

# The Myth of the Good Emperor under Joseph II in the collective sensibility of the Romanians in Transylvania

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The recent changes that occurred in the social, political and economic field (the collapse of the communist regime, the establishment, the liberal democracy and market economy demonstrate that a society cannot set itself entirely free from the myth because some of the essential characteristics of the behaviour: the exemplary model and the embodiment of some messianic expectations, are universally valid to any human condition. When Jung entitled one of his books "The Man in Search of the Soul", he asserted that the modern world, found in a crisis after the rupture of Christianity was searching for a new myth which would allow it to recover a new spiritual source and to render its creative forces.

The attempt to define the myth troubled the sensibility of many generations of great men. Each of them wanted to find the solution of the problem by appealing to the methodology, the information and the affectivity of the epoch. The myth is a "symbolic narrative" which clarifies complicated existential situation, starting from an exemplary paradigm, which found itself in "illo tempore". The chronology of the myth places itself in the period of the beginnings and the present is the moment of a perpetual possible actuality<sup>1</sup>. I have considered that a myth may be:

1. a concept/an image (an imaginary construction) capable of evoking emotions of the people's beliefs in an instinctive manner.<sup>2</sup>
2. a history which has a prescriptive, explanatory, orderly (deforming/interpreting the reality) role.<sup>3</sup>

The conclusion of the last research in the mythical field focuses on the idea that in situation of economic, social and political or cultural crisis, a new way of symbolic thinking is reactivated, way of thinking which appeals to a fundamental imagistic background. The individual's orientation towards the symbol and the myth may be interpreted also as a reaction of self-defence.

The recrudescence of the archetypal images within the totality of collective manifestations bears the mark of the social changes. In these conditions, the primordial world found in the symbolic imagination is far richer than the ideologic symbolism of any historical moment and due to its projection in contemporaneity it can also generate the development of the civilization.

Liviu Maior, referring to the mythical atmosphere created around the Austrian emperor, emphasizes that the peasants were convinced that their emperor lived in Vienna surrounded by an extraordinary luxury. They also believed that he had good intention concerning them but there were the nobles who prevented him from practicing this plan in the daily reality. This may explain the peasants' hostility towards the royal advisors and the landlords as well as their attachment to the emperor.<sup>4</sup>

The myth can be regarded from several hypostases as a paradigm of the exemplary human behaviour, the saving hero and the justiciary spirit. These hypostases may manifest themselves in the traditional societies as well as in the modern ones. It is to such a pluridimensional reality, that the political myth of Joseph II corresponds. The people of the modern times are tempted to focus a good part of their aspirations and religious passion towards politics. This change stresses the metamorphoses of ideologies into mythologies in which a great number of political leaders have heroic and divine characteristics.

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<sup>1</sup> A. Reszler, "Mythe and utopie", in *Revue europeene des sciences sociales*, tam. 18, 1980, pp. 75-76

<sup>2</sup> Ernst Cassirer, *The myth of the state*, New-Haven, Yale Univ. Press, 1946, pp.47-48

<sup>3</sup> Raoul Girardet, *Mituri și mitologii politice*, translated by Daniel Dimitriu, Iași, 1997, p.4

<sup>4</sup> Liviu Maior, *Alexandru Vaida Voievod între Belvedere și Versailles*, Cluj, 1993, p.16

The modern and contemporary political history creates a series of charismatic character in a typological diversity. Starting from the Enlightened prince, reaching the "duke" and the "führer", one may notice an unlimited exaggeration concerning the leaders which is also manifested through the cult of personality – the genius of the Carpathians and the great steersman being only a few examples<sup>5</sup>. E. Kantorowicz emphasized the fact that the king, as a symbol of authority and power, was the result of the union between two corps in the collective imagination: a visible material one which was born and died, and an invisible, perfect, infallible and immortal one<sup>6</sup>. Raoul Girardet notices that the birth of the political myth (regardless of its forms of manifestation, the myth of the good emperor or the saving hero) appears in the moment when the social trauma turns into a psychological trauma, being always linked to the intensity of angst and uncertainties.

The myth of the good emperor enjoyed a special attention in the Czech, Slovak and Polish historiography and was considered to be a naïve monarchy or a peasant monarchy. The dominant explanation may be that there was a pressure exerted through ideological suggestion. This coding of the myth in a manipulation of the peasantry's wishes towards peaceful objectives for power exerted by the Viennese Court is a unilateral approach which ignores the changes that occurred in the structure of the state power. These changes consist in the Josephinist reform and the echo in the conscience of the peasantry which can render a positive or a negative value to the emperor's discourse.<sup>7</sup> The myth does not represent only an imperial slogan but also the peasants' adherence to it. More than that, the myth is also a link of communication between the emperor and the conscience of the peasantry who have the possibility of expressing their consent concerning the salutary interventions made by the state power. Thus, the peasant rebellions which were dominant in this region during the medieval and premodern period reflect the mythical projection of the 'good' emperor who is always close to his people and willing to solve their problems.

