CHAPTER ONE

THE ENVIRONMENT AND ITS RELATION TO THE ANTHROPIC ELEMENT

The reconstruction of the landscape of the southern half of Moldavia at the beginning of the second millennium is of great importance, and should demonstrate the character and extent of the influence of the geographic background on the evolution of human communities. Landscape is a complex body of elements with different structures that have not remained the same through the ages. Of particular interest are the constituent parts of the lithosphere, the hydrosphere, and the biosphere, with which man remains in continuous connection. My view is essentially anthropocentric, and my investigation is particularly focused on the use of the landscape.

At least until the eighteenth century, in the panorama of the eastern Carpathian territories, no structural modifications had appeared in regard to its physical conformation since the dawn of the medieval period. Therefore we consider that in order to shape a comprehensive image of the territory after the beginning of second millennium, one can also resort to the written and the cartographical sources that appeared in subsequent periods, without surpassing, as a rule, the above-mentioned century.

During the last decades, the problems implied by the investigation of the connection between the geographic background and the development of Romanian society have been neglected, to a certain extent. Some historians have gone so far as to completely refuse that a connection exists. Perhaps this nihilism is a reaction to earlier exaggerations by the supporters of vulgar determinism and some excessive trends in geopolitics. Many contemporary scholars consider geopolitics to be discredited as a structural aggregate of epistemological cognition, as a result of Nazi abuse. It would be out of place to analyse here the harmfulness of such irrevocably discredited practices, but we can afford the observation that the repudiation of the pseudo-scientific principles of geopolitics, as well as of their supporters, neither imposes, nor justifies a total rejection of it. Its valid constituent parts cannot be denied just because they were also embraced by the promoters of
fascism (just as nobody would think of excluding Dürer’s, Goethe’s or Wagner’s works from the world’s artistic heritage solely due to their names having once been invoked in the service of for exacerbated nationalist propaganda).

The influence of the geographic factor must not be reduced only to biologic, demographic and economic aspects that are reflected (more or less clearly) in social life, and in administrative, military and political organization.1 A focus on the role of the geographic background in the general evolution of society does not presume joining the geodeterminist theories, but it is justified since, during the last decades, approaches to this problem in the specialized Romanian and east-European literature have not always proven adequate, partially due to their adoption of dogmatic positions that limited the contribution of the geographic background only to the economic sphere.

Generally, there is an idea that the further we move back in time, the greater the dependence of humans upon nature appears to be, and that, through the general evolution of humankind, this dependence gradually decreases. But in fact, what we owe to nature never dwindles. On the contrary, the ever increasing necessities of society, both material and spiritual, make it look for new resources in the environment, its relations with which grow more and more diverse. What can usually be dissociated from the dependence on nature means, in fact, an increase in the possibilities of humankind of using the resources of a certain area, of adapting distinct components of the environment to its own necessities, and of facing natural calamities and cataclysms, due to technical progress and to accumulations of ever deeper knowledge about nature’s intimate mechanisms.

In the evaluation of the natural environment in connection with the evolution of society, a range of specific aspects and nuances must be

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