

## EPISTOLARY FRAGMENTARIUM: ION CONEA – DAVID PRODAN. A GEOPOLITICIAN'S DIALOGUE WITH A HISTORIAN

*Emanuil Ineoan*<sup>119</sup> and  
*Andreea Dăncilă Ineoan*<sup>120</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*The present study aims to emphasize a thinker considered as one of the fathers of Romanian geopolitics, a cultural profile with a special destiny, still little known to the general public, Ion Conea. Recovering the universe of thought of this intellectual, unjustly forgotten, is a plea for research into his ideational legacy and the way in which the conclusions of his researches are still relevant today. In this sense, the letters sent by Ion Conea to the historian David Prodan are a starting point for a broader investigation of how the science of geopolitics was ordered in Romania in dialogue with history.*

**Keywords:** Geopolitics, Ion Conea, David Prodan, correspondence.

### PREMISES

The history of the school of geopolitics in Romania starts at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the name of the scholar Simion Mehedinți, who tried to structure a field of fertile interdisciplinarity, at the intersection of geography with history, sociology, political science, ethnography, economics. For this scholar, understanding the geopolitics of a people meant interpreting two sets of requirements and benchmarks: those relating to the dynamics of spaces and those relating to the dynamics of peoples<sup>121</sup>. Appointed in 1900 as professor at the Faculty of Letters in Bucharest in the first geography department established in Romania, Simion Mehedinți became, in this capacity, a guiding spirit of a first generation of intellectuals interested in the study of geopolitics.

---

<sup>119</sup> Researcher, The European Centre for Ethnic Studies, Romanian Academy, E-mail contact: [iemanuil@yahoo.com](mailto:iemanuil@yahoo.com).

<sup>120</sup> Documentarist, David Prodan Memorial Museum Memorial, Babeș-Bolyai University. E-mail contact: [andreea.dancila@yahoo.com](mailto:andreea.dancila@yahoo.com).

<sup>121</sup> \*\*\*, „Criteriul universalității istoriei cu cel al organicității geopolitice și geo-etnologice a popoarelor, în concepția geografului Simion Mehedinți (1869–1962)” [“The Criterion of the Universality of History With That of the Geopolitical and Geo-ethnological Organicity of Peoples, According to the Geographer Simion Mehedinți (1869–1962)”], in *GeoPolitica*, Available at: <https://www.geopolitic.ro/2018/11/criteriul-universalitatii-istoriei-cu-cel-al-organicitatii-geopolitice-si-geo-etnologice-popoarelor-conceptia-geografului-simion-mehedinti-1869-1962/>, Accessed on September 2, 2023.

Inspired by the theses of the German school, Romanian geopolitics was in the effervescent period of 1900–1948 “geopolitics of the nation”<sup>122</sup>. Mehedinți’s efforts to create a new research discipline are visible both in the number and quality of those who will follow this direction of study, in the materials promoted by the professor and in the emulation around the journal *Geopolitics and Geohistory*, published in Bucharest between 1941 and 1944<sup>123</sup>.

The present study aims to bring back into focus a name regarded as “the first modern theorist of geopolitics”<sup>124</sup>, “one of the most sophisticated and self-reflective Romanian geopoliticians”<sup>125</sup>, Ion Conea.

Recovering the universe of thought of this unjustly forgotten intellectual means, last but not least, a plea for fruitful dialogue between all those disciplines that can be found under the generous umbrella of geopolitics.

### THE GEOPOLITICIAN

Ion Conea was born in Coteana commune, Ilt county, on 15 January 1902, in a peasant family. After completing primary school in his native village, at the suggestion of teachers who noticed their pupil’s potential, his parents agreed to enrol him in 1914 at the Constanța Normal School. From there, Ion Conea transferred to the “Iacob Negruzzi” boarding school in Iași, where he graduated as class leader in 1922. In the same year, he enrolled in the Faculty of Geography, being a close friend of Professor Constantin Brătescu<sup>126</sup>. He was quickly noticed by Professor Simion Mehedinți, and in 1926 he was appointed his assistant. In 1934 he defended his doctoral thesis “Țara Loviștei” [Loviște Land], granted with the distinction “summa cum laude”. Published in 1935, this research was awarded with the Romanian Academy Prize, drawing the attention of Nicolae Iorga. Between 1933 and 1938, Ion Conea was selected Crown Prince Michael’s geography teacher at the Palatine

---

<sup>122</sup> Diana Didă, „Orientări și curente în geopolitica românească. Geopolitica, știința integralității teritoriale românești” [“Orientations and Trends in Romanian Geopolitics. Geopolitics, the Science of Romanian Territorial Integrity”], in *Etnosfera Journal*, No. 4, 2010, p. 31.

<sup>123</sup> More about Simion Mehedinți’s legacy in establishing geopolitics as a science in Romania in Marius Cristian Neacșu, *Simion Mehedinți și geopolitica românească [Simion Mehedinți and Romanian Geopolitics]*, Bucharest, CD Press, 2018.

<sup>124</sup> Marius Neacșu, „Ideile lui Ion Conea asupra geopoliticii” [“Ion Conea’s Ideas on Geopolitics”], in *Terra*, L, No. 1–2, Bucharest, 2019, p. 60.

<sup>125</sup> Călin Cotoi, *Primordialism cultural și geopolitică românească interbelică [Cultural Primordialism and Interwar Romanian Geopolitics]*, Bucharest, Little Wallachia Publishing, 2006, p. 183.

<sup>126</sup> Constantin Brătescu (1882–1945), geographer, teacher, corresponding member of the Romanian Academy. Assistant to Professor Simion Mehedinți’s geography department, professor of geography at the Normal School in Constanța, and from 1930 dean of the Faculty of Sciences in Chernivtsi 1938 he was entrusted with the direction of the geography department at the University of Bucharest. He was a patron of Ion Conea, guiding him towards the study of geography.