In the following lines I will be trying to reconstruct the mechanism that stands at the basis of the myth. The myth of the "good emperor" is born out of a background, preexistent at the level of a conscience belonging to the Romanian traditional society and attached to a specific manner of perception and valorization of power. It is considered to be a supreme instance and the master (the emperor) represents the mandatory of Good's power on earth. Over this sensibility the official propaganda of the Viennese Court overlaps; it wants the same thing: to get the subjects' obedience and trust in order to maintain peace and tranquillity in the empire. Some subtle methods make possible the configuration of feelings at the level of the mentality of some other peoples. By being cultivated they will finally turn into a dynastic patriotism. There were several methods that contributed to the cultivation of the dynastic patriotism in the Romanian conscience: through school, church, army, administration and through the attempt to settle the reports between the serfs and the nobles<sup>8</sup>. As a result the enlightened politics of the empress Maria Tereza and of her son, Joseph II overlaps the pre-existent Romanian background which is also faithful to the trust in the kindness of the monarchy.

From a psychological point of view, the myth exists due to the members of a traditional society who act in a climate of expectation, tension and fear, searching for a protector against the hostile universe (nature, the social system). As a rule, this protector is chosen from their community (the village). He may be the landlord they work for or the sovereign himself. Such a traditional society, or a rustic civilization was characteristic for Ardeal during the XVIII-th century. It represents a society which, under those circumstances, was searching for a defender, a legitimate rescuer who would offer the solution of getting out of the social-political misery. It is to this horizon of expectation that the trust of the Transylvanian peasants corresponded to their monarch. The sovereign is associated to the symbol of light; he was the one who succeeded in restoring the order, who was meant to resolve a major desideratum and who determined the regression of the evil forces<sup>9</sup>.

Within the traditional world still dominated by a collective thinking and whose members do not have their own system of thinking and do not perceive the reality in all its complex forces, the invention of the myth is a natural fact. Paraphrasing G. Cocchiara who asserted that "before being discovered, the savage was invented

<sup>5</sup> Raoul Girardet, *Mythes and mythologies politiques*, Paris, Seuil, 1986, pp. 63-96

<sup>6</sup> E.K. Kantorowicz, *Les deux corps du roi, Essai sur la theologie politique and Hayen Age*, Paris, 1989

<sup>7</sup> Iosif Wolf, *Studii și interpretări istorice*, Ed. Dacia Cluj, 1987, p. 189

<sup>8</sup> T.Nicoară, *Transilvania la începutul timpurilor moderne (1680-1800). Societate rurală și mentalități colective*, P.U.C., 1997, pp. 339- 396

<sup>9</sup> Raoul Girardet, *op. cit.*, p.15.

first”<sup>10</sup> by the people of the XVI – XVIII-th century according to their moral, political and social concerns, one can reach the conclusion that the myth of the “good emperor” was created by the Romanians in Transylvania during the XVIII-th century, as an answer to their hopes and political actions meant to obtain their own rights. However they became encroached on by the Hungarian nobles. From this point of view the birth and function of this myth in the Romanian collective sensibility becomes a natural fact.

The myth of the good emperor crystallized in a short period of time, almost at the same time with the establishment of the Habsburgic domination in the area close to the Middle Danube.

This crystalization was due to the ideas spread by the late crusade: the take over of the territories conquered by the Turks in the South-East of Europe. In order to emphasize the solidarity of the conquered peoples to the imperial discourse, he held a discourse in which they declared themselves the rescuers of the people conquered by the Turks<sup>11</sup>. From this chronological segment up to the fission of the monarchy, the Habsburgic empire promoted a politics based on the dynastic patriotism which provided the cohesion and stability of the empire and of the regions it governed.

The imperial mythology, once crystallized, reaches the acme during the reign of Joseph II (1780-1790). In the history of the political relations between Viena and the Romanians from Transylvania, Joseph II became the representative of the epoch. Defining consequences of the Josephinism, David Prodan noted: “No crowned head of the monarchy has ever succeeded in enjoining, in such a considerable manner, the sympathy of a nation, none of them managed to impose the emperor’s ideas on the popular masses in such a lasting manner”.<sup>12</sup>

A mythical atmosphere was created around Joseph II, emphasiaing him as the saving hero. In the absence of a masculine heir, Carol VI imposed Maria Tereza on the imperial throne through the Pragmatic Sanction, not willing to cover, however, the void of legitimacy. This background of expectation full of hopes required the birth of a prince within the royal family. Being pious and a good Catholic, the sovereign Maria Tereza said her prayers to Saint Joseph, the protector of pregnant women. The child born on the 13-th of March 1741 was a boy, to the relief of the political circles in Vienna and of the empress herself. He got the name Joseph II and became the heir of the Habsburgic throne.<sup>13</sup>

The empress herself joined this horizon of expectation and more than that she expected to give birth to a prince in order to provide dynastic cohesion in the Habsburgic family.

