

## STAGES IN THE FORMATION OF THE ROMANIAN MENTAL SPACE

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**ABSTRACT** – In the evolution of the Romanian mental space, four distinct stages can be emphasized, each of them bringing its specific contribution to its defining and structuring. These stages are the following: the forerunning, Dacian stage, the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. - 106 A.D.; the incipient, Dacian-Roman stage, 105 – 275 A.D.; the structuring, proto-Romanian stage, 275 – the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries; the Romanian stage of completion and affirmation, the 8<sup>th</sup> century – nowadays. Each stage is characterized by different forms, in continuous affirmation and improvement, of interrelations between the human communities and the site, of spiritually sublimation of the physical-geographical substratum features, of the territory inhabited by them.

**Key words:** mental space, Dacia, Carpathians, Romanian, civilization.

As it was mentioned in a series of previous approaches (Cocean, P. 2002, 2005, 2007), mental space, understood in its geographical meaning, namely a physically and spiritually defined territorial aggregate, has been created over a long period, at the level of several centuries. It has suffered a real process of dilution, of sublimation, passing from one stage into another, in a tight correlation with the impact generated by the natural internal evolution, but, especially, by the activity of some external factors with a major potential of influence.

In the evolution of the Romanian mental space, four distinct stages can be emphasized, each of them bringing its specific contribution to its defining and structuring. These stages are the following:

- the forerunning, Dacian stage, the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. - 106 A.D.;
- the incipient, Dacian-Roman stage, 106 – 275 A.D.;
- the structuring, proto-Romanian stage, 275 – the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries;
- the Romanian stage of completion and affirmation, the 8<sup>th</sup> century – nowadays.

**The forerunning, Geto-Dacian stage**, temporally developed between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. and 106 A.D., but having its beginnings much earlier, even from the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., when Herodot, describing the Persian expeditions to the Lower Danube, mentioned the Getae among their enemies. But a favourable environment for the creation of a future mental space can be talked about only in the moment of the edification of the first Dacian state entity recognized in history, the Burebista's, when the Geto-Dacians identified themselves with the territory lain between the northern slopes of the Balkans in the south, the lower Nistru in the east, Wooded Carpathians in the north and the bend of the Danube from the Pannonic steppe towards west (Figure 1).

An extended territory having the gravitational nucleus laid over the Transylvanian Basin, a revealing fact illustrated by Iordanes in his work entitled *Getica* (6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) by using some historical sources from the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. (*Dacia*) *sita trans Danubium corona montium cingitur* ("Dacia, situated on the other part of the Danube, is surrounded by the crown of mountains") (Istoria Românilor, 2001, vol. I, p. 424). In the perimeter of the same nucleus, the capital of the centralized Dacian state, Sarmizegetusa Regia, is also positioned, built on the heights from the Orăștie Mountains. In this stage, *the first creation of the physical background of the ulterior Romanian mental space* took place, having as vertebral column the sinuous range of the Carpathians, which became the ideal shelter, vital resource and defining environment for the spirit of an independent nation.

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Figure 1. Dacia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. Author: Claudius Ptolomaeus. (Source: Atlas istorico-geografic, 1996)

