HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE ORIGIN OF AUTONOMY IN THE ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONING OF LOCAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

A comprehensive approach regarding autonomy in the organization and functioning of local public administration requires investigating its genesis. From such a direction, in this article we intend to analyze from a historical perspective different ways of organization and functioning of local public administration in order to understand and to mark the beginning of autonomy. Research local administration emblematic models encountered on the scene of the Greek history, of the Italian one, but also for the Roman Dacia province reveals desire for autonomy manifested over time in various stages of development of society. Distant history gives us real evidence about the trend towards local autonomy of communities analyzed, they aimed at defending and strengthening it in the administration process.

Keywords:
local autonomy, local public administration, origin, Greek city, Italian state, Roman Dacia.

JEL classification: H83.

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I. INTRODUCTION

With the support of accounts in the society history, the literature states that, in fact, the origins of local administration are lost somewhere in the distant history. The formation process of local administrative bodies is as old as the formation process of states, sometimes even older than this, because the first communities were those that grouped people organized in communes, villages, small settlements that had full autonomy. Local communities are human communities distinct from the state, condition without which administrative autonomy not being possible.

Relevant to our approach it appears the observation of A. Teodorescu, quoted by C. Oprean, that local autonomy, historically, preceded the emergence of the state, it remaining as socio-psychological and economic reality even in the most totalitarian regimes. Likewise, the literature supports that the right of local communities to manage their own problems is, chronologically, earlier to the state, the emergence of local administrative life preceding the emergence of central administrative life.

Trying to explain the origin of local autonomy, G. Bobocea says that it "appeared in history as a problem of the relations between the general interests of the state and the interests of different territorial communities or collectivities within it; the content of this problem has always been the recognition by the central authority and the enshrining in law of some rights and freedoms for local authorities to decide on matters of interest for the administrative-territorial units." From such a direction, the purpose of this article aims to investigate from a historical perspective of some exposed cases and events in historical narratives to mark the origins of autonomy in the organization and functioning of local public administration. In this respect, they will prove to be emblematic for highlighting the beginnings of local autonomy in the local administration process the case of Greek cities, of the Italian states and of the Roman Dacia province situation.
II. THE ORIGINS OF AUTONOMY FOR GREEK CITIES

Demonstrative for our approach is the case of Greek cities (polis-es), which transmitted to posterity thought patterns and political organization, some of them keeping actuality until today. Original creation of the Greeks, the polis is considered a unique form of organization in the world of antiquity. A polis is a territorial unit, with the city, the lands and the surrounding villages, but primarily it is a "community" - of origin, of interests, of traditions, of religious beliefs. In all the Greek World there were over 200 of such small states - autonomous, sovereign and independent communities.

The polis is characterized by the internal and external independence (autonomy and eleutherius), economic self-sufficiency (autarky) and local cultures (political and religious community). Being entirely independent, city admits no relation of subordination to another state. To save their precious autonomy, several cities, led by Athens and Sparta, rejected the barbarian invasions. This fundamental characteristic of ancient Greece was the one that prevented the Greek states to unite in a sustainable way in a federation which would have led to political unity of the whole country. Each city is afraid more than anything to not get subject to another, but it strives to dominate its neighbors: in this way Athens, Sparta will create alliance systems, in which cities called "allies" will be practical subject, but the fundamental desire for autonomy will make these alliances to be always precarious and short-lived.

On the Greek history scene the democratic governance encountered in Athens keep our attention. Administratively, Athenian state territory is divided into 100 territorial constituencies (demes), grouped into 10 tribes. The whole Athens administrative life is organized on the basis of People's Assembly sovereignty (ecclesia), whose members - all male citizens who were over the age of 20 years - directly participated in city government. Under the Assembly it operates the Council of the 500 (bulê), composed of people who were over the age of 30 years, 50 per tribe. The Council meets and controls all administrative functions, dealing with current problems. This government way of the Athenian city-state, attended by citizens, highlights the Athenian democracy, while reflecting also the city autonomy.

The government model met in Athens is emblematic especially if we consider another Greek city - Sparta. Here, all issues of the state were decided on

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People's Assembly (apella), which did not have a truly democratic nature, since people did not actually exercise sovereign power. Assembly members, all citizens over the age of 30 years, there were only consulted, without being able to intervene with proposals. The real Spartan executive power holder was the College of Ephors, which was elected by the Assembly, whose power was so stretched and almost absolute whereas, at the expiry of the one year inning, the ephors had to give a report on the work they perform only to their successors. A third governing body was Elders College (gerusia), whose powers were limited, either because they could not get together than when he was convened by the ephors, or because it couldn’t elect itself its president.\(^{12}\) In this way, we conclude that these three governing bodies of the Spartan city limited each other their powers, a situation that reflects a pseudo-democracy, or more relevant for the approach developed, an apparent autonomy.

So, in light of these historical narratives, we emphasize that in ancient Greece, at the most important polis-es level - Athens and Sparta, there can be seen incipient manifestations of autonomy in the administration process of the cities.