The birth of the prince caused frenesy within the Austrian collective sensibility. In order to celebrate this event, Vienna was highly lighted; the nobles and craftsmen’s houses were decorated with inscriptions that praised Joseph’s birth and represented the Viennese wishes. Out of the multitude of the examples I have chosen one in order to demonstrate the frame of mind existent in the collective mantality. A tailor’s lodgings were decorated with an indispensable part of the masculine clothes blearning the inscription: “The enemies can guess now/ because Austria is wearing trousers.”<sup>14</sup>

Gestures of grandeur and spiritual grace towards this event could be decoded in the following verses written in the Jewish Square:

“All over this Jewish Square  
Every Christian is glad  
Because a new prince is born  
As the greatest treasure.”<sup>15</sup>

An ardent follower of the enlighthed despotism, Joseph II considered that his mission as a political leader was to provide his subjects happiness. Animated by the typical German pragmatism, the sovereign showed his hostility towards the non-working nobles but manifested an unusual sympathy towards the peasants from all over the empire. The sincere attachment towards his people, expressed several times by Joseph II, appeared in his letters from 1765. “Politics has one basis and this is the people because they provide soldiers and pay the taxes. This is why the mission of the state, that meaned of the prince, is to defend the people against the

<sup>10</sup> Apud Mircea Eliade, *Mituri, vise, mistere*, Ed. Științifică, 1931, București, p. 140.

<sup>11</sup> T. Nicoară, *op. cit.*, p.10

<sup>12</sup> David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*, Ed. Dacia, Cluj, 1984, p. 137.

<sup>13</sup> Victor Lucien, *Tapié, L’Europa du Marie Thereze*, Paris, 1969, p.50

<sup>14</sup> Apud T. Nicoară, *op. cit.*, p. 376

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*

privileged classes. They must not take advantage of two hundred peasants for a treacherous prince. The special privileges and rights of the orders and the privileged classes represented an impediment, that is why they must be withdrawn"<sup>16</sup>.

A major dimension of the myth created around his person is given by his many journeys. In many situations he traveled incognito under the name of count Falkenstein, accompanied by a general, a general staff officer and secretaries to whom he dictated the results of his experiences.

Joseph II's first journey in Transylvania took place in 1773 and had a political aim: the inspection of the border and the analysis of the complex problematics existent in Transylvanian space. The emperor's journey determined a true enthusiasm in the Romanians' spirits. Within the collective sensibility, it was perceived as an extraordinary fact, which determined the pro notary of Medias, Mihail Conrad von Heydendorff, the emperor's companion and interpreter, to write in his memoirs: "it is at last the moment around this year (1773) when we were happy to receive the monarch. The country was restless due to this event in which it did not know how to cope, because no citizen had the privilege to see his sovereign because no Austrian sovereign has been in the country since Vladislav II, except king Ioan Zapolya, the region of Ardeal has not had an Hungarian king or another crowned head."<sup>17</sup>

The atmosphere evoked by Heydendorff in his memoris betrays emotion, expectation and respect towards the sovereign. All these things represented confuse tendencies in the collective mentality of the people in Ardeal. The soldiers from the garrison welcomed the emperor with the proper ceremony. Thousands of inhabitants who stood along the route welcomed the emperor on their knees, some of them rejoicing, others crying; many of them raised written petitions which were taken by the emperor himself. Joseph II learned a few Romanian expressions in order to talk to his subjects and respond to their wishes.<sup>18</sup>

His gestures of good will as well as the few words spoken in Romanian contributed to the spreading and receptivity of the emperor's image who was also perceived as an expected justiciary character. This assertion is justified because the thing that dominated the Romanians' sensibility during the XVIII-th century is represented by the feeling of their uncertainty. The material and psychological uncertainty is the result of the oppression caused by the privileged classes (the Hungarian nobles, the Saxon and the Szekler Patricians). Many episodes during the first imperial journey denoted the affinity between the emperor and his Romanian subjects. Due to a border conflict between the Armenian village Dumbraveni and Sara village, the emperor stopped the carriage and got informed about this conflict. The Romanian priest came to welcome the prince dressed in his clerical clothes, together with the peasants, men and woman. Drawing near, Joseph II told them: "stand up, stand up I will take care of it"<sup>19</sup> (the only Romanian words spoken by The emperor). Specific to the imperial world are his stately port, his patience and interest manifested during all his meetings with the peasants, as well as the emperor's gratitude towards the oppressed ones.