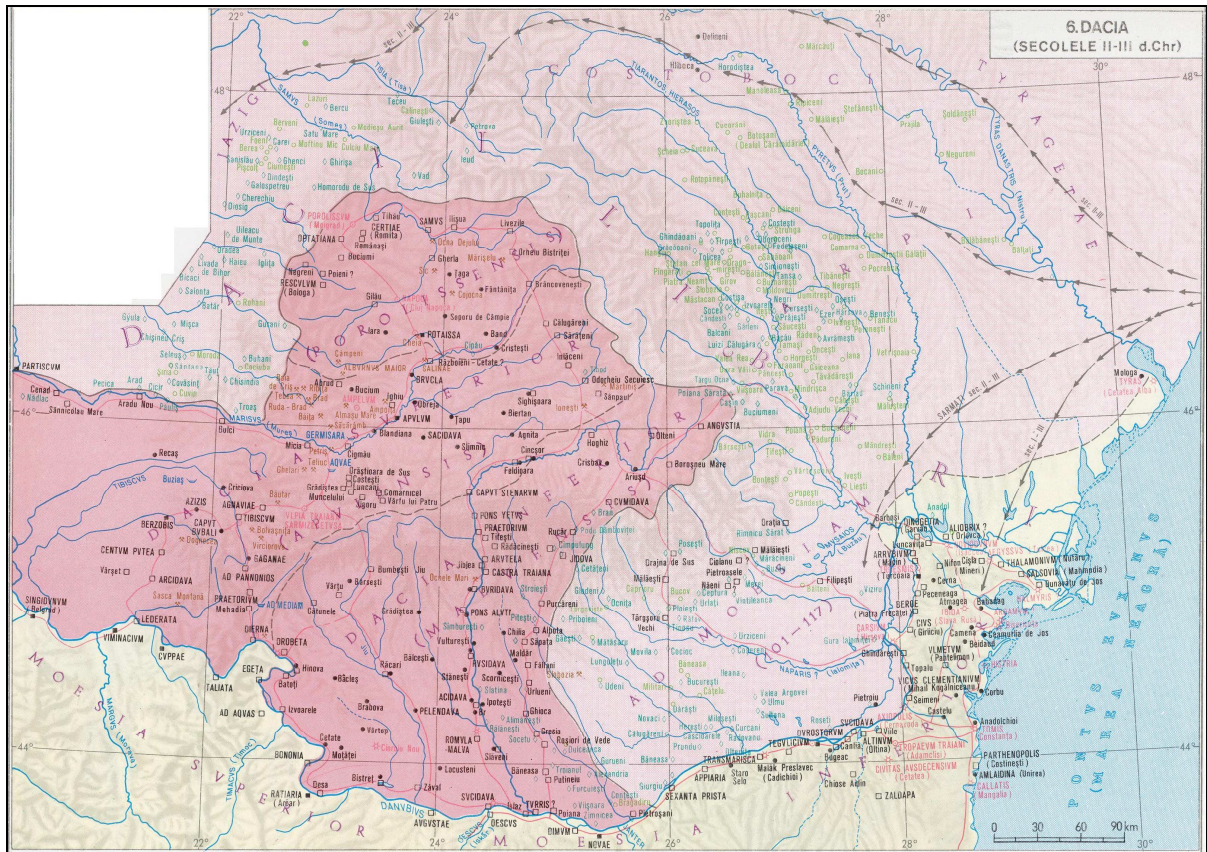
The main mental product of this period is *the Geto-Dacian civilization*, the one and only civilization, as far as originality and level of affirmation are concerned, of mountainous type from Europe. It was created during several centuries, especially between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. and the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. and it had exceptional accomplishments in the architectural, economic, social, or cultural fields (Istoria românilor, I, pp. 725-788). The fundamental binder between man and substratum was provided in this stage by the extremely tight attachment of the Dacians to the mountains, that is the most complex and most difficult to populate, to anthropize form of terrestrial relief (*Daci montibus inhaerent* “Dacians are inseparable from the mountains” - Florus II, 28, 18; *Campos et plana Iazyges Sarmatae, montes uero et saltus ...Daci* - Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia* IV, 80; according to Istoria românilor I, pp.423-424). From the permanent interface with an extreme, often hostile habitat, a vigorous, proud, and courageous folk has coagulated and asserted itself somatically and behaviourally. In such a context, the opinion of the historian Keith Bradley, according to whom one of the Antiquity’s noteworthy personalities, the leader of the Roman slaves’ great rebellion, Spartacus, had his origins among the population living on the present territory of Romania, seems very likely.

In this forerunning stage, one of *the spiritual coordinates of the ulterior Romanian mental edifice*, such as the main occupations of the population (mining, wood-processing, agriculture), a series of traditions (remained in the folk culture from the pre-Christian period), mythology of mountainous origin, etc. also appeared (Cocean, P. 2007).



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The incipient, **Dacian-Roman stage** took place between 106 and 275 A.D. and had as essential contribution to the genesis of the mental space *the linguistic and cultural component*, transposed in the realities of the place from the privileged position of an administration and an exceptional political force such as the one of the Roman Empire. It was the moment when the generalized ethnical melange between the Dacians and the Romans developed on a great area of the territory between the Balkans and the Wooded Carpathians (Figure 2), and the imposing of the lexical, morphological, syntactical and phonetic structure of Latin as a matrix in the formation of the Romanian language took place.