School<sup>127</sup>. From this period also dates the professional approach to the sociological school of Dimitrie Gusti. He participated in three monographic campaigns (Runcu, Șanț, Clopotiva). He coordinated the volume *Clopotiva, un sat din Hațeg [Clopotiva, a village in Hațeg]*, published in 1940. He was active in the group around the magazine *Rânduiala*<sup>128</sup>. From 1941 to 1944 he was a member of the editorial board of the journal *Geopolitica and Geohistory. Romanian magazine for South-East Europe*, together with such prominent Romanian intellectuals as Gheorghe I. Brătianu, Sabin Manuilă, Mircea Vulcănescu, Anton Golopenția.

Between 1937 and 1939, Ion Conea was cultural delegate/attaché to the Romanian Embassy in Berlin. In 1944, together with Mircea Vulcănescu, Colonel Gabriel Gheorghiu and Anton Golopenția, he founded the “Initiative Committee for the excavation of the Dacian fortresses in the Sebeș Mountains”.

After 1948 he was dismissed from his post (blaming his past as King Michael's geography professor and the nationalist approaches of his published research) and his studies were indexed, geopolitics being considered a fascist science. Following the interventions of Vintilă M. Mihăilescu<sup>129</sup>, in 1952 he was recalled as researcher until 1957, when he was again forced to leave the Institute of Geographical Research. He was reinstated a year later at the lowest step of a research post. In 1962 he founded the Toponymy Circle at the Institute. In 1969 he was head of the sector of Population and Settlement Geography, Toponymy and Historical Geography. He retired in 1972. In the spring of 1974, he died in Bucharest and was buried in his native village<sup>130</sup>.

After years of oblivion, Ion Conea's legacy began to be revisited especially after 1989, although the scholar still lacks a published monograph<sup>131</sup>.

## THE HISTORIAN

In the archive of the David Prodan Memorial Museum of the University Cultural Heritage Department of the Babeș-Bolyai University there are some letters from 1965–1971 addressed by Ion Conea to the historian David Prodan. The personal

---

<sup>127</sup> This unique teaching experience formed the basis of the volume Ion Conea, *Cum învăța a-și cunoaște țara Măria Sa Mihai [How His Royal Highness Michael Learned to Know His Country]*, Bucharest, Romanian Book, 1936.

<sup>128</sup> Cătălina Cârstea, „Ion Conea, reprezentant al intelectualității românești din secolul al XX-lea” [“Ion Conea, a Representative of the 20th Century Romanian Intelligentsia”], in *Milcovia*, IX, No. 17, 2013, p. 106.

<sup>129</sup> Vintilă M. Mihăilescu (1890–1978), cultural anthropologist, geographer, member of the Romanian Academy since 1974.

<sup>130</sup> Ion Conea's biographical excursus was recovered from Cătălina Cârstea's PhD thesis, *Semnificația operei lui Ion Conea pentru cercetarea geografică românească [The Significance of Ion Conea's Work for Romanian Geographical Research]*, attended at the Faculty of Geography of the University of Bucharest, 2012.

<sup>131</sup> In this respect, Cătălina Cârstea's doctoral thesis, referred to above, is worthy of note.

documents belonging to the sender are extremely limited, as most of Conea's personal archive was irreparably damaged by the 1977 earthquake, and part of it (letters, unpublished books, studies, etc.) was deliberately destroyed by Ion Conea himself<sup>132</sup>. In these circumstances, these testimonies, despite their easy and friendly air, become valuable, constituting a small piece in an effort to recover the human and intellectual profile of the scholar Ion Conea.

Perhaps the existence of this epistolary exchange can be explained by Conea's constant interest in the dialogue between geography and history throughout his adventure of geopolitical knowledge of the Romanian space. The man who in 1942 was assistant to Gh. Brătianu<sup>133</sup>, has always remained attached to the belief that without historical perspective there can be no comprehensive analysis of Romanian realities.

Considered the greatest Transylvanian historian of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, David Prodan was a name not to be missed by any researcher passionate about Romanian ethnogenesis, population shifts from north to south of the Carpathians and a number of other social history topics.

In fact, ever since the appearance of his first studies, David Prodan had been frequented by famous Romanian sociologists, interested in supporting their investigations with the historical framework he provided. In 1949 David Prodan was approached by Anton Golopenția<sup>134</sup> as follows:

“Dear Professor, Mr. Chinezu mentioned to me last winter your new work ‘Supplex Libellus Valachorum’. I looked for it in the bookshops, and not having found it repeatedly, I came to believe that I had misunderstood what I had heard and that it must have been a manuscript. From the review printed in the last issue of the Studies, I learned that the work has nevertheless appeared.

If it is possible, please send me a copy. I read with interest ‘The Theory of the Immigration of the Romanians in the 18<sup>th</sup> century’. I am working on a history of the evolution of the population of Romanian countries, and I would be pleased to read your description of Transylvania during the Josephine Conscriptio<sup>135</sup>.”

---

<sup>132</sup> Cătălina Cârstea's testimony.

<sup>133</sup> Cătălina Cârstea, „Ion Conea, reprezentant al intelectualității românești din secolul al XX-lea” [“Ion Conea, a Representative of the 20th Century Romanian Intelligentsia”], in *Milcovia*, IX, No. 17, 2013, p. 107.

<sup>134</sup> For the profile and the activity of this sociologist see: Radu Baltasiu, *Anton Golopenția. Crestomație [Anton Golopenția. Chrestomaty]*, Bucharest, Oscar Print Publishing, 2023.

<sup>135</sup> „Stimate Domnule Profesor, Dl. Chinezu mi-a pomenit iarna trecută lucrarea Dv nouă «Supplex Libellus Valachorum». Am căutat-o prin librării și negăsindu-o în repetate rânduri, am ajuns să cred că nu voi fi înțeles bine cele auzite și că va fi fiind vorba de un manuscris. Din recenzia tipărită în ultimul număr al Studiilor am aflat că lucrarea a apărut totuși.

Dacă lucrul e cu puțință, vă rog să-mi trimiteți un exemplar. Am cetit cu interes «Teoria imigrației Românilor în veacul al XVIII-lea». Lucrez la o istorie a evoluției populației țărilor românești și mi-ar face plăcere să citesc din descrierea Dv. a Transilvaniei din vremea conscripției josefine.”, From the archive of David Prodan Memorial Museum.