The Romanians' wishes were numerous and pressing. Joseph II was addressed many petitions whose contents reflected the inequalities which the Romanians had to bear. Before reaching Mediaș the emperor was welcomed by some priests who were not united and by their rector with a petition in which they demanded the return of their church taken by the united priests (Greek-Catholics). Josef talked with the priests into Romanian asking them questions and using Heydendorff as an interpreter. The emperor gave them a favorable answer, which pleased the Romanians who knelt<sup>20</sup>.

The mythical character's legitimacy was given by the special qualities which he owned. The emperor stopped to listen to the people's troubles, took the complaints he himself, addressed them encouraging words promising that he would solve their problems. Concerning Joseph II's relations with the privileged classes, Heydendorff noticed: "His Majesty did not notice the Hungarian magnates and nobles; on the contrary, he shows a lenient opinion about the Saxons and his merciful manifestations towards the plebs astonished them completely".<sup>21</sup>

The emperor to whom they had the chance to talk and meet; thus he was convinced that he was in front of the emperor so long expected. On a more general plan, Joseph II's concern stressed their doubt about the

<sup>16</sup> Von Arneth, *Maria Theresia und Joseph II: Ihre Correspondenz*, tom III, Wien, 1868, pp.335-361

<sup>17</sup> Michael Conrad von Heydendorff, București, 1983, p. 75

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2-3

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2-38

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 38

<sup>21</sup> Michael Conrad von Heydendorff, *Eine Selbstbiografie* translated by T.V Păcătian, Cartea de aur, I, Sibiu, 1902, p. 85

local administration, the landlords and strengthened their trust in the "good emperor". This visit awoke the peasants' belief and hopes in the possibility of improving their own condition. On the other hand, the nobles and all sorts of civil servants manifested anxiety about the new reforms which could jeopardize their privileges and social conditions.<sup>22</sup>

His second journey in Banat and Transylvania was set out in the summer of 1783 on the background of a climate of intense expectation. The abolition of serfdom in Bohemia and Hungary in 1781 and the spreading of the rumors that these measures would be taken in Transylvania increased the popular horizon of expectation. During his journey there was the same crowd who assailed him with their complaints. "They were all received by the emperor himself who expected them in the waiting room solving the unimportant problems on the spot. In what concerns the more complicated ones, the petitioner was invited into the room where the emperor asked him about the object of his complaint. Due to the fact that the petitioners grew in number the emperor did not have time to listen to all their problems but, however, he took all this written complaints himself; a gardian would take the petitions in the emperor's study and then they were sent to Vienna where they were examined and solved. The most of the petitioners were Romanian peasants who came to see the emperor in order to complain"<sup>23</sup>.

Being in Brasov, on June the 8<sup>th</sup> 1783 - the Whit Sunday, the emperor listened to the mass in the Roman-Catholic Church. Afterwards, he went to the Lutherans' big church where he listened to the vicar's (Preidt's) sermon for about ten minutes. To the people's surprise, he went to the Ortodox Church, Saint Nicholas from Scheii Braşovului. This was an exemple of applying the Edicts of Tolerance from 1781.

The emperor's journey impressed the collective sensibility this time too. Masses of serfs were expecting the decree of the reforms fulfilled in the others regions of the empire while the nobles were confronting themselves with an acute feeling of insecurity due to the reforming intentions manifested by the emperor. It is easy to understand the persistency of the emperor's constant and intense image in the peasants mentality; they expected from him the fulfillment of all the individual and national wishes belonging to the Romanians of Transylvania. The same mythical prestige surrounded the emperor during all his journeys, emphasizing the metamorphosis of a historical personality into a mythical character.

The emperor's gestures and actions generated important changes in the peasantry's mentality. They feel that they are not anymore at the nobles disposal. The noble is powerful but he has a leader above him. The emperor himself, seen as a favorable authority to the peasants. The emperor's reforms favoured the Romanian element subjected to injustices by the privileged classes and it transmitted the idea of a great trust in Joseph II.

Joseph II made his last trip in Transylvania in 1786. He visited the offices, archives, jails, he discussed with the Bruckenthal government and the general commandment. According to Heydendorff, the emperor was cold and indifferent towards the authorities and not very talkative with the Romanians. On this occasion, the emperor, despite the deficiencies in the state administration, did not make any changes among the incompetent civil officers. The imperial kindness and understanding strengthened the Romanians' conviction in a general and happy change for their future. As a results of his journeys in Transylvania all the state institutions became milder and the peasants got courage and boldness. Thus in 1773 the peasants around Panticel led by a soldier, Iosif Deac, attacked and robbed the castle of the administrative leader Inczeali. The latter declared on the occasion of Joseph II's journey that "the emperor is the lunatic of Romanians". As a result the Romanians beat and forced him to swear faith to the emperor.<sup>24</sup>

The Romanians' belief in "the good emperor" represented the instrument through which Vienna acquired a dominant power of a different nature than that of a feudal hierarchy. The emperor's popularity is increased not only by the direct contact made during his journey but also by the reformist initiatives. They welcomed the Romanian horizon of expectation. The creation of this myth is the result of three reforms: the Tolerance Edict about the right of cohabitation on the royal land (*fundus regius*) and the abolition of serfdom through the imperial patent on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1785.