**Figure 2.** North-Danubian Dacia during Roman administration (106-275 A.D.).  
(Source: Atlas istorico-geografic, 1996)

In this period, the limits of the mental space in formation did not restrict, as apparently one may suppose, to the territories included in the **Roman Dacia**, overlapping the nucleus of the Dacian state (Oltenia, Banat, north-western Wallachia, southern and central Transylvania, southern Crişana), while extended territories inhabited further on by the Dacians would remain outside. We take into consideration, firstly, the territories included in the **Lower Moesia** province, which included the south-eastern Transylvania, central and eastern Wallachia, Dobrudja, southern Moldavia, up to the mouth of the Nistru, and the territories from south of the Danube up to the Balkans. Secondly, we take into consideration the wide territories situated south of the Danube, in the Morava and Timok basins, also inhabited by the Dacians, which would be integrated into **Upper Moesia**. Northern Moldavia, historical Maramureş, with its north-western extension towards the Slovakian Carpathians, Crişana, and the Pannonian plain between the Tisa and the Danube remain definitely outside the official framework of the Dacian-Roman ethnogenesis, outside the northern limes of the empire. Only apparently, as the interrelations between the Dacian-Romans and the free Dacians continued uninterruptedly and the influences of the Dacian-Roman civilization spread over wide areas outside the *limes*. The free

Dacians themselves frequently became the vectors of these influences, due to the attribute of *beneficiarius*, granted by the Romans to the populations from the periphery of the empire in the scope of affirming some harmonious relations of cohabitation. Moreover, the Dacian language represented, at least in the first part of their life together, an easy means of communication between the two groups of populations separated by an artificial, politico-administrative barrier (a phenomenon which frequently appears even nowadays in the cross-border regions).

In this context, an *aureola of mental contact* appeared in the north-western, northern and eastern part of the Roman Dacia and Lower Moesia limes, between the mouths of the Nistru and the Pannonian Danube rivers, mediated by the Geto-Dacian language community. As in the physical structures, geological for example, no matter of their resistance, the production of some extreme phenomena (thermic, seismic) has an impact upon the surrounding areas, in a scale of influences in direct proportion with the force of impact and the permeability of the environment, the more in a fluid spatial context, with a reduced internal cohesion, less organically and functionally structured, as all the territories from the periphery of the Roman empire used to be, the propagation phenomenon of the beneficial influences, economic, social and cultural amplified. The integral taking-over of the Dacian state's functions by the Roman administration, logistically superior and, therefore, more efficient, in its economic and social scopes, played, for all the regions inhabited by the free Dacians, the role of an attractive factor of prime importance. From this point forward, up to influencing, firstly at the level of the means of communication, the language, was just a step, which the absolute majority of the free Dacian communities from the present provinces of Moldavia, eastern Wallachia, Bucovina, Maramureș, or Crișana took, assuring this way the germinal bed of the homogeneity of the subsequent Romanian language.

**The proto-Romanian stage** began with the withdrawal of Roman administration from Dacia, in 275, and temporally extended up to the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, when the osmosis with the Slavs was definitively adjudicated through their total assimilation.

In this period, the territory of old Dacia became a genuine ethnogenetical melting pot, having as nucleus of reference the Roman Dacia, where, for seven generations, enough, we consider, as number and length of time, to certify a new reality of the place, a new and original matrix of human society coagulated from the mental point of view.

The proto-Romanian stage offers us the image of a brownian space, where the Carpathians and the Transylvanian Depression, surrounded by the mountain heights, represent the territorial system of reference, that ideal melting pot for the perfect ethnical metamorphosis of the Romanian people. Its external limits remain those of Burebista's Dacia (the Balkans, the Nistru, the Wooded Carpathians, the Pannonian Danube), the withdrawal of Roman administration towards south of the Danube, removing, north of the river, the limes from the northern Transylvania and the Alutan one, a generator, for about two centuries, of a genuine scission between the Geto-Dacian communities, once reunited.

A special situation appears in the case of the Geto-Dacian territory situated south of the Danube, including Tribalia firstly, where the Roman administration continued to persist after 275 A.D., Emperor Aurelianus organizing here two provinces with the Dacian ethnonim (*Dacia Ripensis* and *Dacia Mediterranea*), which doubtlessly proves both its belonging to the old Dacian state and to the space of the Romanians' ethnogenesis. In this area, the Dacian-Roman ethnical mixture continued to enhance during the following centuries, favoured by the maintenance of the region under the influence of the Roman Empire and, later on, of the Byzantine one, but the insertion of the Bulgarians, starting with the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and their early political emancipation led to a gradual adjudgement, but never total (as it is proven by the Vlach population still living in great number in the region) of the mentioned space.

Having as fundamental supporting pillars, just like an indelible seal, the antecedents of the Dacian and Dacian-Roman civilization, whose exceptional accomplishments in the architectural, town-planning or economic fields are localized in this place (Sarmizegetusa Regia, Sarmizegetusa Ulpia Traiana, the auriferous exploitation sites, unique in the world, from Roșia Montană), the proto-

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Romanians continued, in a natural manner, the spiritual inheritance of the predecessors, distilling it up to the level of a new language and culture, the Romanian one.

