

# STOIC AND NEOPLATONIC INFLUENCES IN CANTEMIR'S WORK

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**Abstract:** *This article aims to show the influence of two ancient philosophical doctrines in Dimitrie Cantemir's main philosophical work, the Divan. Among stoic ideas of the ephemeral world, the power of wisdom, the beauty of the soul and the attitude of the wiseman towards death, there are some other references, like the world considered as a dungeon and the body as the soul's tomb which clearly are prove of Neoplatonic influence, even if no Neoplatonic authors are ever quoted in the whole work. Obviously poorer than the influence of the overwhelmingly Christian tradition, the few references to ancient philosophical tradition are significant to the message that sends Cantemir whose ideal seems to be a symbiosis of European spirituality.*

**Keywords:** *Cantemir, christianity, ethics, neoplatonism, religion, stoics, stoicism, wisdom.*

If we were to characterize the main philosophical work of Dimitrie Cantemir, the *Divan*, as belonging to a particular tradition, we can say that the work is unquestionably of Christian inspiration. Should it be only so, it could not be easily included in the history of philosophy. However, Cantemir calls in this work, at various times, to ideas and ancient authors, quoted along with the scriptures and patristic literature. Among these ideas and these authors heterogeneous to the Christian tradition, is highlighted a Neoplatonic orientation (without being quoted any author of the Neoplatonic tradition) and the presence of Stoic philosophers as Epictetus and Seneca. The work remains strictly Christian, but the melting of traditions, being attempted in a certain way by Cantemir here, deserves a particularly attention, due to his background message. We will approach in the first part of this article the conciliator layout of the *Divan*, that ranks it, by the style in which it is drawn and the spirit that is animated, among the writings of Renaissance (two centuries later than in Western tradition). In the second part, we will show how much the work of Cantemir is marked by Stoic and Neoplatonic influences.

The *Divan*<sup>1</sup> of Dimitrie Cantemir is the first Romanian philosophical work. Unlike Western literature, where the tradition of Greek philosophy was resumed through numerous translations of Plato since the fifteenth century, Middle Ages<sup>2</sup> have extended in Romanian culture, in terms of philosophical evolution, until the late seventeenth century. It is a further reason to consider the novelty of the *Divan*. It is a work imbued with the same spirit of Italian Renaissance in which Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola conceived symbiosis between Plato and Christianity as the offspring of the new age culture that initiate Neoplatonic Academy in Florence in the second half of the fifteenth century. Even Cantemir's work style is similar to many writings of the Renaissance. It is above all an imaginary dialogue between a wise man and what is very

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<sup>1</sup> The full title is *The Divan or the Bickering between the Wiseman and the World or The soul and body trial*. This work was written in romanian and printed for the first time at Iași in 1698.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted here that the tradition of Greek philosophy was preserved in the Western Middle Ages, however, through the constant appeal of medieval philosophers to Aristotle, combined with the Gospel message.

vaguely expressed as the “world”, alike Nicholas of Cusa<sup>3</sup> and Giordano Bruno’s dialogues<sup>4</sup>, themselves with the Platonic dialogues as a model. Also, just as happens in the work of Nicholas of Cusa<sup>5</sup> and Charles de Bouvelles<sup>6</sup>, the Cantemir’s intention is to give a structured form of some Christian religious themes and to show on the one hand, rational coherence of Christian doctrine, and on the other hand, the convergence of secular, philosophical, tradition, with the religious Christian one.

But we can not give a large part of his right to the literary critic G. Călinescu when he observes how Cantemir draw his work:

“Using precepts of the Church writings, and very many of the thinkers of antiquity (Seneca, Epictetus, Cicero, Lactantius etc.), fully Christianized, with an obvious tilt to the Stoics, cu o *vădită înclinare către stoici*, whose Ten Commandments he strings, Cantemir elaborates a confusing, dull and lacking originality chapter<sup>7</sup>, trully with a barbaric pedantry.”<sup>8</sup>