The edict of religious tolerance from 1781 stipulated that every religion had the right to manifest itself freely and each community including more than one hundred families had the possibility of building its own church and school. This motivated even more the Romanians' gratitude towards their benefactor, the emperor

<sup>22</sup> David Prodan, *Răscoala lui Horea*, vol I, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, pp. 70-71

<sup>23</sup> T.V. Păcățian, *Cartea de Aur*, I, Sibiu, 1902, p. 85

<sup>24</sup> David Prodan, *op. cit.*, p. 73

Joseph II. As a result, echoes appeared within the orthodoxy. The rector, Moise Moga, began the "protocol of the commands" in 1782 with hymns of praise and gratitude addressed to the emperor. They reflected the attachment of the Romanian communities who had the possibility of practicing their own religious belief.

"With happiness to Joseph II  
For this Romanians thank  
And they render Joseph, the Romanians' emperor, happiness,  
Because he was merciful and took pity on them  
He allowed the Romanians to have  
Churches, priest, teachers  
That is why the whole people thank him  
By saying this with gratitude  
O sweet Joseph emperor  
We thank God continuously  
And pray to Him for your empire  
And we will always stand  
And give our lives for your empire"<sup>25</sup>

Another favorable initiative for the Romanians, the decree of cohabitation recognized the Romanians' equal rights with the Saxons' on the royal land, the right of property, of the acquisition of properties in towns, the establishment of guilds. The equal rights obtained by the Romanians according to the emperor's law of 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1784 was considered unbearable by the Saxons. "I wish with all my heart not to live any longer"<sup>26</sup>, ejaculated Von Hanneheim, the imperial advisor when he heard about the decree of cohabitation. The abolition of the political nations, of their autonomy as well as the implementation of the decree of cohabitation were favorable to the Romanians. Their century-old situation of "tolerated" people ceased to function and they joined the social body of the Habsburgic empire.

The decree of cohabitation stirred the anger of the governor of Transylvania as well, Samuel von Bruckenthal, co-initiator of the Theresian reforms. He made attempts to lessen the social and political-economic rights that the Romanians enjoyed. "As long as the Romanians do not reach a cultural level equal to that of the Saxons, as long as they do not assimilate the Saxons' habits and customs, their interference does not bring any gain to the whole" he reproached to the emperor<sup>27</sup>. This argument did not modify the course of the reforms and due to the emperor's law of 13<sup>th</sup> of July 1784, the Saxons as a privileged nation were declared abolished and the wealth of the Saxon University was entrusted to the Hungarian Imperial House.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August 1785 Joseph II decided to abolish the serfdom and to replace the term of serf with that of a colonist, their subjects having the possibility of moving from one noble to another without being forced to serve the nobles' courts. The latter were forbidden to drive the serfs away from the lands that they owned without judicial verdict and more than that they were not allowed to drive the serfs away from one village to another<sup>28</sup>. The abolition of serfdom, a fascinating idea, captured the whole sensibility of the Romanians in Transylvania. "Their emperor in whom they believed and whose goodwill they never doubted, gave them the wished satisfaction: the social freedom. This can be noticed in the answers formulated by the villages of Giurgiu on the occasion of the imperial law in the autumn of 1785. Although the serfdom was a perpetual duty tied to the land so that the serf could not leave, it was finally abolished. We were serfs for a long time but we have been made free men by the emperor for a few weeks".<sup>29</sup>

It is obvious that due to such gestures the Romanians became aware of their protector, the emperor himself. His goodwill actions were spread at the level of the largest social structures. Joseph II's messages of goodwill towards the Romanians were received as such in the collective sensibility. The collective memory retained these gestures, transformed them into hyperboles, spread and amplified them contributing thus to the redimension of the messianic profile and the creation of Joseph II's mystical character.

<sup>25</sup> Ioan Lupăș, *Istoria bisericească a românilor ardeleni*, Editura Dacia, Cluj 1995 p119

<sup>26</sup> Mathias Bernath, *Habsburgii și începuturile formării națiunii române*, Ed. Dacia, Cluj, 1984, p. 247

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p 248

<sup>28</sup> David Prodan, *Problema iobăgiei în Transilvania 1700-1848*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1989, p. 172

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 180

The belief in the emperor's justiciary spirit enjoyed a high popularity within the Romanian village. In his agitations in preparing the rebellion Horea often appealed to "the emperor's will and order", according to a circular addressed to the judge of Ponor. The document called the peasantry from this village and that from Bucium, Lupșa and Megina to a gathering in Câmpeni, stressing that this call was made according to "the emperor's will"<sup>30</sup>. This call had a strong echo in the Romanian peasantry's soul, increasing thus their hope in a social emancipation.

