte pași* and *Înainte, popă Stoico!* (VI, 326, 327) probably suggest the audacity and the courage of a certain captain in Mihai Viteazu's army. The meaning of the saying *Ca pe timpul lui Avașote* (VI, 16) could not have been revealed without knowing that Avașote became a legendary character due to his daring deed of sharing the land owned by the boyard in Broscari (Mehedinți), without paying the rent to the leaseholder.

The anthroponym Pasvantoglu (in Turkish *pasban-oğlu* meaning "the son of the guardian"), adopted into Romanian as *Pasvante* (Graur, 1965, 31), retains a certain comic tonality and a pejorative meaning; it entered our paremiology as a remnant of the ill fame of a historic character, the leader of a mercenaries' army, *pasvangii*, who committed repeated robberies in Țara Românească in the first years of the nineteenth century, spreading terror. The significance of the variant recorded by I. Zanne – *Nu mai e timpul lui Pasvante* (VI, 256) – is focussed on the malefic nature of the character. Besides, the researcher provides a possible interpretation of the saying with the following key: "when a person appears arrogant and mean". The anthroponym *Pasvante* is also present in a saying which was not recorded by I. Zanne – *De pe timpul lui Pasvante (Chiorul)*, but which still exists in the paremiologic active fund. It is relevant to notice that the current variants do not exploit the negative personality traits of the historical character any more, suggesting out datedness instead (Graur, 1965, 152).

The saying *Belu belește, / Goleșcu golește, / Manu jupuieste* (VI, 19), about which I. Zanne provides the information that it may be connected with the period of a Phanariot ruler, Caragea, associates the harsh social reality of a terrible oppression of the people with the names of the three boyards (Belu, Goleșcu and Manu). Remarkable in this saying is the transposition of the message at the level of the folkloric artistic creativity by selecting the verbs which progressively indicate spoliation, justifying the first two anthroponyms which are related to a verb containing a partially identical signifier, thus transforming names into emblems (*Belu – belește, Goleșcu – golește*).

The saying *A fi de pe vremea lui Ciubăr-Vodă* (with the variants: *Par'că-i pe vremea lui Ciubăr-Vodă; Se trage de la Ciubăr-Vodă care l-a mâncat guzganii*, VI, 56), capitalises, by means of the assigned significance, i.e. "from old, immemorial times", the uncertainty of the existence and of the reign of an ephemeral ruler from Moldavia, around 1449. Moreover, the very etymology of his name, originating from Hungarian, Ciupor, is also debatable.

The significance of the saying *Vodă vrea și Hâncu ba* (Covurlui), with the variant *Vodă zice ba, toată lumea zice ba, numai Hâncu zice da*, surpasses the historic reality which primarily constituted its incipient point (the rebellion of Orheiieni and Lăpușneni under the command of Hâncu and Durac Sărdariul, during Duca Vodă's second reign), reducing the fight between the ruler and the boyards to the essence: the state of conflict. The collective memory has settled by means of the two names – *Vodă* (generic name for

a ruler) and *Hâncu* – the couple of opponents with an unequal, social status; this also results from the interpretation made by I. Zanne on the basis of the chronicles written by I. Muste and I. Neculce: “1. It shows the difference of opinion, the disagreement between two persons; 2. [It is said] When someone with a high rank came to beg for mercy to another who is inferior to him” (VI, 142). Stelian Dumistrăcel records, in addition, an expression which refers to the same event, namely *neamul lui Hâncu*, with the meaning “those who are against the laws, the protestants (Dumistrăcel, 1997, 105).