Such criticism can be applied perfectly, except the religious elements, to works such as that of Giordano Bruno and many other Renaissance authors whose lack of originality and clarity is a feature recognized by many Renaissance historians<sup>9</sup>. Cantemir, to the extent that we can include in a late Renaissance, shares other characteristics of the literary renaissance. The first is the excessive use of quotes, what it leads him to clogged, as Călinescu said, “into the forest of precepts and moralities, with a pile of biblical quotes”<sup>10</sup>. The second feature, which Cantemir’s *Divan* can be labeled as a neo-Renaissance writing, is the need for obedience to authority. Unlike Renaissance authors however, such as Marsilio Ficino and Erasmus, which replaced the medieval philosophers reverence to the authority of the Church’s with reverence to the ancient authors, Cantemir divides his reverence between Scripture and philosophical tradition. “Very few of the Italians of the fifteenth century”, writes Bertrand Russell, „would have dared to have an opinion which could not find any authority in antiquity nor in the doctrine of the Church”<sup>11</sup>. Dimitrie Cantemir corresponds precisely to this need for an authority which it serves through his work, even though in his case, eclecticism makes him not choose, but to combine the two traditions that Western countries are facing in the culture begining with Renaissance, the secular and clerical tradition.

Almost all commentators of the *Divan* noted, including references to the authors of antiquity, the preponderance of the Stoics, Epictetus and Seneca mainly. The very message that sends all the work seems at first glance to share features of Stoicism. “The wise”, writes Alexandru Piru, “scanning the meaning of existence, has reached a Stoic conception. According to him everything in the world is subject to blind fate,

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<sup>3</sup> *Idiota*, 1450 (*The Layman about Mind*, tr. C.L. Miller, New York, 1979), in which a philosopher and a layman dialogue on the nature of thinking.

<sup>4</sup> Among others, *Candelaio* (1582) and *Spaccio della Bestia Trionfante* (1584).

<sup>5</sup> As is the case for the masterpiece of Nicholas of Cusa, *Despre docta ignorantă*, 1440.

<sup>6</sup> In *The Wiseman* (1510), *Le Livre du Sage* (trad. P. Magnard, Vrin, Paris, 1982), Bouvelles proposes, among other things, signs of recognition of the divine Trinity Highness, through concepts such as memory, will and intelligence.

<sup>7</sup> That is the Third Book of the *Divan*.

<sup>8</sup> G. Călinescu, “D. Cantemir: filosof și romancier” (*Cantemir, philosopher and novelist*), in *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până în prezent* (*History of the Romanian literature, from origins to the present*), Second Edition, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1985, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Burchardt, *Cultura Renașterii în Italia*, vol. I, trad. N. Balotă, Gh. Ciorogaru, Editura pentru literatură, Bucharest, 1969, pp. 323-328; G.W.F. Hegel, *Prelegeri de istorie a filozofiei*, vol. II, trad. D.D. Roșca, Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, Bucharest, 1964, pp. 313, 318; Jean-Claude Margolin, *Philosophies de la Renaissance*, Paradigme, Orléans, 1998, pp. 9-10;

<sup>10</sup> G. Călinescu, *Op.cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup> B. Russell, *Istoria filozofiei occidentale* (*History of Western Philosophy*), Editura Humanitas, Bucharest, 2007, vol. II, p. 11.

*nothingness*<sup>12</sup>. Few commentators have recognized, however, Neoplatonic approach to topics such as death or the relationship between soul and body. The reason for such an omission is, of course, easily found in the fact that many religious approaches of Neoplatonism have been taken by the patristic literature and later on merged with the Gospel message.