Traian Herseni, another representative of the sociological school in Bucharest, wrote to the historian from Cluj in 1978:

“Fortunately, I have most of your works of interest to me, and, in addition, I have read them with much benefit and used them whenever necessary. In my opinion, sociology is not possible without history, especially economic and social history, so your writings are of great value, not only for historians, but for sociologists. I have been working for several years on a book on ‘Romanian Folk Culture’ – which I hope to finish, in spite of my ‘relatively’ advanced age – and you can imagine how much I need historical data, a scientific clarification of the ‘historical framework’ in which and under whose influence the peasantry developed, and the ‘ethnographic’ and ‘folkloric’ phenomena related to it appeared. I am therefore looking forward with great interest to your new works”<sup>136</sup>.

The same returned in 1979:

“I have received ‘Răscoala lui Horea’ [‘Horea’s Rebellion’] – an important work for all social-human sciences – and I thank you very much. It will be of great use to me in my work on the sociology of the peasantry and Romanian popular culture”<sup>137</sup>.

Therefore, we are in a period when the openness of sociologists towards historical research was intense, categorically summed up by Traian Herseni “sociology is not possible without history”.

It is against this background that the rapprochement between Ion Conea and David Prodan is consummated. However, in order to better understand the background to this meeting, a brief biographical sketch of the historian from Cluj is necessary.

David Prodan was born on 13 March 1902 in the village of Cioara, today Săliște, Alba County, in a peasant family – an important biographical detail for the later historian’s thematic choices. After his first school classes in his native village, David Prodan attended the gymnasium in Sebeș and later the Kún College in Orăștie. In the autumn of 1921, the young scholar from a family with few material possibilities was admitted to the Faculty of Letters, Romanian-history department of the King Ferdinand I University. His teachers were the emblematic generation of the inter-war Cluj university: Sextil Pușcariu, Gheorghe Bogdan Duică, Vasile Bogrea, Alexandru Lapedatu, Ioan Lupaș, Silviu Dragomir, Ioan Ursu (the latter is mentioned as having been decisive in guiding him towards universal history), Virgil Bărbat. After graduating, David Prodan enrolled in doctoral courses under the supervision of Professor Ioan Lupaș.

<sup>136</sup> „Din fericire am mai toate lucrările dv. de interes pentru mine, și, în plus, le-am citit cu mult folos și le-am utilizat ori de câte ori a fost cazul. După mine, sociologia nu este posibilă fără istorie, în special, istoria economică și socială, așa încât scrierile dv. sunt de mare preț, nu numai pentru istorici, ci pentru sociologi. Eu lucrez de mai mulți ani la o carte despre «Cultura poporană românească» – pe care sper să o fac, cu toată vârsta mea «relativ» înaintată – și vă imaginați câtă nevoie am de datele istoriei, de o precizare științifică a «cadrelor istorice» în care și sub influența cărora s-a dezvoltat țărănimea și au apărut fenomenele «etnografice» și «folclorice» legate de ea. Aștept deci cu mare interes noile dv. lucrări.”, in *Ibidem*.

<sup>137</sup> Același revenea și în 1979: „Am primit «Răscoala lui Horea» – lucrare importantă pentru toate științele social-umane – și vă mulțumesc foarte mult. Îmi va fi de mare folos în lucrările mele de sociologie a țărânilor și a culturii populare românești.”, in *Ibidem*.

In 1937 he obtained his doctorate in History with a thesis on *Răscoala lui Horea în comitatele Cluj și Turda [Horea's rebellion in Cluj and Turda counties]*, published a year later. Employed as archivist at the State Archives, Cluj branch, he moved in 1937 as librarian-archivist at the Central University Library in Cluj. In September 1940, after the Vienna dictatorship, he fled to Sibiu with most of the teaching and auxiliary staff of the Cluj university. He returned to Cluj in 1945. Only a year earlier, in 1944, appeared his book *Teoria imigrației românilor din Principatele române în Transilvania în secolul al XVII-lea [The Theory of the Immigration of Romanians from the Romanian Principalities to Transylvania in the 17th century]*. In 1948 he published *Supplex Libellus Valachorum*, a remarkable historical investigation, considered one of the most reprinted book by a Romanian historian (it has been published 6 times in Romanian, once in English and German). This book was a decisive factor in his admission to the Romanian Academy and, subsequently, in his appointment to the chair of Modern History at the Faculty of History and to head the Medieval History section of the George Barițiu Institute of History.

In a context of considerable political pressure on historians and historical writing in the 1950s, David Prodan was accused of reactionary, nationalistic attitudes, and it was suggested that he was no longer wanted either in the professoriate or in research. At first, he retired due to illness and then, not yet 60, he retired officially. From this period date the volumes: *Iobăgia în Transilvania [The Idleness in Transylvania]* (I–III), *Încă un Supplex Libellus Valachorum – 1804 [Another Supplex Libellus Valachorum – 1804]*, *Urbariile Țării Făgărașului [The Urbariile of Făgăraș County]* (I–II), *Problema iobăgiei în Transilvania 1700 – 1848 [The problem of serfdom in Transylvania 1700 – 1848]*, *Transilvania și iar Transilvania [Transylvania and Transylvania again]* and *Răscoala lui Horea [Horea's Rebellion]* (I–II). This last book is the masterpiece of Prodanian creation, a necessary reference point for any Transylvanian history of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. David Prodan was thus established as the historian of social life par excellence.

The value of David Prodan's contributions in the field of historical research has been confirmed not only on a national level (by the awards he received and by his admission to the Romanian Academy), but also internationally (in 1986 he was invited to become a member of the Association of American Historians, a prestigious forum that includes leading names in world historiography)<sup>138</sup>.

Intertwining in the course of a lifetime with almost everything that meant the cultural infrastructure of the city of Cluj (University, Institute of History, University Library, State Archives, Romanian Academy), David Prodan has remained to this day a distinct personality of the Transylvanian cultural environment of the second half of the twentieth century, a destiny that, although forced to create in complicated times, managed to find refuges through which to survive morally and professionally.

---

<sup>138</sup> David Prodan's biographical excursus after the volume David Prodan, *Memorii [Memoirs]*, text edited and annotated by Aurel Răduțiu, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing, 1993.

