

IN REMEMBRANCE OF HOLY AND MARTYR PRINCE CONSTANTIN BASARAB BRÂNCOVEANU – A COMMEMORATION OF 310 YEARS SINCE HIS DEATH

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Abstract: *Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, a member of the Cantacuzino family, was raised and educated by it. He found himself in this situation as orphan of father since infancy. In his youth, up to the age of 20, he already knew the Greek, Latin and Slavonic languages well. He read a lot. He was in charge of printing the monumental Bible in Romanian, a work requested and patronized by his uncle, prince Șerban Cantacuzino. After he himself became ruler of Valachia (October 28, 1688) he was concerned with the fertilization and population of the Bărăganu Plain, with the construction of cities, where he left great monuments (Craiova, Bucharest, Făgăraș), monumental palaces, representative of the relationship between man and nature (Mogoșoaia, Potlogi, Obilesti). He also built the largest Orthodox monasteries in Wallachia (Hurezi, Sâmbăta, Sf. Gheorghe Nou), and developed the Princely Academy (Academia Domnească) bringing it to the level of a "Faculty of Arts" in the universities of Western Europe. He also developed a royal chancellery with connections in Europe, Central Asia and North Africa, etc. In time, he amassed a huge fortune, which made Sultan Ahmet III (1703-1730) and the Grand Vizier Ali Pașa want to take his money. His assassination, together with his four sons and his relative the boyar I. Văcărescu, led to the creation of the image of a martyr for the Romanian people and their faith. The Library of the Romanian Academy preserves several Romanian manuscripts containing verses and songs of anonymous bards, who took over and spread over time through folklore the legend of the martyrdom of the Voyvode and his sons.*

Key words: Constantin Brancoveanu, culture, architecture, the Royal Academy, students, martyrdom.

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This year, on the 15th of August 2024, is the commemoration of 310 years since the spectacular, but infinitely villainous assassination of Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu (1688-1714) together with his four sons Constantin, Ștefan, Radu, Matei, and the faithful grand boyar Ianache Văcărescu.

Unfortunately, the authorities have done very little to commemorate the great ruler and his deeds. Due to the efforts of Professor Gheorghe Anghelescu, backed by the Romanian Orthodox Church, there have been organised commemoration conferences to highlight the life and deeds of the great prince. I have participated in these actions: on July 9, 2024, at the Faculty of Theology of the "Ovidius"

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University in Constanța and on August 16, 2024, in the Sâmbăta de Sus Monastery Complex under the patronage of His Holiness Metropolitan Laurențiu Streza.

We are addressing a remarkable personality, living on the cusp of the 17th and 18th centuries, who occupied the throne of Wallachia between 1688 and 1714, but also had influence over the other Romanian principalities. He knew how to capitalise upon the geographic position of his state, although this was the place of meeting and clashing of interests of three large empires: the Sublime Porte, the Habsburg Empire, and the Tsarist Empire. At the same time, here was also where the main cultural currents were intertwined, the currents that dominated the West, those of the post-Byzantine world, and the “laleli” ones of the Sublime Porte. Also here, there was an attempt for the ingress of Catholic religious ideas, in opposition with those of the Reformed, all searching to draw the Orthodox to their side. The grounds for such a successful attempt to this latter end was Transylvania, where the Unitarian Church was to be founded, which was united with Rome, under controversial former Orthodox cleric Athanase Anghel, who had deceived Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu.

In such difficult conditions the ruler of Wallachia, master of the political arts, using the principle of political balance introduced in southeastern Europe by his uncle Șerban Cantacuzino (1678-1688), also the money diplomacy towards the corrupted Ottoman dignitaries, educated and initially aided by his uncles from the powerful Cantacuzino family, knew how to keep the throne for 26 years.

Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu was born on the 15th of August 1654, in the family palace near the Brâncoveni monastic complex. Previously, in the neighbouring boyar houses, there was also born his uncle, ruler of Wallachia, Matei Basarab (1632-1654)¹. Therefore, a family tradition was respected. Since being a child, Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu had a family with a dramatic fate. On February 5, 1655, in Bucharest, in the Brâncoveanu Palace at the foot of the hill on which there rises the Metropolitan Church, that became the Patriarchal Church, Constantin father, grand boyar Papa Brâncoveanu himself was killed by the *seymen*², Constantin the youngest of his family being almost one year old. A piece of information from a letter by Prince George Rákóczi II to his mother, Suzana Lovantffy, from March 12, 1655, written in Cluj, reveals to us the great peril which little Constantin had escaped that day. In the epistle, Prince George Rákóczi II wrote that during the *seymen* uprising of 1654-1655, grand boyar Preda (Brâncoveanu, the paternal grandfather of Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu) and other boyars had saved their lives by paying significant amounts of money. At the same time, being

¹ For the history and analysis of the Brâncoveni court, Olt, see Virgil Drăghiceanu, *Curțile domnești Brâncovenești: IV. Curți și conace fărâmate (1. Conacele: Obilești, Schiei, Pitești, etc., - 2. Curțile: Caracal, București. - 3. Curtea și Mănăstirea Brâncoveni)*, in B.C.M.I. Anul IV, 1911, p. 53 and following.