Starting from Piru Alexander's remark, we believe his characterization to be correct as far as the *Divan* really reach a Stoic conception, but less fair the definition of Stoicism reduced to a kind of fatalism. Despite the omnipresence of fatality in the Stoic doctrine<sup>13</sup>, we can not in any way consider it as a concept according to which „*everything in the world is subject to blind fate, nothingness*”<sup>14</sup>. There's also a fundamental contradiction in the Stoic conception between the idea of destiny and the lack of an intrinsic reason to this destiny. If destiny would be blind, it would be no longer destiny, but fate. The main feature of Socratic philosophy in the approach of destiny is to find in fate the signs of Providence. Submitting to Providence is not obedience to the fatality<sup>15</sup>. Citing wrongly Epicurus, in place of Epictetus (*Manual*, 31), Cantemir highlights just this difference: “*Listen to the gods and obey them in everything that happens and follow them voluntarily as to things committed by the wisest mind*”<sup>16</sup>. Blind fate could not be equated in any way to a wise mind<sup>17</sup> and, on the other side, would permanently deny the freedom, which is the declared purpose of Stoic philosophy. In fact, the key to the Stoic emancipation is precisely the distinction **De altfel, cheia emancipării stoice este tocmai distincția**, clearly drawn by Epictetus, between the sphere of freedom, of things that depend on us, and the sphere of necessity, of things beyond our control<sup>18</sup>. If we remove the freedom from the equation of Stoic moral doctrine, we would simply abolish the Stoic philosophy – since there would be nothing to do, in any way, in this, other than to bear the “*fate*”<sup>19</sup>.

In another order of ideas, according to Stoic philosophy, adopted by Cantemir, the world is “*proud*”, but “*deceptive and transient*”<sup>20</sup>, while his flowers, says the wiseman in the *Divan*, are “*soon withered, falling down and returning into nothing*”<sup>21</sup>. There are many visions of this kind in the Stoic philosophy, which confirms the influence exerted on Cantemir: „*How quickly do you become ashes and bone skeleton, and there's only*

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<sup>12</sup> A. Piru, „Dimitrie Cantemir”, in *Istoria literaturii române de la origini până la 1830 (History of Romanian literature from origins till 1830)*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, Bucharest, 1977, p. 276.

<sup>13</sup> Epictetus, *Manualul (Manual)*, 1, 11, 53, *Fragmente (Fragments)*, 9, 169, trad C. Fedeleş, Editura Saeculum Vizual, Bucharest, 2002, pp. 23, 26, 42, 44, 67.

<sup>14</sup> See *supra*, note 12.

<sup>15</sup> Here's a revealing passage in this regard, from Marcus Aurelius: “*The world is rather a casual mix of things that are interwoven here and untie each other there, - rather a whole where the unity and order and Providence prevail If the first thing, why should I want to remain in a scrimmage without trim, in such a vortex? What could be more desirable to me, that status to become earth again? And then, why would I worry? For everything I do, disaggregation will reach me anyway. In the other case, I worship the Almighty, I keep a peacefull mind and I fully trust in him*” (Marcus Aurelius, *Către sine însuși (Meditations)*, VI, 10, trad. Șt. Bezdechi, Editura Vestala, Bucharest, 2006, p. 84).

<sup>16</sup> *Divan*, Book III, 2, p. 172. Cf. Epictetus, *Manualul*, 17, 29, 53, pp. 28, 32, 42; Marcus Aurelius, *Op.cit.*, II, 15, V, 34, VI, 22, VII, 68, XII, 11, pp. 51, 81, 87, 105, 153.

<sup>17</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Op.cit.*, VI, 42, 44, p. 91.

<sup>18</sup> Epictetus, *Manual*, 1, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> It should be understood here that the Stoic resignation to the necessity, to the destiny, is not a passivity in the face of a blind fatality, but an understanding of the course of history and a delimitation of *freedom's* space, which defines us as humans towards unavoidable things and facts, that we must accept them *as they are*, because they belong to a higher necessity of nature.

<sup>20</sup> *Divan*, Book I, 1-3, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

one name to remain of you, and perhaps not even a name!”<sup>22</sup>. This view is in fact a leitmotif of stoicism, present in Dimitrie Cantemir’s philosophical work.

