

## A THOUGHT ABOUT CANTEMIR

**A** prince of letters, science and people, Dimitrie Cantemir was the first universal spirit in Romanian culture. He was educated in Constantinople, one of the then capitals of the world, in the light of the great civilisations of both Byzantium and the Turkish and Arabic East and of the European West, propagated by so many scholars, literati, diplomats and artists living there. His writings cover all the major fields of the spirit: history, philosophy, literature, music, ethnography, theology, logic, science, which makes him a harbinger of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Encyclopedism. He lived in his country, Moldavia, but also in the Ottoman Empire and in Russia; he was in touch with great philosophers such as Leibniz; he became member of the Berlin Academy, and his name is engraved on the frontispiece of the Sainte Geneviève Library in Paris. He wrote, among other works, a fundamental history of the Ottoman Empire, several books on the civilisation of Romanians, seen both in its ancestral unity and as integrated into the European world, and a "philosophical novel" centred round the "world as a stage" metaphor – an allegory "with a key" for "understanding" the paradox of human life. The Romanian prince encompasses the great cultural experience before him and heralds the forthcoming approaches. This places Cantemir at the intellectual forefront of his time, an age still fascinated with mythology and antiquity, but already in search of exotic realms and man as a free and universal spirit. If such a complex author could be circumscribed by the bounds of a cultural trend, he would undoubtedly belong within the broad limits of the early European Enlightenment (Frühauflklärung).

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