## THE ENCOUNTER

When viewed in the mirror, the two intellectual destinies contain certain commonalities, certain points of intersection. Born in the same year, they both come from a peasant background, not only keeping with them certain rural nostalgia, but also using the village as an object of research. Both Ion Conea and David Prodan grew up in the cultural environment of the interwar period and were formed around the elite of the field in which they would later work. For the two thinkers, 1940 was a watershed year, as their writing took on militant overtones and their works engaged in polemics with the Hungarian historiography that was jubilant about the new borders. For an intellectual like Ion Conea, who thus theorised the discipline to which he enthusiastically devoted himself, “Geopolitics is (...) the science of the pressures between states”<sup>139</sup>, 1940 ushered in a landscape that could not have been more favourable to his research.

In 1944, from the refuge to which the Vienna Dictatorship had forced him, David Prodan published *Teoria imigrației românilor din Principatele române în Transilvania în veacul al XVIII-lea* [*The theory of the immigration of Romanians from the Romanian Principalities to Transylvania in the 18th century*], an answer to the Hungarian historians who used to explain the Romanian demographic superiority in Transylvania by the flow of population from south of the Carpathians. Between 1940 and 1944, Ion Conea also published a series of studies on Transylvania in the journal *Geopolitică și Geoistorie* [*Geopolitics and Geohistory*], which became a “focal point” of his geopolitical thinking, especially against the background of Hungarian revisionism<sup>140</sup>.

In Conea’s view, Transylvania was predestined to be an organic land:

“Transylvania (you can find it out from the first geopolitical treatise that will fall before your eyes) is destined from the beginning of the world to be a country core, as we see it in Great-Romania and not a marginal, secondary piece, as it was – and would be! – in a Great-Hungary”<sup>141</sup>.

Conea goes on to describe the geopolitical profile of Transylvania:

“Transylvania (...) has been like a house of spring for the Romanian people in the course of history: it has been its (therefore permanent) bad weather home, while the highlands have offered such conditions only on certain restricted portions, especially those clothed in forest;

---

<sup>139</sup> Ion Conea, *Geopolitică, o știință nouă* [*Geopolitics, A New Science*], Bucharest, Romanian Social Institute, 1938, p. 29.

<sup>140</sup> Marius Neacșu, „Ideile lui Ion Conea asupra geopoliticii” [“Ion Conea’s Ideas on Geopolitics”], in *Terra*, L, No. 1–2, Bucharest, 2019, p. 56.

<sup>141</sup> „Transilvania (o poți afla din cel dintâi tratat de geopolitică care-ți va cădea sub privire) e sortită de la începutul lumii să fie sâmbure de țară, cum o vedem că e în România-Mare – și nu piesă de margine, secundară, cum a fost – și ar fi! – într-o Ungarie-Mare”, in Ion Conea, „Transilvania, inimă a pământului românesc” [“Transylvania, the heart of Romanian land”], in *Journal of Geopolitics and Geohistory*, Year. I, No. 1, 1941, pp. 18–34.

There is, therefore, an obvious truth in the observation that, in general throughout Romanian history, the hive-country, the country of ethnic dew around, has been Transylvania together with its belt of mountains, hills, depressions<sup>142</sup>.

In the aforementioned study signed by David Prodan in 1944 he concluded as follows:

“The Romanians in Transylvania emigrate more than they immigrate. In any case, an inverse theory [than that of the Hungarian historiography, n. n.], with the known material, would be much easier to support and would have, by all signs, more chances of approaching the historical truth<sup>143</sup>.

And in his historical testament, the same David Prodan wrote:

“Romanian people, we represent the Eastern Romanity, the Dacoromanism, which starts from Transylvania, the root of the Romanian people, which radiates from here by spreading out in both directions, gradually, historically, encompassing the whole extent of the Romanian space (...)”<sup>144</sup>.

As can be seen, the conclusions of the two intellectuals on the question of the Romanian population in Transylvania and Transylvanian primordialism coincide perfectly.

For both Ion Conea and David Prodan, the establishment of communism meant the confrontation with an ideology that was contrary to historical, geographical, or geopolitical truth. Although an intellectual with left-wing sympathies since the interwar period, David Prodan also had a problem adapting to the demands of the new system, confessing in his memoirs:

“In 1953 I was declared ‘dangerous to the education of youth’ (incriminated especially by the way I addressed young researchers, urging them to always seek historical truth, the only lasting one, regardless of the conjuncture, of vicissitudes) and I was changed to a new chair, I had to start from the beginning. It was not long before I lost my new chair, and as a pensioner I was given neither the title of ‘consultant’ nor doctorates. I couldn’t even enjoy the benefits, they were

---

<sup>142</sup> „Transilvania (...) a fost ca o casă de izbuc pentru poporul românesc în decursul istoriei: a fost casa de vreme rea (deci permanentă) a lui, în timp ce șesul i-a oferit astfel de condițiuni numai pe anumite porțiuni restrânse, mai ales cele îmbrăcate în pădure;

Este, prin urmare, un adevăr evident în constatarea că, în genere în tot cursul istoriei românești, țara-stup, țara de roire etnică în jur, a fost Transilvania împreună cu centura ei de munți, dealuri, depresiuni.”, in Ion Conea, “Tota Transilvania Ad Nos Venit”, in *Geopolitica și Geoistoria [Geopolitics and Geo-history]*, II, 1942, pp. 14–15.

<sup>143</sup> „Românii din Transilvania mai mult emigrează, decât imigrează. În tot cazul, o teorie inversă [decât cea a istoriografiei maghiare, n.n.], cu materialul cunoscut, ar fi mult mai ușor de susținut și ar avea, după toate semnele mai mulți sorți de a apropia adevărul istoric”, in David Prodan, *Teoria imigrației românilor din Principatele române în Transilvania în secolul al XVII-lea [The Theory of The Immigration of Romanians From the Romanian Principalities to Transylvania in the 17th century]*, Romanian Book, 1944, Sibiu, p. 165.