When the world lure the wise from the *Divan* with his “delights and charms”, he only see them as dust and smoke<sup>23</sup>. Addressing the world, the wiseman exclaim: „Oh, you’re worthy of reproach, and still more defamation the one that believes you and wishes you, the one who, grabbing you up, do not throw you down”<sup>24</sup>, or, later on: “Ah, you are hypocritical and powder, world!”<sup>25</sup> It should be noted here that such an attitude already exceeds the Stoic position, which focuses only on the passage of all things<sup>26</sup>, without ever reaching a verdict on the world in general. Therefore the wise who wonders how the world is false and misleading and “how God suffers and doesn’t destroy it earlier”<sup>27</sup>, belongs to a completely different tradition, especially close to the *Ecclesiast*, often quoted, moreover, by Cantemir, whose echo one may find in classifying the world as the desert of vanities<sup>28</sup>. Remains stoic nevertheless the remark on the vanity of the world’s powerfull men, whose list he strings, wondering what’s left of them: “But in the end what did they become? What became the great, wonderfull and famous Persian kings? (...) Where is Xerxes and Artaxerxes, which they believed they were instead of God stronger than all the world’s people”<sup>29</sup>. Remarks like the one on the way in which Alexander the Great died only with a drop of wine<sup>30</sup> and of other leaders of the world final fate are again numerous in the writings of Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus.

Another Stoic idea, taken from Seneca, is exposed in the third book<sup>31</sup>, according to which misery and suffering reinforce the virtuous man<sup>32</sup>. Even since the first book, Cantemir states that the wise wishes to become good precisely through the wickedness of the world, to become good “and to the greatest good to come”<sup>33</sup>. A series of quotations from Seneca completes the picture of Stoic references, some of them on greed (that only it rejuvenates, while all ages)<sup>34</sup>, others on gratitude<sup>35</sup>, on the beauty of the soul<sup>36</sup>, on the idea that wisdom is the guarantor of carefree joy<sup>37</sup> or on the acceptance of death by the wise<sup>38</sup>. From Epictetus, Cantemir takes especially the conception of wisdom, considered

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<sup>22</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *Op.cit.*, V, 33, p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> *Divan*, Book I, 5, p. 31. Cf. Marcus Aurelius, *Op.cit.*, VII, 43, p. 92.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, Book I, 13, p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, Book I, 53, p. 51.

<sup>26</sup> „How quickly all things disappear! Throughout the world, the people themselves, finally, in time, even their memory!” etc. (Marcus Aurelius, *Op.cit.*, II, 11, trad. Șt. Bezdechi, Editura Vestala, Bucharest, 2006, p. 50); „Human life is a moment; the being, as an unceasing flow; the feeling as a darken ghost; the body, a rotten matter; the soul, a spinner; the faith, a riddle; the fame, something indefinite” (*Ibidem*, II, 16, p. 51).

<sup>27</sup> *Divan*, Book I, p. 31. Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 43.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, Book I, p. 36. Cf. *ibidem*, Book II, 3, p. 91. *Ecclesiast*, 1, 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Divan*, Book I, 35, p. 41-42. “Scipio, Cato, Augustus, Adrian, Antoninus... All pass and become stories, to quickly immerse themselves in complete oblivion. And that’s the fate of those who have once shone so wonderful” (Marcus Aurelius, *Op.cit.*, III, 33, p. 67).

<sup>30</sup> *Divan*, Book I, 11, p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, Book III, 19, p. 190.

<sup>32</sup> Seneca, *De prudentia*, III.

<sup>33</sup> *Divan*, Book I, 16, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, Book II, 45, p. 113.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, Book III, 3, p. 173.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, Book III, 6, p. 177.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, Book III, 7, p. 178.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, Book III, 16, stih, p. 187. “The words of Metrodorus seems to me quite appropriate: Any good of mortals is mortal. He talks about the goods that they want all: for the true good, wisdom and worthiness, never dies, is safe and eternal; this is the only form of immortality that people have. But people are so mad and forget so easily what is the end that push them every day, that they marvel when they lose something – them, which one day will lose everything. All assets over which you count as master are just with you; nothing is safe for one who is uncertain, anything to last forever for the one that is transient. It is unavoidable, also, to lose your life and to lose your property. But, if we truly understand, that is the

to be a heavenly thing on earth<sup>39</sup> and the assertion of the primacy of reason over passions, as evidenced in book III<sup>40</sup>. Finally, a quote from Horace brings into question the force that gets wise when driven by justice and he may avoid the unjust action that would burden his soul: “*It shall be to you a wall of brass: to have nothing to reproach you, not let the fault fades you*”<sup>41</sup>. Those are the main references of Cantemir to the stoic doctrine in his main philosophical work, the *Divan*. But the most significant evidence of Stoic influence on Cantemir’s work seems to be the the conclusion of his work where he inserts the ten stoic Commandments, extracted from Wissowati’s *Stimuli virtutum*, which gives a clear idea of the overall moral orientation of Cantemir’s work.