From an ontological point of view, this fact is not surprising at all since one of the characteristics of the peasantry's mentality - which was maintained until 1907- represented the belief in the "good emperor". The conviction so necessary in the myth that "si le roi savait", if the king knew, then the abuses and the injustices would end, has its origin in the mystical dimension created around the sovereign's character, perceived as the "God's anointed". Perceived in such a hypostasis the emperor was considered to be good and fair, guaranteeing the legality which was often broken by the Hungarian and Saxon nobles.

Horea's audiences to the Viennese emperor nourished the creation of the spirit around Joseph II. During the last audience to the emperor, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1784, according to the legend spread by Horea at this return, the emperor stirred the masses to revolt through the words "tut ihr das" (do this by yourselves). These worlds were attributed to the emperor by a Hungarian noble's late letter from Ribita (18<sup>th</sup> April 1830). He asserted that he had received the information from captain Solder<sup>31</sup> who was present at Horea's audience.

The peasantry often invoked Joseph II's image as well as that of his mother, the empress Maria Theresa, in 1784. Thus, in Vulpeni, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1784, the peasants destroyed thirty-eight houses of nobles and townspeople shouting "vivat Maria Theresa". In order to rally the participants to the revolt, Horea showed them a diploma with the emperor's signature and a golden cross with the emperor's image in the medallion.<sup>32</sup>

Even after the defeat of the revolt, the imperial clemency referred to the participants. Joseph II interfered in order to diminish the thirst for revenge against the Wallachians. In this respect he entrusted the investigation of the causes which determined the revolt to a mixed commission made of civilians and military led by the count Jankowics and the general Papilla: "He ordered them to leave aside all the ordinary instances". He urged the governor Bruckenthal to make the nobles understand that "the emperor cannot keep his army ready for the war against his subjects". The investigation commission led by count Jankowich and general Papilla created the image of the good and protective emperor within the collective mentality. These goodwill gestures are the cause of the hopes within the Romanians' collective mentality and the emperor's image was more and more surrounded by its mythical and charismatic halo.

The belief and the certainty in the "good emperor" were so intense that not even after the clash with the harsh reality of the defeat of the revolt and the horrible execution of its leaders, the myth did not disappear. It survived being nourished permanently by the imperial discourse, by the Viennese reforming spirit and Joseph II's saving interventions in the support of the Romanians confronted with the Hungarian nobles' oppression.

The institution of the military border created by the Habsburgs represented another unifying factor in the creation of Joseph II's mythical image. The collective sensibility perceived that through the establishment of the border regiments the Romanians acquired a common consciousness and had the possibility of having land and the chance of a social equality with the other inhabitants of the country. This perception strengthened their hopes and the belief in the "good emperor". The following lines were written by Nicolae Stoica, a participant to the military confrontations of the empire and they constitute a good example in this respect:

"Plebs we are / we live from alms  
maternal concern / and safe in its turn  
The emperor's good deeds / may they increase  
Joseph, the emperor / the well known traveller  
Saw us as a nation / with low education  
Found us in the mountains / and lost in the valleys  
When he saw us all / he didn't hesitate at all  
To make us his own nation / used in certain situations  
To guard him and to serve / be praised as we deserve

<sup>30</sup> Ioan Lupaș, *Împăratul Iosif al II-lea și răscola țăranilor în Transilvania*, București, 1935, p. 17

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>32</sup> Nicolae Densușianu, *Revoluția lui Horea în Ardeal și Ungaria*, București, 1984, p. 213

Unflinching in the faith / and fighters till death  
 Working as his soldiers / being praised with honours  
 I feel like a son / Convinced till I die  
 That Austria's high / and what it deserves best  
 Is this hymn from myself".<sup>33</sup>

The verses belong to a popular gender of the epoch, the camp songs. Beyond the value of the author's verses, they reveal the strong impact of the military border on the Romanian collective sensibility. Referring to this, the historian Toader Nicoară from Cluj stated the following: "The military condition (that of the frontier guard) will become synonym with the noble condition in the Romanians' social imagination, nourishing the dreams and hopes of emancipation from the servile categories (serfs) and in a more general plan of the hope of emancipation for the Romanians from Ardeal."<sup>34</sup> This perception has its origins at the Viennese Court and in its efforts to modernize the out-dated institutions and to render Transylvania a constitutional background.

The Romanian frontier guards proved their abilities during the Napoleonic wars when they and the Serbian, Czech, Slovak regiments fought for the emperor's cause and against his enemies. Their participation in the battle under the Habsburgic flag strengthened the mythical perception of power and stressed the significance of the "good emperor" for the Romanian peasants who became soldiers in his army. Joseph II's contemporary expressed the truth in his assertion: "All the Romanian serfs might have enrolled in the army if it had been allowed to them."<sup>35</sup> The testimony made by the notary of Mediaș Heydendorff is crucial for the emperor's image, the latter having mythical qualities in the collective sensibility. Such imperial initiatives and many others had a strong impact upon the peasantry's mentality. The Romanians became aware of their rescuer who, under these circumstances, was the emperor himself. His goodwill acts were spread at the level of all the social categories. On this background, the emperor's image was surrounded by his mythical and charismatic halo.

