
BOOK REVIEWS

LAURA MESINA

Uitarea Romei: Studii de arheologie a imaginarului

(Rome's sinking into oblivion: Studies on the archaeology of the imaginary)
Iași: Institutul European, Academica 203, Litere, 2015

LAURA MESINA is a doctor in philology and a member of the teaching staff at the Faculty of Letters, University of Bucharest. Since 2001 she has been working as a scientific expert and a researcher at the Center for Excellence in the Study of Images (CESI), as project director or member within interdisciplinary teams. She is a corporate member of the Accademia di Romania in Rome. She is a published author of books, scholarly studies and articles both in Romania and abroad, in the field of philology, history and theory of images and of the imaginary.

From a structural viewpoint, the book comprises four main chapters, and, apart from the first chapter, the other ones also have subchapters. However, let us first observe that, although in most papers the photographic support is published at the end, or possibly spread throughout the paper, as an auxiliary method of emphasizing contextual assertions, Laura Mesina proposes another way of presenting photographs—at the beginning of the book, even before the introduction which could let the reader know the motivation behind the topic.

Starting with the title of the volume, *Rome's Sinking into Oblivion*, we see that

there is more than just a symbolic antithesis between the general title and the almost forty photos included by the author and illustrating fragments of Rome's history, in general, from the legacy of the Eternal City to that of the "New Rome," Constantinople, and finally to the different frescos on Romanian territories—those that also attest to Rome's legacy. Therefore, Laura Mesina sends a powerful message through the photographic sets—that of not consigning Rome to oblivion!

In the introduction (pp. 47–54), the author makes a short overview of the history of Rome's evolution, showing that the incipit of the "New Rome" (Constantinople)—in 330 A.D., when the Emperor Constantine I inaugurated the new imperial capital—was somehow also the end of the Eternal City, which would later be conquered by migrants, in 410. Laura Mesina writes that the emperor was forgetting about Rome, although the emperor's forgetfulness should be ascribed to Constantine I's political military strategies of renewing the empire by moving the administrative center. However, that "forgetfulness" led to the Roman Empire's demise and, at the same time, to disorder in the political *axis mundi*. Moving on from the historical aspect of the events mentioned, the author asserts that, by applying the "method proposed by Michel Foucault," she is trying to bring forward the imaginary of the empire's central power—the power of the emperor. We notice that the method is compared, more than just symbolically, to "an archaeology of the imaginary." Therefore, the central topic studied here is the imaginary.

The first chapter (pp. 55–85) has no subchapters, in contrast to the others; however, it does present another peculiarity—it is structured in the form of a comprehensive answer that Laura Mesina gives to the question “Is an archaeology of the imaginary possible?” The question is the chapter’s title itself.

The second chapter, “Semantics and Ritual: From *kolossos* to *imagines*” (pp. 87–160), is rather substantial and it is made of three subchapters. Its substance comes not necessarily from its structure, but mainly from the quantity and quality of the information. As such, this chapter offers a historical linguistic itinerary of the ancient imaginary, presenting the transfer from the Greek *kolossos* (the double, a material form of the abstract body—the materiality of the statue or of the stone bust) to the Latin *imagines* (the significance given by the Romans to the ancestors’ wax masks, either created to faithfully resemble their real faces, or created according to the community’s belief that their ancestors looked a certain way)—all filtered through memory.

The third chapter, “Greek Thought, about the Political and the Image” (pp. 161–194), is divided into two subchapters. As the title suggests, within the chapter there are various elements of political theory pertaining to Greek philosophy because, according to the author, political thought is a central topic both in the process of imagination, and in that of the symbolic representation of reality. Unlike the first subchapter, the second one is shorter, but much more dynamic, if we can call it that, in the way ideas are presented; the subchapter itself is suggestively entitled “Controversies of the image.”

The last chapter, “The Imaginary of the Byzantine Christian Power” (pp. 195–256) is, from a structural aspect, the lon-

gest, and is made of four subchapters. Unlike the preceding one, which proposed an analysis of the ancient philosophical imaginary, this chapter is focused on presenting Constantinopolitan power, mainly the imaginary of Byzantine Christian power. As such, in the first subchapter we are presented with the philosophical evolution of the image of the divine, from its ancient image to the *basileus*. The second subchapter also focuses on the *basileus*, but the analysis is into the imaginary of the autocrat’s Christian power, the one who held both the *imperium* and the *sacerdotium*—the two most important powers. We can observe a difference in approach between the first two subchapters and the last two; if in the first part the philosophical discussion focused on the imaginary of the Constantinopolitan emperor, in the last part the author analyses the two terms which may not be known to the majority of the readers of this complex work—we’re talking about *oikonomia* (the ensemble of means of reaching functional harmony and organic finality) and hesychasm.

As a consequence, Laura Mesina’s book is a complex exegesis approaching the imaginary of the empire’s central power in a historical philosophical perspective, be it of the pagan empire—the Roman Empire, or the Christian one—the Constantinopolitan Empire. Although the work is not extensive, it is however challenging, due to its subject and especially to the chosen lexicon, the author employing a professional language which, from the very beginning, makes a “natural” selection among the audience; those who want to read the work will notice a high register in the presentation of ideas, which differentiates the work from the others in the field of cultural history.