<sup>144</sup> „Popor român, reprezentăm romanitatea de Răsărit, dacoromânismul, care pornește din Transilvania, rădăcină a poporului român, care iradiază de aici prin descălecarea în ambele sensuri, cuprinzând treptat, istoric, toată întinderea spațiului românesc (...)”, in David Prodan, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 145.

jeopardizing their situation, they were bypassing me, and I didn't insist on it either. I resigned myself to my own two hands"<sup>145</sup>.

Having escaped from political prison, Ion Conea will have to endure the torment of the new situation. His academic destiny, so promisingly outlined before 1948, the theoretical premises from which he set out to build a global and national geopolitical system, the effervescence of his published research, his publishing activity – all were to crumble during the years of the Red dictatorship<sup>146</sup>. Ion Conea is also removed from the chair, like David Prodan, and accused of not being able to participate in the communist education of students<sup>147</sup>.

In the period of the exchange between Ion Conea and David Prodan, both are marginalized intellectuals who continue to invest all their energy in their most consistent existential refuge, their work.

The tone of Ion Conea's letters to David Prodan is one of admiration and affection, suggested by the introductory phrases "beloved", "esteemed", "dear", and the concluding words "many warm wishes for the health of the historian who writes soberly and with dignity at such a high level".

The first preserved letter dates from 19 May 1965 and comes in response to the study written by *David Prodan* "Boieri și vecini în Țara Făgărașului în sec. XVI–XVII" ["Landlords and neighbours in Țara Făgărașului in the 16th century. XVI–XVII"], published in 1963 in the Yearbook of the Institute of History in Cluj. From the lines sent, the same interest of Conea, a real focal point of his research, is apparent, that of determining the matrix space of formation of the Romanian people:

"This country [of Olt, n.n.] – and with that of Hațeg and with Oltenia under the mountains and with the Arieș Basin and with – still – the Argeș – Muscel area – here is the original territorial basis of the Romanians (proto – and post – proto), say, north Danube"<sup>148</sup>.

This idea of Olt County as the "original territorial foundation of the Romanians" will be repeated in the correspondence with the historian from Cluj:

"What do we do with Olt County? Don't we attach it to the Romanian Country, as it was originally an integral part of it?"; "This holy Olt Country – I am afraid that it

---

<sup>145</sup> „În 1953 am fost declarat „primejdios pentru educația tineretului” (incriminat mai ales de felul cum m-am adresat tinerilor cercetători, îndemnându-i să caute mereu adevărul istoric, singurul durabil, indiferent de conjunctură, de vicisitudini) și mi s-a schimbat catedra, a trebuit să o iau de la început. Nu peste mult timp am pierdut și noua catedră, iar ca pensionar nu mi s-au dat nici titlu de «consultant», nici doctorate. Ba nici de ajutoare nu m-am putut bucura, își primejduiau situația, mă ocoleau și în această situație nici eu n-am insistat. M-am resemnat la ale mele două mâini”, in *Ibidem*, p. 106.

<sup>146</sup> Marius Neacșu, „Ideile lui Ion Conea asupra geopoliticii” [“Ion Conea's Ideas on Geopolitics”], in *Terra*, L, No. 1–2, Bucharest, 2019, p. 42.

<sup>147</sup> Cătălina Cârstea, „Ion Conea, reprezentant al intelectualității românești din secolul al XX-lea” [“Ion Conea, a Representative of the 20th Century Romanian Intelligentsia”], in *Milcovia*, IX, No. 17, 2013, p. 97.

<sup>148</sup> „Țara aceasta [a Oltului, n.n.] – și cu cea a Hațegului și cu Oltenia de sub munte și cu Bazinul Arieșului și cu – încă – zona Argeș-Muscel – iată temeiul teritorial originar al românilor (proto – și postproto) al românilor, zic, nord-dunăreni”, in Ion Conea's letter to David Prodan, May 19, 1965. The Archive of David Prodan Memorial Museum.

carries, however, in its holy historical womb, the original germ of the holy Romanian Country beyond (the Carpathians)”<sup>149</sup>.

In another letter, the same Conea confessed to the historian from Cluj that he was writing a study on “the Moțesc seed of the nation”<sup>150</sup>. Again, the same idea of the Romanian omphalos which can be considered one of the central themes of investigation for Ion Conea.

As the letters sent show, David Prodan was a prestigious and reliable referent for the works written by Ion Conea

“(…) I would like to inform you that soon (in two weeks) I will hand over the manuscript of a work: The autochthonous population of Dacia during the migration period – with the request to give it to you and – I believe – to Professor Petrovici for reference. It is not necessary to be either a geographer or a toponymist specialist – to be able to give your opinion, by reading it, on the work”<sup>151</sup>.

In his relationship with David Prodan, despite the reverence that Ion Conea showed to the historian, he did not confine himself to the role of a passive admirer, on the contrary, he was always tempted to engage in a provocative dialogue with the master:

“I hear that in the issue that is expected (must) appear daily on the market of the so-called ‘Revue roumaine d’histoire’ is an article *Toponymie et histoire* by Prof. Emil Petrovici, which I can’t wait to read and to tell you (my) opinion”<sup>152</sup>.

The letters signed by Ion Conea also testify to the exigency of this scholar; they are always about a postponed work, about a research that needs to be redone, reworked. In spite of his illness, Ion Conea shows an enormous willingness to work on his own text to the high standards he sets for himself:

“I was a little late with the manuscript, but it’s coming. I’m working on cleaning it of impurities, after which I’ll type it up again, quickly, and send it off, by post (...); Please don’t take my tardiness personally and don’t ever imagine that (...) I’ll die without handing over the manuscript of my work to you for proofreading (that’s what happens to over – scrupulous people: they delay, delay (...) until they (...) get sick)”<sup>153</sup>.

---

<sup>149</sup> „Ce facem cu Țara Oltului? Nu o atașăm la Țara Românească, ca fiind fost, inițial, parte integrantă a acesteia?”; „Această sfântă Țară a Oltului – tare mi-e teamă că poartă, totuși, în sfântul ei pânțec istoric, *germenele* inițial al sfintei Țări Românești de dincoace (de Carpați).”, in Ion Conea’s letter to David Prodan, May 13, 1971. The Archive of David Prodan Memorial Museum.