The migration of the Slavs in the 6<sup>th</sup> century represented the greatest danger and the most severe exam, developed on historical scale, for the Romanian mental space. Firstly, by its development in a period in which the structuring of the respective place was not finished, was not complete; secondly, by the unprecedented massiveness and extension of the impact. The penetration into the Romanian mental edifice from all the four cardinal points (eastwards, on the main direction, by the Eastern Slavs, from the north and west by the Western Slavs branch, and from the south, by the infiltration, in the Balkan region, starting with 499 A.D. of the Bulgarians), transformed it into the well-known “Latin island in a Slave sea”, a preserved fact, with a single exception (the westward opening through the narrow split window in the Slave belt by the sedentarization in the Pannonian Plain, beginning with 896 A.D., of the Magyars) even after a millennium and a half.

Any logical argumentation regarding the maintenance of this island, in spite of its remarkable attractiveness it had upon many people, especially upon the migratory ones (just to mention the presence in this area of the greatest gold ores and exploitations from Europe, a fact which also motivated the Roman expansion north of the Danube), cannot omit two elements which any researcher in good faith is obliged to affirm: the superior administrative organization, of Roman origin, and the more evolved, more expressive and, hence, more attractive language of the proto-Romanians. Moreover, in this equation it can be included another aspect, put forward by the historical research: “*when two nations come into contact, the one which has a higher prestige imposes itself linguistically*” (Istoria românilor, II, p. 226). Or, the result of the respective interaction doubtlessly proves that it belonged to the Romanians.

It is obvious that in the absence of these attributes, the territory of the old Dacia would have been as the ones around the “island”, from Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Serbia or Bulgaria, integrally Slavized, and the evolution of the Romanian mental space stopped for good. It is beyond doubt that the assimilation of the Slavs was made especially by means of language and superior culture, a fact which eliminates any interpretative temptation regarding the lack of continuity and the ethnogenesis of the Romanians in another space than the archetypal Carpathian one (Cocean, P., 2007).

An important role in the coagulation of the Romanian mental space in the proto-Romanian stage, of the maintenance and continuity of its spiritual support in an unsettled historical period, such as the one of the migrations, was played by *Christianity*, the presence of Holy Apostle Andrew among the Geto-Dacians from the Lower Danube being signaled since the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

**The completion and affirmation, Romanian stage** began in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, after the complete assimilation of the Slavs penetrated into the Romanian ethnogenetic space, and continues even nowadays. From a territorial, physical, material support point of view, the analyzed mental space has its limits already outlined: the Nistru Corridor, eastwards; the Wooded Carpathians, northwards; the Tisa River, westwards and the Balkans, southwards. Generally, it integrates, without significant changes, the territory of Burebista’s Dacia, having the Transylvanian Basin as the “central place” of its organization and structuring. The peripheral dissipation of the constitutive attributes remains, as in the case of all nations, a reality, fervently exploited by other nations or ethnical groups the Romanians entered into competition with, being forced either to retreat inwards, or to face, for centuries, assimilation. We refer to the territories between the Nistru and the Bug, adjudged by the Russians (Ukrainians), to those from the western part, from Pannonia, gradually conquered by the Magyars, to the right side of the Lower Danube taken into the Bulgarians’ possession, or to the south-western part of the old Dacia, extended under the form of a deep lobe axially cut through by the Timok Valley, adjudged by the Serbians.

An example of the manner in which the Romanian ethnogenetic space has stunted itself is offered by the territory situated on the right side of the Danube, where, although the Romanization of the Dacians was longer, being conquered earlier by the Romans and found, after the Roman retreat from the north of the Danube, under their influence for a longer period of time, inclusively through the

agency of the Byzantine Empire, the rapport between the Romanians (Vlachs) and Bulgarians became gradually favourable to the latter. And this, even though, between 1185-1393, the “Romanian-Bulgarian Czardom” existed here, founded by the Asănești family (Asan brothers, Petru and Ioniță Kaloianul), of Romanian origin, and the respective state occupied at a certain time (the 13<sup>th</sup> century) the whole northern part of the Balkan Peninsula, between the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea (Istoria Românilor, III, pp. 427-438).