In the paremiological expression *Lup te cheamă și lup ești / Lupii dar ce prigonești* (VI, 189) the double value of the word *lup* (wolf) is exploited (as a common noun and as a proper name.) The explanations provided by I. Zanne explicitly hint at a real person, with a certain public recognition in the first half of the nineteenth century, namely Lupu Balș, “the Minister of Internal Affairs in Moldavia” in 1841, but the significance of the paremiological expression suggests not only the homonymy between the common noun *lup* (wolf) and the anthroponym *Lupu*, but also to the complex symbolism of the animal, the wolf, within the Romanian traditional bestiary (M. Coman, 1996, 181-186), where it is associated with the perception of the historical character in that epoch. The anthroponym *Lupu* is part of the old Romanian onomatology, being very frequently used in the past (Constantinescu, 1963, 97, 312) due to some Romanian beliefs and superstitions about the therapeutics by means of onomastics and the practice of changing the Christian names of the children who were sick: “It is about a “rebirth” by means of an onomastic mutation. The name, which managed in this way to trick the malefic spirit, is invested with a therapeutical power” (Ungureanu, 1987, 262). This magical practice, which implied the substitution of the Christian name, is also registered by George Coșbuc in an article which promoted the folk culture, *Gura Lupului*:

It is known that mothers, in order to cure their children of a sickness, usually change their names in Lupu. [...] Why is this the most common name? Because they want to scare the malefic spirits [...]. That is why other names Ursu (Bear), Crâncenu (The Ferocious), Grozavu (The Terrible) are used only for the spirits to know that they deal with a man who is stronger than them, with a ferocious and terrible man (Coșbuc, 1986, 242; 245).

The fact that the name Lupu (or Ursu) was frequently used as an onomastic substitute in these magical practices is connected, at the level of the collective traditional mentality, to the bivalent perception concerning the wolf, viewed both as a ferocious animal and as a very strong one. In this respect, we may consider that the first component of the paremiological expression – *Lup te cheamă și lup ești* – transfers on the person called Lupu the qualities of the animal with a homonymous name: ferocity and power. As a completion, the second component of the expression – *Lupii dar ce prigonești* – adds another significance connected with the historic character, Lupu Balș, probably a very hard-hearted man who was capable to dominate his opponents.

**b)** The second subcategory includes the paremiological expressions which contain anthroponyms denominating historic personalities whose fame goes beyond the local history sphere, being documentarily attested at the same time.

In the expressions *Iarna lui Barnovschi* (VI, 18), *Iarna lui Cunițchie* (VI, 70), *ca iarna de la Hangerliu* (VI, 146), the anthroponyms do not bring to the fore the ruler of Moldavia Miron Barnovschi Movilă (1626 – 1629; April 1633 – July 1633), the Minister of War Cunițchi and the Phanariot ruler Hangerliu (1797-1799); quite on the contrary they represent a temporal landmark for a precisely delimited period of the year,

winter, marked by very strong weathering. These formulaic expressions subsequently settled down within the usual communication, function as a comparison term.

Some of the sayings and paremiological expressions speculate on the symbolic value of the historic names. I. Zanne recorded a series of variants which evoke the Phanariot ruler Caragea and the Romanian ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza. In these cases, there is a metonymic transfer from the period of those two reigns to the rulers' names. In the collective memory, the proper name Caragea was apt to be confused with a dark period in the history of one Romanian province, Muntenia, representing afterwards a measuring unit for any abusive leadership: the memory of the terrible oppression of the people during that period remained preserved in expressions such as *A fi după legea lui Caragea* (VI, 45) (namely without laws) or *Se fură ca în (pe) vremea lui Caragea* (VI, 45). On the opposite side, in the direction of positive valorisations, there are the paremiological expressions which contain the name of the ruler Alexandru Ioan Cuza. The formulaic expression in the verse *Când era Cuza / Ardea focul și spuza* alludes to the welfare brought to people by Cuza Vodă's administration, and the variants *Ocaua lui Cuza* and *L-a ras cu briciul lui Cuza* (VI, 72) (which means that he was severely punished for cheating, if we take into account the "translation" of the expression offered by I. Zanne, "l-a potcovit", is related to Cuza's decision to put an end to the merchants' dishonesty and to establish order. Furthermore, the expression *Ocaua lui Cuza* and the variant *l-a prins cu ocaua mică*, still present in the active paremiological fund, can be decoded only in association with a well-known historical legend (Legende istorice, 2002, 278-279).