Neoplatonic influence seems more difficult to discern, especially since we don’t even have one single neoplatonic author in the Cantemir’s work. Neoplatonic themes were probably dissolved in the Christian message taken from the patristic literature. However, the treatment of some subjects allowed us guess the influence, far be it, of Neoplatonism.

Considering the way we should welcome death<sup>42</sup>, Cantemir starts with a quote from Epictetus (*Manual*, 21), to expose a Platonic idea:

“*As a happy death to get hold of you, learn to live. So you can live right, learn to die. If death would find in every day in front of your eyes, you would not think anything of things made of clay, of earthly things, nor would you lust without moderation the earthly things*”<sup>43</sup>.

It is certainly the well known idea of Plato’s *Phaedo*, of the philosophy practiced as a preparation for death. „*Those who practice the philosophy in the true sense are practicing in dying (apothneskein meletosin)*”<sup>44</sup>. Unfortunately, the only reference to Plato one may find throughout the *Divan* is in book III, 6, and does not refer to the *Republic*, as we were expecting, but to *Phaedrus*<sup>45</sup>. The idea of practicing death can not be understood only through the cave allegory, from book VII of the *Republic*. What might surprises the reader is that the whole background of the *Divan* seems to be dominated by this allegory. Also, as strange as it seems to be, a number of textual references do not find their exact greek, Neoplatonic or at least Platonic origin. Thus, in addition to the failure of mentioning cave allegory, we are confronted with the world image as a prison<sup>46</sup> and of the soul struggling in the mercilessly garbage bin of the body<sup>47</sup>. Instead of being quoted Plato and his famous formula, of orphic origin, of the body as soul’s prison (*soma sema*)<sup>48</sup>, Cantemir brings forward the figure of Adam, who ate the apple „*and with death died*”<sup>49</sup>. Iamblichus, one of the most important representatives of Neoplatonism, described this condition in the following terms:

“*Your suffering does not differ from that of Philoctetes from the tragedy, «reached by an ulceration», it’s just that his wound came from a*

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*comfort. Learn to lose everything peacefully: we must die*” (Seneca, *Epistole către Lucilius*, 98, 9-10, trad. Ioana Costa, Polirom, 2008, vol. II, p. 132).

<sup>39</sup> *Divan*, Book III, 6, p. 178.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, Book III, 1, p. 171.

<sup>41</sup> Horace, *Epistles*, I, 1, 61. D. Cantemir, *Divan*, Book III, 7, p. 179.

<sup>42</sup> “*On this to stay the day of your death: let your vices die before you*” (Seneca, *De vita beata*, 27).

<sup>43</sup> *Divan*, Book III, 16, Stih, p. 188.

<sup>44</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 67 e 3. Cf. *ibidem*, 64 a 4-6; *Republic*, VII, 514 a sq.

<sup>45</sup> *Divan*, Book III, 6, p. 177.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, Book I, 46, p. 48.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, Book I, 9, p. 32.

<sup>48</sup> Plato, *Cratylus*, 400 c; *Phaedo*, 62 b; *Gorgias*, 493 a. Plato’s idea was that the soul is subject to lifelong slavery of the body. Sensory death would prove to be a revival, an awakening to a reality that remains opaque to sensations, as long as those are deaf and blind (cf. Plato, *Phedo*, 66 d; Iamblichus, *Protreptic*, 3, Des Places p. 45.22-25).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, Book I, 3, p. 30.