The spiritual component was also brought into being through the finalized ethnogenesis of a new nation, the Romanian one, resulted from the secular *mélange* of the autochthonous, Dacian population, with the Roman colonists. The most relevant result of the ethnical interference is the appearance and the affirmation of the Romanian language, of Latin origin, capable, since the 6<sup>th</sup> century, to impose itself in front of the Slav language, generalized under the form of different dialects in the whole eastern part of Europe. A vigorous language, which has selectively taken over the allochthonous influences it had temporarily come into contact with and has distilled them in terms of great semantic expressivity. And, above all, it is a language without dialects, of unrivalled uniformity on the entire territory of its use.

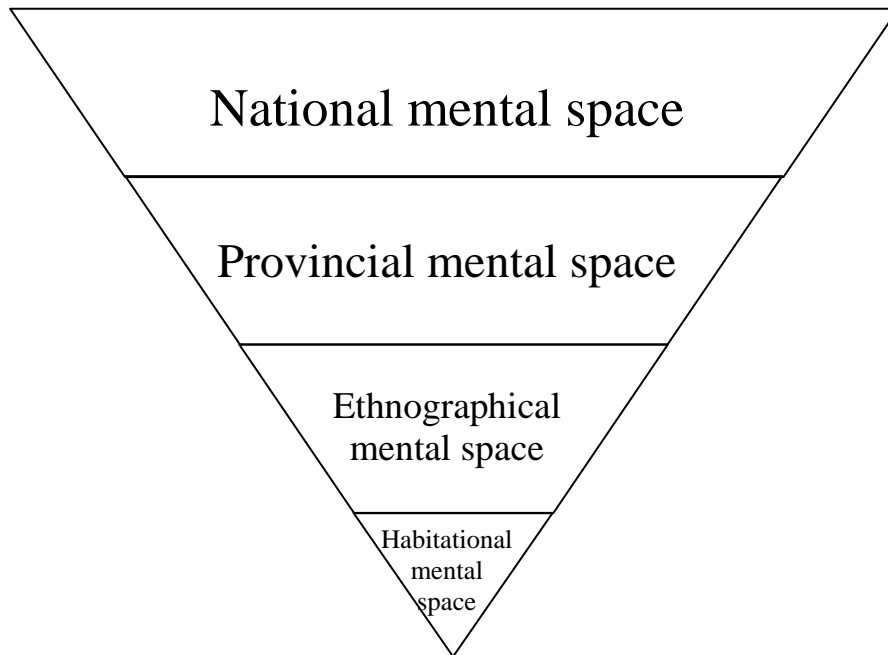
The affirmation process of the Romanian mental space has not lacked obstacles and difficulties. One of them was the one generated by the Magyars’ expansion towards east, beginning with the 11<sup>th</sup> century, when the territory situated east of the Tisa, Crișana, Maramureș, Banat and Transylvania were conquered one by one. The Transylvanian basin, the nucleus of the Romanian ethnogenetic space, became, for several centuries, the scene of some attempts of substitution, through colonizations and assimilations, of the Carpathian archetypal mental space with a structure of another type, belonging to the temporary masters (Hungary, in the 11<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Habsburg Empire, between 1699-1869 and, finally, Austro-Hungary, between 1869-1918). In this territory, we assist, beginning with the 12<sup>th</sup> century, with the colonization of Hungarians, Szeklers and Transylvanian Saxons, at a *fragmentation* and *enclavization* of the initial Romanian mental space, due to the appearance of some stripes and buffer-corridors, comprising allochthonous population, frequently inserted between the “land” (“țară”) type entities, and bringing their contribution to increasing the lands’ degree of isolation and autarchy (The Land of Maramureș, The Land of Oaș, The Land of Lăpuș, The Land of Sylvania, The Land of Chioar, The Land of Năsăud, The Land of the Moți, The Land of Beiuș, The land of Zarand, The Land of Bârsa, The Land of Făgăraș, The Land of Amlaș, The Land of Hațeg, The Land of Almăj). A very important fact must be also mentioned: despite isolation, different administrative, economic and social evolution, including the affirmation of some specific cultural manifestations (especially at the folklore level), all these “lands” preserve an overwhelming Romanian ethnical structure and the same Romanian language, without noticeable regional differences. By way of proof, in the moment of their individualization, the conscience of nation and language was fully formed, being nothing else but the fragments of a unique mental space found in an advanced phase of its structuring and affirmation, which did not make possible, despite the pressures it was subjected to along history, the dissolution and the substitution with the mental edifices of the others.

