

Antiques from Transylvania and Banat in Relation of the 18th Century Western Travelers¹

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Abstract: *This study deals with European travelers' sensation for ancient objects from Transylvania and Banat, of which most were to be found in private collections (and cabinets of curiosities). In travelogues, as well as in all the literature of the period, the rationalist legitimising role of Antiquity was added the discourse of pre-Romantic sensitiveness – the compassion for all that meant the transience of the past glory, but also the nostalgia for an age perceived as a time of the rise of the human reason. It's also interesant to see the relation between collective memory and identity legitimising.*

The Antiquity has been, since the 17th century, constantly present among the artistic concerns, stimulating the assembling of art collections owned by aristocrats and Classicist scholars. Most eloquently, Nicolas Poussin's (1594-1665) and Claude Lorrain's (1600-1682) landscapes reflect the interest towards the Greek, Roman and Jewish vestiges. This concern was at first archaeological, focusing particularly on Roman ruins (see the antiques collectors such as Thomas Howard, the Duke of Arundel or Cassino del Pozzo, who owned some of the richest collections of Roman antiques in the 17th century). After a few decades, the ancient ruins became the main attraction of touristic voyages of French, English and German travellers, particularly in the area of the Mediterranean Sea. Shortly, the vestiges of the ancient past have entered the private space. The ancient architecture and sculpture were imitated and reproduced in the obelisks, colonnades, the fountains' ornaments and statues that provided the 18th century gardens and cemeteries with the grace that is agreeable as it follows the reason (see Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Grazia nelle opere d'arte*, 1759). The cabinets of curiosities, common for the great aristocracy during the Enlightenment, also appear in Transylvania and Banat. Thus, they are mentioned for instance in an interesting and complex account belonging to the scholar Domenico Sestini, initially invited to Bucharest by Alexandru Ipsilanti. In 1779, together with I. Raicevich he was in charge with the education of the royal children. His journey across Transylvania offered him opportunities for intellectual delight, as he met people and places that stimulated his passion for the study of human nature, of the beauty of nature and of the historical treasures of these places. He particularly focused on Sibiu,

¹ See Mihaela Grancea, *Călători străini prin Principatele dunărene, Transilvania și Banat (1683-1789). Identitate și alteritate* (Sibiu: Editura Universității „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu, 2002) and Mihaela Grancea, “Foreign Travelers about the Personality of Samuel von Brukenthal,” *Transylvanian Review*, XII, 3 (2003), 14-23.

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