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ROBERT-MARIUS MIHALACHE

LAURA MESINA
Imaginarul medieval: Forme și teorii

(The medieval imaginary: Forms and theories)

 Iași: Institutul European, Academica 204, Litere, 2015

LAURA MESINA is a member of the academic staff at the Faculty of Letters of the University of Bucharest, and in this role she has published books, studies and scholarly articles both in Romania and abroad, in the fields of philology, history, and the theory of images and of the imaginary.

At first glance, we notice that the present volume is, in fact, a continuation of the topic approached in the previous book, entitled *Uitarea Romei: Studii de arheologie a imaginarului* (Rome's sinking into oblivion: Studies on the archaeology of the imaginary). We notice that the imaginary was and remains the axis around which the texts are structured. Nonetheless, there is a difference between the two works; the first approached the imaginary of the Roman Empire's central power from a philosophical viewpoint, while the second book approaches the medieval imaginary, as shown in the general title. Therefore, the main difference between Laura Mesina's two exegeses is the analyzed historical period.

In *Rome's Sinking into Oblivion*, the author compared the working method with an "archaeology of the imaginary," while in *The Medieval Imaginary*, Laura Mesina "dug up" information by using an important object in our everyday life—the mirror—and proposed the reflection technique as a method of storytelling. Thus, besides the different periods analyzed, the working method is the second difference between Laura Mesina's two books.

The volume entitled *The Medieval Imaginary* is structured into four main chapters, of different lengths. The introduction (pp. 7–19) presents the author's motivation for choosing the mirror (*speculum*) as the stylistic device employed in expressing ideas.

Following the "path within the mirror" we get to the first chapter of the paper (pp. 21–76), where we notice some reference points related to the modern theories on the medieval imaginary. It is a sizable chapter both in terms of its length—it consists of four subchapters—and in terms of the information contained.

The second chapter (pp. 77–97) is shorter than the previous one; some elements for a new reading of the medieval imaginary are presented here. If the titles of the first chapter contained the noun *speculum* (mirror), in a simple form, the second chapter takes up the metaphor in the title, under the form of *speculum speculorum*. Laura Mesina asserts that *speculum speculorum*—the image reflected by one mirror into another mirror—emphasizes here the distance between the interpretation constructed in connection to the imaginary and the known theories.

The third chapter (pp. 99–186) is the vastest from the viewpoint of the structure, containing eight subchapters. This chapter marks the passage from the general framework of the medieval imaginary towards the particular, concrete one about the medieval imaginary in the Romanian Principalities. There's a selection of texts reflecting the Romanian medieval imaginary, beginning with the paradoxes of the establishment of the Romanian medieval states, continuing with the imaginary surrounding the prince, either founder of the state or crusader, the one who will eventually get from the throne to the "codes of vassalage." At the same time, the texts also

reflect the imaginary of medieval everyday life, from daily domestic existence to the grave, as a chronotopic imaginary. We see this chapter as having a double role: first of all, an invitation to reflect, to “mirror” the Romanian medieval imaginary through an objective selection of the texts that capture the historical evolution of the region; on the other hand, the conglomerate of texts certainly constitute a historiography of the topic.

The fourth and last chapter (pp. 187–199) has the most appealing title: “The Hall of Mirrors: The Way out of Medievalism and the Paradoxes of the Imaginary.” From the reader’s perspective, we notice a pleasant contradiction between the low number of pages and the complexity of the ideas submitted for analysis. In fact, the analysis in the last chapter includes all the “mirrors” used by the author in the other chapters—*speculum*, *speculum speculorum*, *speculum mundi*, to the final “hall of mirrors.”

Laura Mesina’s book approaches once again the imaginary under a historical philosophical aspect—the medieval one. The working method that she proposes in the book—the reflection on texts with the help of the “mirror”—offers at the same time a new perspective on the Romanian medieval imaginary. Therefore, the work opens up various horizons of research not only for historians, but also for philologists, philosophers, and generally for all those interested in the mirage of the imaginary.



ROBERT-MARIUS MIHALACHE

DIANA MARIA DĂIAN

Activitatea misionară ofensivă a ordinelor catolice în Transilvania secolului al XVII-lea în contextul Reconquistei catolice post-tridentine: Perspective asupra ordinului franciscan în Principatul calvin (1604–1690)

(The missionary offensive of the Catholic orders in seventeenth-century Transylvania in the context of the post-Tridentine Catholic Reconquista: Perspectives on the Franciscan order in the Calvinist Principality, 1604–1690)
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ALTHOUGH THE Catholic orders were banished from Transylvania (more or less violently) in the third quarter of the 16th century and they were officially not allowed to return until the end of the next century, these orders, especially two of them, the Jesuit and the Franciscan order, were present in the principality and had an impressive activity.

The Jesuits arrived in Transylvania in 1579, responding to the call of Stephen Báthory, king of Poland and prince of Transylvania. The same year they opened their school at Cluj-Mănăstur (Kolozs-Monostor), which, two years later, was moved to the city of Cluj (Klausenburg, Kolozs-vár) and became the first university of the country (many claim that the school never reached university level). Although the Jesuit activity was interrupted several times (even violently), they continued their missionary activity throughout the 17th century. The Jesuit activity in Transylvania is well known, as has been the center of attention for several prestigious scholars: Ioan-Aurel Pop, Paul Shore or Júlia Varga.