Another adverse factor to the natural, harmonious evolution of the Romanian mental space was represented by its division during almost seven centuries (the 14<sup>th</sup> century-1918) into three distinct politico-administrative entities: Moldavia, Transylvania and Walachia. The three Romanian geographical-historical provinces were, during this interval, under the incidence of the expansionist desiderata of no less than three empires: Turkish, Russian and Austro-Hungarian, with all the negative consequences derived from this situation (the frequent transformation of their territories into battle scenes, politico-administrative mutations due to the cutting-up of some territories and their joining to the respective empires, etc.). The Carpathians, the mountainous region of forming the archetypal mental space of the Romanian people, became, fortunately only on administrative level, a separating line between the Romanian communities situated on both sides of their ridges. Although in the absolute majority of cases, the mountainous ridges, due to their attributes of natural obstacles, separate people and coordinate their evolution in different directions, in the present case the respective phenomenon is totally missing. There is another indisputable argument that, in the moment in which





Consequently, the mental space receives a holarchic configuration (Figure 4), the superior holon integrating the entity proper, the national one, of maximum generality, clearly differentiated, both structurally and functionally, in rapport with the mental spaces of other people the Romanians have interfered or cohabitated with.



**Figure 4.** *The holarchy of the Romanian mental space.*

**The Romanian national mental space** represents the superior, generalizing entity, created over a long period of time, through a complex process of organic distillation, of sublimation of matter into spirit and of creating a territorial unit, indestructible in its uniqueness. In its genesis, the four above-mentioned, distinct stages can be identified, that is the Dacian stage, the Dacian-Roman stage, the proto-Romanian stage, and the Romanian stage. In the first stage, the material frame of the subsequent mental space, centred on the Carpathians, was defined; in the second stage, due to the Dacian-Roman mixture, the main means of communication, the language of Latin origin, was foreshadowed and the Roman cultural matrix was implemented; in the third one, specificities appeared, and in the fourth stage, structure and functions were finalized.

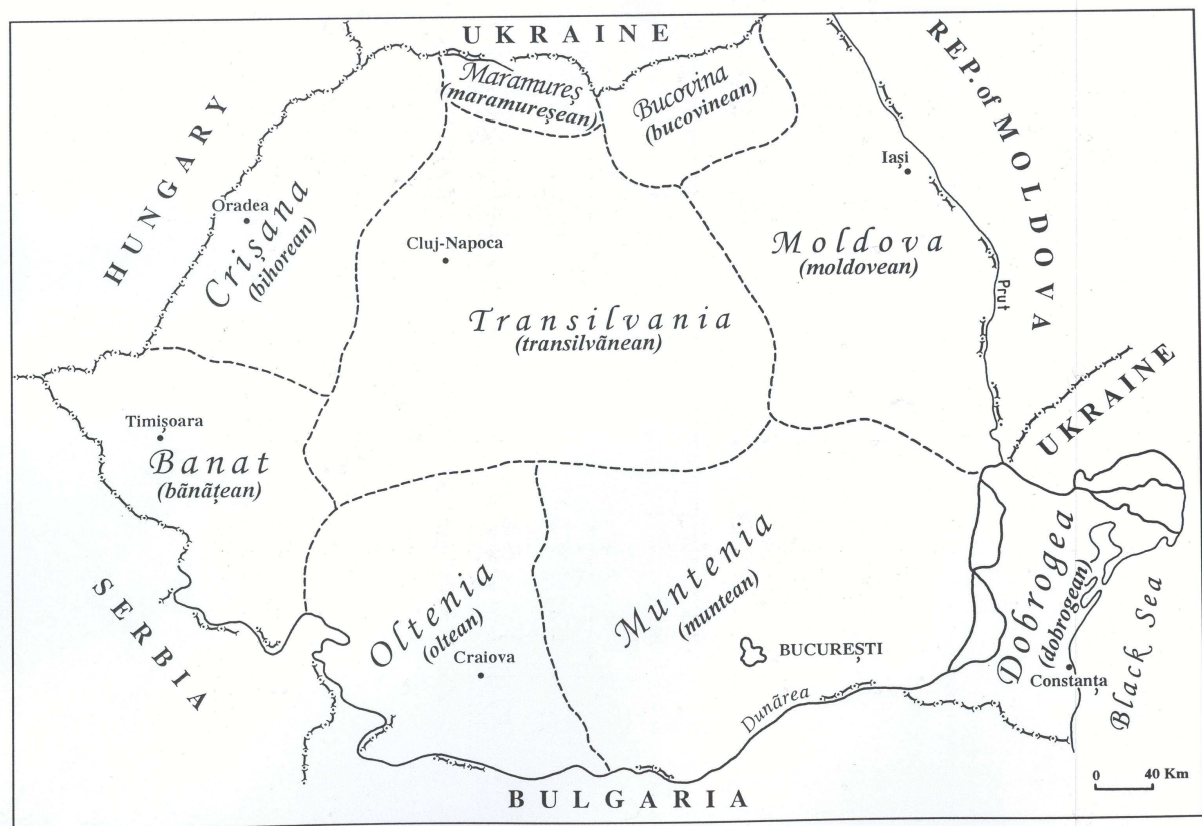
The Romanian mental space, but also of other people, operates with fundamental structural elements, of maximum generality and relevance, such as *territory* (seen as an indispensable environment, as a sine qua non existential resource), *language* (as the main socio-systemic binder), and *culture* (the creative summing up of all specificities). It includes into its matrix the *ethnogenesis*, the one of the Romanian people being accomplished entirely *in situ*, in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic region, fact which explains the inclusion of the continuity of existence and affirmation in the same hearth among its supreme values.