<sup>150</sup> „*sâmburele* moțesc al nației”, in Ion Conea’s letter to David Prodan, May 19, 1965. The Archive of David Prodan Memorial Museum.

<sup>151</sup> „(...) vreau să vă anunț că pe curând (peste două săptămâni) voi preda manuscrisul unei lucrări: Populația autohtonă din Dacia în perioada migrațiilor – cu rugămintea să vi se dea, pentru referare, dumneavoastră, și – cred – profesorului Petrovici. Nu e nevoie ca cineva să fie nici geograf și nici toponimist specialist – ca să-și poată da părerea, citind-o, asupra lucrării.”, in *Ibidem*.

<sup>152</sup> „Aud că în numărul care e așteptat (trebuie) să apară din zi în zi pe piață al numitei «Revue roumaine d’histoire» este un articol Toponimie et histoire al prof. Emil Petrovici, pe care abia aștept să-l citesc și să vă comunic, asupra-i, părerea (mea).”, in *Ibidem*.

<sup>153</sup> „Am cam întârziat cu manuscrisul, dar *vine*. Lucrez la curățirea lui de impurități, după care-l voi bate iar la mașină, repede, și-i voi da drumul, *pe poștă* [...]; Te rog să nu-mi iei întârzierea în nume de rău și nici să-ți închipui vreodată că ...voi muri fără să-ți predau manuscrisul lucrării pentru a refera asupra-i (așa pățesc prea-scrupuloșii: întârzie, întârzie...până se...îmbolnăvesc).”, in Ion Conea’s letter to David Prodan, March 14, 1968. The Historical National Archives, Cluj, Fund David Prodan, 415.

Not least, Ion Conea shows so much attention to his signed texts and pays so much attention to them also because he is aware of the value of his own work:

“I hope, however, that if the gods give me days, I will be able to adjust them – improve them – at least from the form they are now – and (...) may go to the holy press, for of one thing let us be (forgive my lack of modesty) sure: even as they are now, they would please those who would bend over them”<sup>154</sup>.

In reconstructing this dialogue between the geographer and the historian, of course, a rounded interpretation could only be given if the other voice, that of David Prodan, could be recovered. As I said at the beginning, unfortunately, the fate of the Ion Conea archive does not allow such an outcome.

Although based on some epistolary fragments, twilights of an intellectual friendship, our text is a necessary point of reflection on two destinies of Romanian scholars twisted by a complicated political and cultural context. As a subsidiary, it is also a plea for investigating the legacy left by the two thinkers.

\*

“Dear and esteemed (and, once again:) beloved (that is, again, dear!) Mr. Prodan,

I am writing this, *i.e.*, by confusing the texture of the title, to express my heavy (at heart) regret that I could not see you, in Cluj. The causes are many (that is, actually, two) and I won’t go into them here. Sincerely, from my heart, I repeat I am very sorry, and I ask for forgiveness. I will come to Cluj again, hopefully soon, and then we will surely see each other, and you will hear, exposed, the causes for which I still could not finish my historical ‘writing’. But I hope that, if the gods give me days, I will be able to adjust – improve – at least from the form it is in now – and (...) they can go to the holy press, because of one thing let us be (forgive my lack of modesty) sure: even as they are now, they would please those who would bend over them.

By the way: this holy Olt Country – I am afraid that it carries, however, in its holy historical womb, the original germ of the holy Romanian Country beyond (the Carpathians). I’ll tell you what I mean (by that).

I ask Mrs. Gina Tib. Morariu to receive my warm thanks for having handed this letter to her, and I greet you, dear academicus, with love,  
Ion Conea”<sup>155</sup>.

<sup>154</sup> „Sper însă că, dacă zeii îmi vor da zile, le voi putea ajusta – îmbunătăți – măcar din forma în care se află acum – și ... să poată merge la sfânta tiparniță, pentru că de un lucru să fim (iartă-mi lipsa de modestie) siguri: chiar așa cum sunt acum, ar plăcea celor ce s-ar apleca asupra-le.”, in Ion Conea’s letter to David Prodan, May 13, 1971. The Archive of David Prodan Memorial Museum.

<sup>155</sup> „Scumpe și stimate (și, încă o dată:) iubite (adică, iar scumpe!)

Domnule Prodan,

Scriu așa, adică încurcând textura titlului, ca să-mi exprim greaua mea (la inimă) părere de rău că nu te-am putut vedea, la Cluj. Cauzele sunt mai multe (adică, de fapt, două) și nu mă apuc să le expun aici. Sincer, din inimă adică, repet: regret enorm și cer iertare. Lasă că o să mai vin odată la Cluj, *sper că în curând\**, și atunci sigur ne vom vedea și vei asculta, expuse, cauzele pentru care încă n-am putut «găta» «scrierea» mea istorică. Sper însă că, dacă zeii îmi vor da zile, le voi putea ajusta – îmbunătăți – măcar din forma în care se află acum – și ... să poată merge la sfânta tiparniță, pentru că de un lucru să fim (iartă-mi lipsa de modestie) siguri: chiar așa cum sunt acum, ar plăcea celor ce s-ar apleca asupra-le.

\*

“You must have forgotten me, dear Professor D. Prodan!

But nothing has happened other than the sad fact that, for objective reasons, I have not been able to finish the work so far. But that will be done this autumn – and I will be happy when I send the manuscript from the post office (or hand it directly to the bin) to the person to whom I am grateful for his promise to read it.

Yours, with the most special sentiments,

Ion Conea

Constanta, 31/VIII/966”<sup>156</sup>.

\*

“Dear Comrade, Prodan,

I’m a little late with the manuscript, but here it comes. I’m working on cleaning it of impurities, then I’ll type it up again, quickly, and send it off, by post, to 41 Republicii Street (unless you happen to be in Bucharest). So: my geographical penetration into the history of our great people – is coming.

I wish you good health,

Ion Conea

Buc. 9.IX.65”<sup>157</sup>.

---

A propos: Această sfântă Țară a Oltului – tare mi-e teamă că poartă, totuși, în sfântul ei pânțec istoric, *germenele* inițial al sfintei Țări Românești de dincoace (de Carpați). O să-ți spun ce vreau să înțeleg (prin asta).