If at the level of peasant mentality the myth of the "good emperor" was perceived intuitively through its spreading and mental contamination, within the intellectual elite the myth is rationally perceived at the spiritual level, too. Because of the bad relations with the Popa, the emperor stopped the Romanian youngmen's journey to Rome and favoured their studies in Vienna. As a result, the Romanian intellectuals assumed the imperial discourse especially when it welcomed their own horizon of expectation. The schools in Blaj and frontier guard schools grew in number. The number of the intellectuals was continuously increasing; the public offices became accessible to the Romanians and Romanian officers developed their activities within the frontier guard regiments. All these achievements are the result of the emperor's reforming politics. The Romanian intellectuals praised him and considered him the people's greatest benefactor.

In this respect the political verses, which explain the role of the royal eagle, are significant for the imperial mythology. They were published in the preface of the "Molitvenic" printed at Blaj in 1784:

"The coat of arms with two heads hoisted  
 The sceptre and the apple with two swords united  
 The sign of the imperial power shows  
 That this one to the emperor belongs  
 To Joseph the Great loved by his nation  
 To this rescuer and great apparition  
 May God keep him sound and healthy  
 And through him to make us happy."<sup>36</sup>

The text emphasizes through simple verses of a profound symbolism, which, as in the King Sun's case, have the same mythological symbols. The sun with its shining rays suggests a protective structure that secured the triumph of the good over the evil. On a more general plan, the document suggests the triumph of the imperial idea considered to be a liberating and a benefactor one.

<sup>33</sup> Nicolae Bocșan, *Manuscrise bănațene din secolul XVIII-lea*, în „Studii de limbă, literatură, folclor” IV, Reșița, 1978, pp.423-424

<sup>34</sup> Toader Nicoară, *Transilvania la începuturile timpurilor moderne (1680-1800)*. *Societate rurală și mentalități colective*, Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1997, p. 368

<sup>35</sup> Mathias Bernath, *op. cit.*, p. 17

<sup>36</sup> I. Bianu, N. Hodos, *Bibliografia românească veche*, București, 1910, tomul II, p. 291, tom II, Blaj, 1801, p. 201-202



The elite and the intellectuals enjoyed the emperor's reforming politics. They were granted ranks and titles, assigned estates and aristocratic diplomas. These goodwill gestures towards the Romanian elite suggested the imperial kindness through the spreading of rumours. The intellectuals dedicated odes and elegies to the emperor motivating thus the myth of the good emperor:

"Through Joseph II  
Our nation condemned to thralldom  
Gets rid now of its long serfdom  
Gaining finally its freedom".<sup>37</sup>

Gheorghe Șincai was entranced by the emperor's image "who animated the Romanians and made me prosper."<sup>38</sup> Another example, which attested the presence of the myth in the Romanian mentality, was represented by the "Preface" written by Gheorghe Șincai in *The Great Catechism*: "Having shown his mercy for so many years our emperor Joseph II ordered the governor of the Great Principality to build schools where children could learn in their own language and write and count or arithmetics and the Christian learning so that they were not only good sons of their country but also true Christians."<sup>39</sup>

Samuil Micu spoke in praise of the emperor: "Since Leopold's reign the Romanians have been improving their condition; Maria Theresa was a «merciful mother» and the emperor Joseph II surpassed all because, among other things, he was a merciful emperor, fair to the poor and a good father: he abolished serfdom which was a sort of heathen slavery."<sup>40</sup>

Within the same mythical atmosphere, the emperor was invoked at the level of the popular creation as the supreme judge of last instance. The popular tradition asserts that in Transylvania there existed a petition in verses. It refers to the emperor as a supreme instance of justice:

"Our dear emperor,  
Consider this in a fair manner  
Four days we are working  
On the fifth one we are fishing  
On the sixth one we are hunting  
And the seventh celebrating  
Emperor consider thus  
If it is fair for us  
To pay taxes, fees and tasks."<sup>41</sup>

"Our August dear Heighness  
Come and give us our justice  
We beg thus your Majesty  
We cannot set ourselves free  
From the Szklers' great opression  
And Hungarians' exploitation."<sup>42</sup>

Joseph II's health problems had repercussions within the Romanian sensibility. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1790 the Romanian Orthodox bishop ordered the rectors to urge the priests from "al over the country to pray together three days for the emperor". It was the priests' obligation to urge the people "to pray with all their hearts for his reighness' recovery and help".