**Provincial mental spaces** have their crystallizing periods beginning with the 9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the first forms of Romanian political organization appeared as result of the coagulation of the village communities and the appearance of knezats (clusters of villages) and voievodats (princely states). They become relevant in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when all three Romanian states, Moldavia (Moldova), Transylvania (Transilvania) and Wallachia (Țara Românească) individualize as



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state entities. They include a series of provinces such as Bucovina, Basarabia, Moldavia (in restricted sense), Maramureş, Crişana, Banat, Transilvania (in restricted sense), Oltenia, Muntenia, Dobrogea (Figure 5). The common denominator of all these spaces is the Romanian language, remarkable for its homogeneity, and the consciousness of belonging to a unique mental space, the Romanian one. The differences appear, however, at the level of interrelations with the physical environment, of their transcendence into spirituality, as self-identification, etc., and form a cumulus of elements which generate the attribute of *bucovinean*, *basarabean*, *moldovean*, *maramureşan*, *crişan*, *bănăţean*, *transilvănean* (*ardelean*), *oltean*, *muntean* or *dobrogean*. This attribute contain a series of behavioural and cultural peculiarities, which differentiates one another, generating the image of a mosaic meant to halo the whole through its structural polychromy, to generate the so beneficial diversity in unity.



**Figure 5.** Provincial mental spaces of Romania.

*Ethnographical mental spaces* overlap some segments of the previously analyzed spaces, into which, territories humanized by a population with the same traditions, customs, folklore, etc., different in rapport with the adjoining regions, integrate organically. A population able to create an authentic and original rural culture, affirmed as fundamental existential attribute. They overlap accurately the 18 “*ţări*” (“lands”, “pays”), identified on both sides of the Carpathian range (Figure 6), but also some provinces such as the ones of the forest dwellers (“*pădureni*”) from the Poiana Ruscă Mountains, the Argeş Hills, the Codru Ridge, etc.

The consistency of the ethnographical mental space is clearly superior to the provincial one because of the very tight attachment to the local spiritual values of maximum resonance. They become components of the social behaviour and are often seen in antithesis: gentleness - aggressiveness, diligence - laziness, stability - instability, organization - disorganization, generosity - avarice, hospitality - inhospitality, etc. (Cocean P. 2005). The self-identification of man with the place is much

more profound and makes direct reference to spiritual and behavioural specificities, transformed and often displayed without reserve as genuine regional “brands”.