O rog pe Doamna Gina Tib. Morariu să primească mulțumiri calde pentru a-și fi înmănat această scrisoare, iar pe dumneata, scumpule academicus, te salut cu dragoste,

Ion Conea

13.V. 71

Buc.

Ion Conea,

Str. Alex Sahia 1

Sectorul 2, București.”, in David Prodan Archive, David Prodan Memorial Museum.

<sup>156</sup> „Probabil că ați uitat de mine, scumpe profesor D. Prodan!

Nu s-a întâmplat însă nimic altceva decât tristul fapt că, din cauze obiective, n-am putut finisa, până acum, lucrarea. Lucru care, însă, se va face în toamna asta – și voi fi fericit când voi expedia de la poștă (sau voi înmâna direct, la coș) manuscrisul, către cel căruia-i sunt recunoscător că mi-a promis să-l citească.

Al dumneavoastră, cu sentimentele cele mai deosebite,

Ion Conea

Constanța, 31/VIII/966.”, in *Ibidem*.

<sup>157</sup> „Stimate și scumpe tovarășe Prodan,

Am cam întârziat cu manuscrisul, dar *vine*. Lucrez la curățirea lui de impurități, după care-l voi bate iar la mașină, repede, și-i voi da drumul, *pe poștă*, spre str. Republicii 41 (afară numai dacă nu vă veți nimeri atunci prin București). Așa dar: geografica mea *penetrație* în istoria marelui nostru popor – *vine*.

Vă doresc multă sănătate,

\*

“Dear and beloved Professor Prodan,

I had hoped to come to Cluj myself and therefore thought it was not necessary to reply in writing to the letter for which (the content of which) I would like to thank you warmly and sincerely (albeit late, as I said). I will come back only towards the end of September, after I have revised – and reworked – my manuscript once again. Until then I’ll do a month’s fieldwork for my Institute – and a month’s rest for myself (for I am exhausted: not from this work, but from others – and older – and I want, if I can, to replenish my resources). Very good – and very good – what you say: that’s how I want the report to be, even if I have to redo (or almost redo) the work afterwards.

With warm sympathy and special appreciation – from before we met (and talked) at the (...).

Ion Conea,

Buc. 1965 Jul. 7

PS. I hear that in the issue that is expected (must) appear every day on the market of the so-called ‘Revue roumaine d’histoire’ there is an article *Toponymie et histoire* by Prof. Emil Petrovici, which I am looking forward to read and to tell you (my) opinion about it.

I.C.”<sup>158</sup>.

\*

“Dear Professor D. Prodan,

I said ‘highly esteemed’ having in mind the way the last paper is written about the Olt Country boyars. This country – and with that of Hațeg and with Oltenia under the mountains and with the Arieș Basin and with – still – the Argeș – Muscle area – here is the original territorial basis of the Romanians (proto – and post – proto) of the Romanians, I say, north of the Danube.

---

Ion Conea

Buc. 9.IX.65”, in *Ibidem*.

<sup>158</sup> „Stimate și iubite profesor Prodan,

Am sperat să vin eu pe la Cluj și de aceea am crezut că nu e cazul să mai răspund în scris la scrisoarea pentru care (conținutul căreia) țin să vă mulțumesc călduros și sincer (deși târziu, cum spusei). Voi veni abea pe la sfârșitul lui septembrie, după ce-mi voi fi revizuit încă o dată – și refăcut, pe alocuri – manuscrisul. Până atunci voi face o lună de teren pentru Institutul meu – și una lună de odihnă pentru mine (că sunt extenuat: nu din cauza lucrării acesteea, ci din altele – și mai de demult – și vreau, dacă pot, să-mi refac re-sursele). Foarte bine – și foarte bun – ce spuneți: așa vreau și eu să fie referatul, chiar dacă va mai trebui, după aceea, să refac *iar* (sau aproape refac), – lucrarea.

Cu simpatie caldă și prețuirea deosebită – de dinainte de a ne fi cunoscut (și vorbit) la COȘ.

Ion Conea,

Buc. 1965 iul. 7

PS. Aud că în numărul care e așteptat (trebuie) să apară din zi în zi pe piață al numitei «Revue roumaine d’histoire» este un articol *Toponymie et histoire* al prof. Emil Petrovici, pe care abia aștept să-l citesc și să vă comunic, asupra-i, părerea (mea).

I.C.”, in *Ibidem*.

It's been a long time since you did me the honour of sending me your paper and I feel guilty for not having written to you until now. But I believe that you are primarily to blame for not replying at all to the telegraphed 'Happy Birthday' that I sent you from Bucharest for the 'first year' of 1960. I wondered why you didn't reply. But that's all in the past.

Now, I would like to inform you that soon (in two weeks) I will hand in the manuscript of a work: The autochthonous population of Dacia in the period of migrations – with the request to give it to you and – I believe – to Professor Petrovici for reference. It is not necessary to be either a geographer or a toponymist specialist – to be able to give your opinion, by reading it, on the work. In it, I also deal with the Moțesc<sup>159</sup> core of the nation.

What more can I say? If, when you come to Buc[harest], you find the time to call me on the phone to exchange a few words – I would be particularly happy.

I end, with many warm wishes of health to the historian who writes soberly and with dignity at such a high level.

Ion Conea,

Buc. 19.5.965<sup>160</sup>.

\*

“The delay is explained, firstly, by the fact that I kept wanting to come to Cluj myself for some business – and, secondly, by the (other) fact that I've been a bit ill (and still am). Please don't take my delay as a bad thing and don't ever imagine that (...) I will die without handing over the manuscript of the work to you for proofreading (that's what happens to the too-scrupulous: delay, delay.... until they... get sick).

<sup>159</sup> A community living in the region of Apuseni Mountains.

<sup>160</sup> „Mult stimat profesor D. Prodan,

Am spus «Mult stimat» din gândul sau și pentru cum e scrisă ultima lucrare despre boierii cei din Țara Oltului. Țara aceasta – și cu cea a Hațegului și cu Oltenia de sub munte și cu Bazinul Arieșului și cu – încă – zona Argeș-Muscel – iată temeiul teritorial original al românilor (proto – și postproto) al românilor, zic, nord-dunăreni.