The emperor's death on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1790 had a strong impact upon the Romanian sensibility; the Romanians saw in the august emperor the saving and the justiciary character. It is significant, in this respect, the message sent on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1790 by the bishop to the Romanian priests from Ardeal; he urged them

<sup>37</sup> A. Bitaj în "Dacoromania" III, 1923, p. 784-786

<sup>38</sup> Gheorghe Șincai, *Cronica Românilor*, București, 1969, p. 287

<sup>39</sup> *Bibliografia românească veche*, II, p. 281

<sup>40</sup> Samuil Micu, *Istoria și lucrurile și întâmplările românilor*, tom II, Blaj, 1801, pp. 201-202

<sup>41</sup> E. Dăianu, *Vorbe bune, Calendarul nostru pe anul 1919*, Camloșul Mare, 1918, p. 58-60

<sup>42</sup> Ioan Lupaș, *Revoluțiunea lui Horea*, în "Studii, conferințe și comunicări istorice", București, 1927, p. 330-331

that on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> of March "they should say a mass and a requiem in order to remind of our emperor and each church should toll the bells three hours a day."<sup>43</sup>

The pain within the Romanian collective sensibility contrasted with the one existent within the Hungarian sensibility. The Hungarian officials hesitated to make public the emperor's death in order not to trouble the atmosphere of happiness created by the revocation of his orders (except the edict of religious tolerance and abolition of serfdom). There organized parties all over the country and people were exultant. In March 1790 new disposals were given regarding the ordinary mourning in Hungary but according to a Saxon historian: "There were black coats which were seen everywhere but not sad faces."<sup>44</sup>

"Revocatio ervationum" and the emperor's death affected the Romanians from Ardeal painfully. They realized that their hopes in a social status were destroyed and they had lost an emperor who strove to abolish the injustice. The emperor's image remained vibrant in the Romanians' affective memory for a long time. In order to emphasize the plastic images which reflected the belief in the emperor I will follow the formulae through which a Romanian representative addressed to the emperor. "Our complaints which, under the domination of the Glorious and August House of Austria, were highly diminished and lately under our emperor, the great Joseph II disappeared completely, have become so difficult. Through our emperor's death, the Great Joseph II, the High House of Austria has already given us schools, seminars, foundations and donations due to our bishops; it gave us diplomas, restrictions and rezolutions regarding the Romanians' appointment in public positions so that during Joseph II's reign they had equal rights with the other nations."<sup>45</sup> This text is the most relevant document that attests the fact that, although Joseph II had died, his myth passed from the transient age-old atmosphere to a spiritual, eternal one.

The moment of *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* is one of the many moments when the Romanians remembered the emperor's kindness. In their mentality the emperor was "that happy emperor, the justiciary prince, our Great Joseph II who understood the man's pure and simple rights, who saw the injustice and the oppression and was convinced that the Romanian nation was more numerous and useful during time of peace and war than the other nations in the Province and allowed the Romanians to enjoy the same rights and benefits exactly as the other nations in the Principality."<sup>46</sup>

The meaning of this text refers to the tendency manifested by the Romanian community towards Joseph's II personality. Due to the lack of normality and stability, the Habsburg sovereign was seen as an exceptional character, different from the other subjects chosen by the Providence and endowed with high virtues. His initiatives matched the Romanian horizon of expectation. The Romanians' special receptivity to "the emperor's kindness" was undoubtedly determined by the promise which he made regarding the solving of all their social and political wishes. This is the reason why the spreading of this illusion determined a kind of "veneration" of the Habsburgic emperor within the collective sensibility. Due to such perceptions crystallized in the Romanian sensibility, the emperor's image became surrounded by his mythical and charismatic halo.

The text decodes the idea that the emperor became an ideal lider of state who was considered the element of cohesion of the Romanian community around the empire. He was the mediator between the different social interests, a justiciary spirit due to his concern in protecting the others, a superpotence factor which determined the Romanians' prosperity and integrity.

The Romanian loyalty towards the dynasty and the emperor was the result of some events experienced at the level of political imagination and of the mythical episode represented by Joseph II's reign. The emperor's meeting with his subjects took place at the level of imagination. Each of them took notice of the missing elements. In order to modernize the empire, the emperor needed the Romanians to convince the social classes to adhere to this purpose. In their turn, the Romanians needed their "good" emperor in order to survive the difficult situation in which they were considered a tolerated nation. Thus, the belief in the "good emperor" became a huge symbol, which nourished the Romanians' hopes of social and national emancipation in Transylvania.

<sup>43</sup> Idem, *Contribuții la istoria politică a românilor ardeleni în secolul al XVIII-lea în "Studii, conferințe și comunicări istorice", București, 1927, p. 330-331*

<sup>44</sup> Zenovie Păclișanu, *Luptele politice ale românilor ardeleni 1790-1792*, București, 1923, p.5

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p.15

<sup>46</sup> David Prodan, *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1984, p. 504