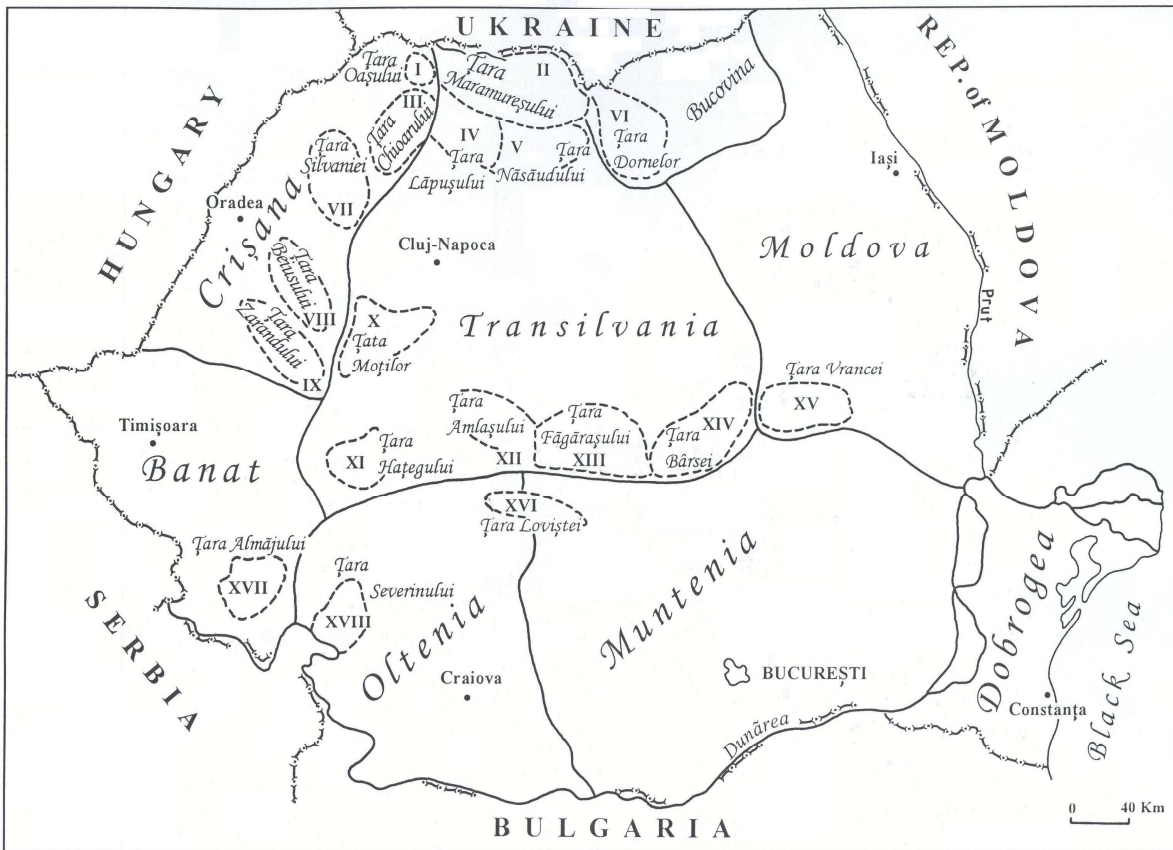


Figure 6. Ethnographical mental spaces of Romania.

**Habitational mental spaces** are instituted in the basic cell of any mental space, no matter of its size and structural and functional complexity. They coincide with a person’s locality of origin and long-term living, the place where a person develops his first concrete representations of reality and whose common laws he imprints into his behaviour under the form of some genuine unconditioned reflexes. Their name derives from adjectivizing the locality’s toponym: Zagra – zăgrean, Vidra – vidrean, Lupșa – lupșan, etc.

The habitational type spaces form, by summing up, an ethnographical space, enjoying, however, a great functional individuality within it. The more reduced dimension and complexity confer a more pronounced degree of homogeneity. The interrelations established between them are permanent and generate a genuine competition at material and spiritual level, which ensure their affirmation on clearly-defined social and cultural coordinates.

In the past, during the period of traditional rural society, the preservation of these mental spaces’ peculiarity was ensured by population’s general sedentarization within the limits of local sphere. Together with the increasingly numerous and longer outputs from the autarchic type, closed or semi-open spatial system of the profound Romanian rural space, the uniqueness of the habitational mental spaces diminished, its specific elements being rivalled and sometimes even substituted for allochthonous ones.

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*Metropolitan mental space* has always defined especially the capital-cities, the beneficiaries of some political, economic, social or cultural attributes, which impose themselves in such a significant manner in the public consciousness that they receive the attribute of superior existential values (especially in rapport with the adjoining areas of inferior level). Sarmizegetusa Regia during the Dacians, Ulpia Traiana Sarmizegetusa in the Dacian-Roman period, Cluj, Alba Iulia, Suceava, Iași, Craiova, Târgoviște and București in the medieval stage, București in modern and contemporary period represented the nuclei of such derived mental spaces, functionally privileged in comparison with the other equivalent spaces (ethnographical).

The structuring of the metropolitan spaces is new, different from the above-mentioned ones, through the role of retort the urban environment offers to the interferences of different types. Practically, a process of feature dissolution of habitational, ethnographical or provincial spaces takes place, features which the new-coming population carries, at least in the first generation, in its individual or collective mental. It adheres, by rapid substitution, to the values of the place, which it assimilates and, implicitly, affirms.

An analysis of the metropolitan mental spaces focalized on the great cities (Cluj Napoca, Iași, Timișoara, Constanța, Brașov, Craiova, Ploiești, Sibiu etc.) emphasizes the same affirmation phenomenon of some regional entities from the analyzed category, but where the provincial or ethnographical imprint is much more visible. The city rank and its polarizing potential are decisive factors in imposing the *mental aura* and its territorial resonance.

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