E mult de când mi-ați făcut cinstea de a-mi trimite lucrarea și *vinovat mă simt* de a nu vă fi scris până acum. De vină, însă, aș crede că sunteți, în primul rând, dumneavoastră, care nu mi-ați răspuns deloc la cei «Mulți ani» telegrafiați, pe care vi-i expediai eu din București pentru «întâiul an» 1960. M-am mirat de ce nu mi-ați fi răspuns. Dar astea au trecut.

Acum, vreau să vă anunț că pe curând (peste două săptămâni) voi preda manuscrisul unei lucrări: Populația autohtonă din Dacia în perioada migrațiilor – cu rugămintea să vi se dea, pentru referare, dumneavoastră, și – cred – profesorului Petrovici. Nu e nevoie ca cineva să fie nici geograf și nici toponimist specialist – ca să-și poată da părerea, citind-o, asupra lucrării. Mă ocup, în ea, și despre *sâmburele* moțesc al nației.

Ce să mai spun? Dacă, venind prin Buc., veți găsi timp să mă chemați și pe mine prin telefon să schimbăm vreo două vorbe, – eu aș fi deosebit de bucuros.

Termin, cu multe și calde urări de sănătate pentru istoricul care scrie sobru și demn la un nivel atât de înalt.

Ion Conea,

Buc. 19.5.965.”, in *Ibidem*.

What do we do with the Olt Country? Don't we attach it to Wallachia, as it was originally an integral part of it?  
May the gods help us both.  
With love,  
Ion Conea.  
14. III.68, Bucharest<sup>161</sup>.

## REFERENCES

### Unpublished Sources:

David Prodan Archive, David Prodan Memorial Museum.  
The National Historical Archives, Cluj, David Prodan Fund, 415.

### Published Sources:

- \*\*\*, „Criteriul universalității istoriei cu cel al organicității geopolitice și geo-etnologice a popoarelor, în concepția geografului Simion Mehedinți (1869–1962)” [“The Criterion of the Universality of History With That of the Geopolitical and Geo-ethnological Organicity of Peoples, According to the Geographer Simion Mehedinți (1869–1962)”], in *GeoPolitica*, Available at: <https://www.geopolitic.ro/2018/11/criteriul- universalitatii- istoriei- cu- cel- al- organicitatii- geopolitice- si- geo- etnologice- popoarelor- conceptia- geografului- simion- mehedinti- 1869- 1962/>, Accessed on September 2, 2023.
- Baltasiu Radu, *Anton Golopenția. Crestomație [Anton Golopenția. Chrestomaty]*, Bucharest, Oscar Print, 2023.
- Cârstea Cătălina, *Semnificația operei lui Ion Conea pentru cercetarea geografică românească [The Significance of Ion Conea's Work for Romanian Geographical Research]*, PhD. Thesis attended at the Faculty of Geography of the University of Bucharest, 2012.
- Cârstea Cătălina, „Ion Conea, reprezentant al intelectualității românești din secolul al XX-lea” [“Ion Conea, a Representative of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Romanian Intelligentsia”], in *Milcovia*, IX, No. 17, 2013.
- Conea Ion, *Cum învăța a-și cunoaște țara Măria Sa Mihai [How His Royal Highness Michael Learned to Know His Country]*, Bucharest, Romanian Book, 1936.
- Conea Ion, *Geopolitica, o știință nouă [Geopolitics, A New Science]*, Bucharest, Romanian Social Institute, 1938.
- Conea Ion, „Transilvania, inimă a pământului românesc” [“Transylvania, the heart of Romanian land”], in *Journal of Geopolitics and Geohistory*, Year. I, No. 1, 1941, pp. 18–34.
- Conea Ion, “Tota Transilvania Ad Nos Venit”, in *Geopolitica și Geoistoria [Geopolitics and Geohistory]*, II, 1942.
- Cotoi Călin, *Primordialism cultural și geopolitică românească interbelică [Cultural Primordialism and Interwar Romanian Geopolitics]*, Bucharest, Little Wallachia Publishing, 2006.

---

<sup>161</sup> „Întârzierea se explică, în primul rând, prin faptul că am tot vrut să vin însumi la Cluj pentru niște treburi – și, în al doilea rând, prin faptul (altul) că am tot fost nițel bolnav (și încă mai sunt). Te rog să nu-mi iei întârzierea în nume de rău și nici să-ți închipui vreodată că... voi muri fără să-ți predau manuscrisul lucrării pentru a refera asupra-i (așa pățesc prea-scrupuloșii: întârzie, întârzie... până se... îmbolnăvesc).

Ce facem cu Țara Oltului? Nu o atașăm la Țara Românească, ca fiind fost, inițial, parte integrantă a acesteia?

Să ne ajute zeii la amândoi.

Cu dragoste,

Ion Conea”.

14. III.68, București.”, in Historical National Archives, Cluj, Fund David Prodan, 415.

- Didă Diana, „Orientări și curente în geopolitica românească. Geopolitica, știința integralității teritoriale românești” [“Orientations and Trends in Romanian Geopolitics. Geopolitics, the Science of Romanian Territorial Integrity”], in *Etnosfera Journal*, No. 4, 2010.
- Neacșu Marius Cristian, *Simion Mehedinți și geopolitica românească [Simion Mehedinți and Romanian Geopolitics]*, Bucharest, CD Press, 2018.
- Neacșu Marius, „Ideile lui Ion Conea asupra geopoliticii” [“Ion Conea’s Ideas on Geopolitics”], in *Terra*, L, No. 1–2, Bucharest, 2019.
- Prodan David, *Memorii [Memoirs]*, text edited and annotated by Aurel Răduțiu, Bucharest, Encyclopedic Publishing, 1993.
- Prodan David, *Teoria imigrației românilor din Principatele române în Transilvania în secolul al XVII-lea [The Theory of The Immigration of Romanians From the Romanian Principalities to Transylvania in the 17th century]*, Romanian Book, Sibiu, 1944.