The Romanian folklore also preserves the differentiated attitude of the common people towards the rulers. The lyrics *Când era Ghica / Se zburlea păru' și chica; / Când era Știrbei / Arai unde vrei; / Când era Cuza / Ardea focul și spuza; / De când cu Carol întâi / N-are lumea căpătâi* (VI, 125) reflect, by antithesis, the positive evaluation of the native rulers Ghica, Știrbei, Cuza and the negative evaluation of the foreign ruler. It is interesting to notice that the lyrics *Când era Ghica / Se zburlea păru' și chica* have also been orally transmitted, in the same manner as the lyrics *Când era Cuza / Ardea focul și spuza*, independently, since I. Zanne records them in this way. Considering them separately, the lyrics referring to Ghica may be interpreted in another key too. We may assume that, starting from the names of the rulers who are precisely identified within the complete variant – Al. I. Cuza și Carol I – the names of the other two rulers are possibly connected with Alexandru D. Ghica (1834-1842) and Barbu Știrbei (1848-1853; 1854-1856). The identification of the ruler Al. D. Ghica by means of the proper name Ghica in the distich which works on its own leads to the clarification of the meaning of the lyrics: his reign was marked by important disturbances at the administrative and political level. At the same time, Ghica is included in the complete variant accompanied by two other native rulers – Barbu Știrbei and Al. I. Cuza – famous for the measures with beneficial effects on their people. It is possible that the inclusion of Alexandru D. Ghica in this series may be the result of his concern to improve the peasants' condition. Beyond the historic reality there may be revealed the subjective perception at the level of the collective mentality, which confers a symbolic value to the historic names.

The saying *Voia dumitale ca la banul Ghica* (V I, 125) refers to a historic reality characteristic of the Romanian provinces, namely, the concentration of the political and administrative power in the hands of a small number of boyard families. One of these families was, in Țara Românească, the Ghica family (around 1800). Describing this

state of affairs, the historian Neagu Djuvara connects the meaning of the saying with Dimitrie Ghica, who was a great *ban* of Craiova and who managed to centralise the political power in the hands of the members of his numerous family; those members held important positions in the Boyards' Council (Djuvara, 1995, 123). In this respect, updating the meaning of the saying within a communicational context aims at conveying the discretionary use of power.

A distinct series of formulaic expressions emphasise the way in which certain historic figures are epitomised in the collective perception by means of a quality, character or a certain type of behaviour unanimously recognised. This kind of formulaic expressions speculates on the prestige of the evoked historical personalities. According to I. Zanne, in the expression *a fi Alexandru Machidon* (VI, 3), the name of the great military leader and strategist from Antiquity becomes synonym with “a brave man”; in the same way, the name of the ruler Al. I. Cuza in the expression *a fi Cuza* (VI, 72) refers to a man “from an important family”, but also to a brave man “who is not afraid of anything”. In the expression *a fi Jianu vreme rea* (VI, 173), the figure of the famous outlaw Iancu Jianu is associated with “a brave man”. It is interesting that the meaning of the expression *Mihai Viteazu / Călare pe breazu* – with the variant *A încălicat pe breazu / Ca (un) Mihai Viteazu* (VI, 204) –, registered by I. Zanne in Vâlcea county, does not indicate feats of bravery, exploiting instead an image which settled as an emblem and afterwards became a cliché, namely the glorious posture of Mihai Viteazul on the back of his horse. This is the way in which we can explain the fact that the expressions registered by I. Zanne have been updated with the meaning “[it is said] about a proud and boastful man”.