«cursed hydra». *Soul bear the pain caused by a fall in body, because we live to atone for certain major crimes. The union of soul with the body resembles the way the Tyrenians were torturing their prisoners: they bound them, alive, with corpses, face to face, legs to legs, hands to hands. So it seems that the soul has been himself enlarged and pasted to all the sensitive organs of the body*”.<sup>50</sup>

The same Neoplatonic influence is found in the assessment that the world is insatiable in annihilation of **peoples'souls**<sup>51</sup>, being a blood spilling and souls' losing world<sup>52</sup>. We find in Porphyry a similar representation in his Plotinus' biography. Speaking about his deceased mentor, Porphyry says that he “*did everything to escape the bitter waves of this bloodthirsty life*”<sup>53</sup>. Another striking feature of the influence of Neoplatonism on the Cantemir's *Divan* is the idea that all wealth and charm of the world are not of any use to the wise if his “*priceless soul*” is through them slain<sup>54</sup>. Cantemir states that sweetness is mixed with poison in the world<sup>55</sup>, that the world poisons and kills the soul through body's lust<sup>56</sup>. It is a formulation that is found, in other metaphorical terms, in Porphyry:

*“It was rightly told that the man who deserted the gods is necessarily chained in some kind of dungeon and tries hard to loosen his chains, like the rebel to the things down here who left the divine being, as Empedocle says, «wanderer and exiled from gods ». That is because all sneaky existence is full of slavery and impiety, and is therefore devoid of divinity and justice”*<sup>57</sup>.

A last element of the Neoplatonic influence on the *Divan* is the consideration of earthly life as something not very desirable. Cantemir writes, addressing the world:

*“You liar, proud and false, not wise is the one who is inside you, but the one that came out of you makes happy and even happier the one that did not come in you”*<sup>58</sup>.

We might remember here the ancient greek wisdom, that we find in Plutarch's *Consolation to Apollonius*<sup>59</sup>, summarized in the story of king Midas and the Silen, better known to the public through Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. But the same disquieting judgment on human being life is also one of the key points of Plotinus *Enneads* doctrine. It defines a typical Neoplatonic position in which the fall of the soul in a body is seen as an unfortunate decline, while death release the soul once detached from the body.

In closing, we would like to point out the main element that makes the Cantemir's *Divan* an essential piece of work in Romanian literature and why, on the other hand, this work does not correspond with certain aspects of its classical philosophical tradition. Cantemir's merit is to have perceived the confluence of all European spiritual traditions, despite the conflicts which they have given rise over time. With this background understanding of convergence between Christianity and Hellenism, Cantemir traced a path that other scholars will confirm in addressing indigenous and European cultural tradition. Unfortunately, this very peaceful spirit, which is animated the *Divan*, makes it

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<sup>50</sup> Iamblichus, *Protreptic*, 8, Des Places p. 78.2-11.

<sup>51</sup> *Divan*, Book I, p. 45.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*, Book I, 47, p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> Porphyry, *Plotinus's Life*, 23. 5-6, in Plotin, *Ennéades*, I, trad. Émile Bréhier, Belles Lettres, Paris, 2003, p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> *Divan*, Book I, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, Book I, p. 35.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, Book I, 55, p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> Porphyry, *Sentences*, XXXVIII, 67-74, Della Rosa p. 100-102.

<sup>58</sup> *Divanul*, Book I, 49, p. 49.

<sup>59</sup> Plutarch, *Consolation to Apollonius*, 115 b-e, in Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. II, Loeb Classical Library, 1928, pp. 177-179.

a writing hardly relevant for philosophical works in the Western sense of tradition. From the Presocratics to Plato, Socrates to Plotinus, from Epictetus to Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, philosophy brings essentially a critical spirit, including, if not primarily, upon its own tradition, which is a constant controversy of doctrines, ideas, systems, concepts etc. The understanding of the beneficial nature of the critical spirit essential for any philosopher. Cantemir's *Divan* might be anything else, less a work inspired by a critical movement.

We must point out that such judgments of value does not diminish the value of his philosophical work, but rather places it in an area of *early* literature, a literature that begins building a culture, a spirit, a tradition, an identity. We could not expect from a man so gifted and versatile in many respects, historian, scholar, diplomat, ruler, a man eminently conciliator of traditions, that he would have left a critical, implicitly polemical, work, which could have been interpreted from the very beginning in political terms, as an attack on one authority or another, of one tradition or another, in an era when nothing was clear in the political and cultural context of his country. The risk was too great, and the result could have possibly overshadowed the rest of Cantemir's merit.