### III. THE BEGINNINGS OF AUTONOMY ON THE ITALIAN HISTORY SCENE

Another example that we consider eloquent to illustrate the beginnings of autonomy can be identified in Italian history. The XV\(^{th}\) and XVI\(^{th}\) centuries marks the period of a "rebirth", in which profound changes in the organization of the state take place. Italy is presented as "micro-states system, in which each retain a full freedom of action. The main focus of the biggest composing political-administrative entities was that none of them will not become so strong that threaten the freedom of action and the independence of the others\(^{13}\). Thus, we cannot fail to notice here the will and trend of autonomy of the Italy states.

On the stage of Italian history our attention is kept on Venetian Republic. The strongest state of the in Italy, Venice has created itself the most efficient and original organization. Unlike most medieval towns, in which the supreme authority of government was the bishop, in Venice, clergy, entirely, had a subordinate position in relation to the doge. [...] Also, unlike other states which accepted the "downward" theory (the full legitimate power was entrusted by God to the pope and the emperor, who conveyed it then to those under their authority), Venice had opted for the "upward" theory: all powers, including the competence and the right to legislate, belong to the community which, then, entrusts to some representatives (of the community) chosen by it, and to which

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\(^{12}\) Idem, pp. 575-576

they remained accountable.\textsuperscript{14} Such a theory highlights the freedom, autonomy had by the Venetian community, which allowed it to designate its own representatives in the local government process.

Moreover, in terms of state organization, Italy Republic can be described as a Stato delle autonomia\textsuperscript{15}. Besides, even the Basic Law provides that the Republic recognizes and promotes local autonomy\textsuperscript{16}.

IV. THE GENESIS OF AUTONOMY IN THE ROMAN DACIA PROVINCE

We can talk about the beginnings of autonomy and with reference to the case of the Roman Dacia province. Historians say that the Roman Empire appeared like a huge conglomeration of city-states, free or autonomous\textsuperscript{17}. In general, the cities have had, from their foundation, a certain autonomy, which they attempted to keep intact.\textsuperscript{18}

After the conquest of Dacia by the Romans, in 106, its territory becomes the property of the Roman state, being subjected to a administrative organization process. In the Dacia province one can identify two categories of administrative-territorial units: towns and rural settlements.

Cities were the most important type of human settlement in the province [...] They had a broad autonomy, having their own administrative bodies responsible for solving local problems. The supreme leadership forum within the cities was the counsel city (ordo decurionum), collegial body with administrative preponderant tasks. [...] Many cities had a number of dependent territories of them, in terms of administrative point of view. With this status are known forums (fora) and conciliabules (conciliabula), a kind of fairs equipped with their own magistrates, elected by the people. The most important units were apparently the lands (territoria). Some of them had some autonomy, having a counsel (ordo curialium), composed of representatives of the villages in the land. At the top of the counsel there was a leader elected for a period of five years that could be, at the same time, the leader of one of the villages in the land.\textsuperscript{19}

Rural settlements are attested throughout the Roman Dacia territory, being of pagis (pagus) and vices (vicus) types. Scarcity of epigraphic documents

\textsuperscript{14} Idem, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{16} According to the art. 5 of the Constitution of Italy Republic.
\textsuperscript{17} Drăgan, J. C. (1986). Mileniul Imperial al Daciei, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, p. 75.
\textsuperscript{18} Idem, p. 71.
and their incomplete character offers little information about the organization and management of rural settlements of the province. The analogies with the organization way of rural settlements in the other provinces of the Empire still provides some clues. Thus, it is considered that in the administration of villages in Dacia the principle of collegiality and eligibility was not applied, but they made use of the appointment of a single person (principes), in charge with the administration of the commune or of that territorium that he headed.\textsuperscript{20} It seems that this princes had a special situation in Dacia, being the leader of a locus, that is an autonomous rural settlement.\textsuperscript{21}

The history narrates that, by withdrawing the military and the imperial administration, Dacia gets full autonomy, but within the empire, not outside of it. Dacia autonomy is equivalent to the possibility of local forces to act more operative to defend its borders.\textsuperscript{22}

Given as support these data related by historians, we note that the administrative organization in Roman Dacia proves rudimentary manifestation of autonomy in functioning of local public administration.

\textbf{V. CONCLUSIONS}

In the light of the assumptions exposed in the rows of this paper, we conclude that the origins of local autonomy can be identified in the distant history. Historical accounts show that, in different stages of development of society, there were various manifestations in the organization and functioning of local public administration that highlight the trend and the aspiration towards local autonomy. On the Greek history stage one can notice incipient forms of manifestation of autonomy in the administration process of the cities. Then, Italian history evidentiates the freedom of action and the independence in the local government process. Also, the Roman Dacia province had, since its inception, a certain autonomy. These three cases from the history of the society proved emblematic of our approach, in that each and all together give clear guidelines about the genesis of local autonomy in administrative life from ancient times.


\textsuperscript{21} Guță, M., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 24-25.

\textsuperscript{22} Drăgan, J.C., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 197-198.
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