Sometimes the formulaic expressions contain certain rulers' names preserved in the memory of the people not by means of a quality or an important achievement, but by means of the richness and opulence of their reign. *Să aibă averea Brâncoveanului și nu se pricopsește* (VI, 459), an expression which has circulated in Mehedinți county, speaks in itself about the wealth of the ruler Constantin Brâncoveanu, a wealth which had reached a fabulous limit in the popular perception. Two other sayings referring to Gh. Bibescu (1842 – 1848) – *a fi Bibescu* („a fi foarte bogat”) (VI, 454) and *a șede ca Bibescu* („[a șede] boierește”) (VI, 454) – show, beyond doubt, this particular ruler from Muntenia as a standard of wealth and splendour. *A petrece ca pe timpul lui Știrbei* (namely in opulence) (VI, 325) may be included in the same series. More relevant are other two paremiological expressions which include names of boyard families – *Catargi și Goleșcu* –, relevant in the Romanian history of eighteenth and nineteenth century. In the paremiologic expressions *a fi de soiul Catargiului* (VI, 50) and *din vacile Goleșcului* (“from a good breed”) (I, 688), the names function as the symbol of high quality, as a real brand.

The collection elaborated by I. Zanne also contains paremiological expressions in which the names of the historic characters emphasise two types of perception of the temporal dimension: one in which the name settles the historical event and another which places the event and the character connected with it in an undefined time.

Illustrative for the first category are the expressions connected with the nickname Pârlea: *Să te ții, Pârleo*, with the variants *Tunde-o Pârleo!* or *Du-te, Pârlei!* (VI, 261) (attested in Buzău, Ialomița and Covurlui); their meaning is related to an event which took place during Alexandru Mavrocordat's reign, according to I. Zanne, namely the great fire from 1783, when the flames destroyed a large part of Iași; afterwards, this ruler was nicknamed Pârlea-Vodă. The two sayings mention the name of the Phanariot

ruler Ion Gheorghe Caragea (1812 – 1818) – *De când cu bășica lui Caragea* and *de când cu ciurma lui Caragea* (VI, 45) – and two events which had a great impact on common people, being preserved at the level of the collective memory: the ascension of a balloon by the French above Bucharest and the ferocious pestilential epidemic from 1813. In these cases, the names function exclusively as a temporal landmark.

In the second category we may include the formulaic expressions *de când cu Mircea-Vodă* (VI, 205), *de când cu Magheru* (VI, 190), *de când cu Tudorin* (a diminutive for Tudor Vladimirescu) (VI, 409), *parcă e de pe vremea lui Caragea (de la Caragea)* (VI, 45), all with the meaning “from old, immemorial times”. In these cases, the name is not used to establish a fixed period in time, but, on the contrary, they are taken out from the context, suggesting the fact that, at the moment when I. Zanne recorded the expressions, both the historic characters and, eventually, the related events had already lost their topicality.

The analysis of the paremiologic expressions which contain historical anthroponyms led us to a series of observations with a general character:

- The semantic kernel of the historical anthroponym is connected to an image created by collective consensus and traditionally legitimated. The name of the character which corresponds to the anthroponym receives positive or negative significances, acquiring, in this manner, a symbolic function. In the collection made up by I. Zanne the historical anthroponyms with an identification function are relatively rare: they may lead to a certain event or a precise period;
- Certain wordings represent isolated structures, different kinds of fixed expressions, phrases, at the level of common language, which circulate apart from the broader utterance in which they appeared. This characteristic explains why most of the paremiological expressions surpass the historic reality and, starting from a specific experience, take on a general meaning;
- The analysis of these formulaic expressions has revealed an interesting aspect concerning the way in which Romanian folkloric imaginative complex functions. This contradicts, in a certain respect, the romantic Herderian idea about folklore as the repository of the history of a nation. In fact, the folkloric imaginative complex has selected the names of certain historical personalities and put them down in a series of noteworthy characters, investing them with a symbolic function, thus outlining a “mythology” which only intersects itself with the one of cult origin, provided throughout history, by historians, ideologists and scholars in general.

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## **Aspecte ale antroponimiei în expresiile românești cu caracter formular**

### **Rezumat**

Literatura populară românească dispune de un fond foarte bogat de expresii cu caracter formular (proverbe, zicători, zicale, expresii proverbiale, povățuiri, stereotipii verbale). Aceste expresii pun în evidență multiple ipostaze de valorizare a antroponimelor. Articolul de față își propune să examineze categoria antroponimelor istorice, prezente în expresiile cu caracter formular, dintr-o triplă perspectivă: lingvistică, mentalitară și istoric-culturală.