² Acc. Virgil Drăghiceanu, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

in Bucharest, Papa Brâncoveanu, son of Preda, was killed by the *seymen*. Only Constantin managed to be saved, a child of Papa, because the servants of the boyar gave to the *seymen*, in his stead, the child of a gypsy, that was killed by sword³. Thus, he remained fatherless at the age of less than one, and miraculously survived. Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, that had actually lost both of his grandfathers in similarly violent conditions⁴, was raised by his mother Stanca, daughter of Lady Elina/Ilina Cantacuzino, in her turn one of the daughters of Prince Radu Șerban. The maternal grandfather of Constantin Brâncoveanu was grand chamberlain (*postelnic*) Constantin Cantacuzino. The uncles of Constantin Brâncoveanu – brothers of his mother – were future Prince Șerban Cantacuzino (1678-1688), seneschal (*stolnic*) Constantin Cantacuzino, *spătar* Mihai Cantacuzino, to mention only the most prominent amongst them. In this given situation, Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu was to say, on many occasions, that “*I remember no father and as father I knew him, stolnic Constantin Cantacuzino*”. Under the guidance of the most important boyar family of the times, in Wallachia and elsewhere, little Constantin learned well the Greek, Turkish, and Latin languages, as well as the conduct of a grand boyar, which he was. Towards 1674, he married Maria/Marica, daughter of grand chancellor Neagoe and granddaughter on the son’s side of ruler Antonie Vodă from Popești (1669-1672). From this marriage there were to result four boys and seven daughters. Constantin Brâncoveanu had two other brothers, Barbu and Matei Brâncoveanu, but they had died young, before him⁵. Also, before his marriage,

³ “*The voivode of Wallachia is in his place, but there has been tremendous bloodshed; the seymen soldiers did not take pity even of the lady boyars that were with child, nor of the innocent children, have killed countless boyars; poor lords Sava and Preda have bought their lives with much money; they killed his son; he was left with a nephew by his son; in his stead the servants gave a gypsy child, thus they saved his life; ...many boyars fled from here*” (acc. A. Veress, *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării-Românești*, vol. X, acte și scrisori, Imprimeria Națională, București, 1938, p. 287).

⁴ Preda Brâncoveanu, the grandfather on the father’s side, was killed at the order of Prince Mihnea the Wrongdoer “in the princely houses in Târgoviște, being guilty of nothing” (tombstone in Brâncoveni, Olt, where Preda Brâncoveanu was reburied in 1668 alongside his son, Papa Brâncoveanuș the text of it was published by V. Drăghiceanu, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70). Also the maternal grandfather, grand chamberlain Constantin Cantacuzino was strangled in the trapeze of the Snagov Monastery on December 23, 1663 following the actions of Stroe Leurdeanu (acc. Radu Ștefan Ciobanu (=Vergatti), *Pe urmele stolnicului Constantin Cantacuzino*, București, 1982, pp. 78-79).

⁵ For the close or distant relatives of Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, see Ilie Chiriță, *Originea Brâncovenilor*, in *Arhivele Olteniei*, XIII, 1934, no. 74-76, pp. 343-346; idem, *Boierii Brâncoveni*, in *Arhivele Olteniei*, XII, 1933, no. 69-70, pp. 370-374; idem, *Boierii Brâncoveni*, in *Arhivele Olteniei*, XIII, 1934, no. 74-76, pp. 49-57; idem, *Boierii Brâncoveni*, in *Arhivele Olteniei*, XIV, 1935, no. 77-78, pp. 46-59; idem, Preda Brâncoveanu, in *Arhivele Olteniei*, XI, 1932, no. 59-60, pp. 37-46; idem, Papa postelnicul Brâncoveanu, in *Arhivele Olteniei*, no. 61-62, pp. 176-190; idem, Urmașii lui Brâncoveanu vodă, in *Arhivele Olteniei*, no. 63-64, pp. 303-318; idem, Ultimii boieri Brâncoveni, in *Arhivele Olteniei*, no. XII, 1933, no. 65-66, pp. 53-64;

Constantin already had an immense fortune, but subsequently his estates, along with those received as dowry by his wife, went along the line of fulfilment of the great estate of the Craiovești family.

Naturally for us today, but apparently unexpected at that time, the one set to head the Cantacuzino family got to be Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu. Thus, in the reigns previous to that of his uncle Șerban Cantacuzino, as boyar, Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu escalated the ranks – *cocon* (gentleman), *paharnic* (cup-bearer), *vtori postelnic* (chamberlain second-in-command), *vtori logofăt* (chancellor second-in-command), *biv logofăt* (former chancellor), then after the ascent of Șerban Canacuzino to the throne he became *aga*, *ispravnik* of Bucharest, grand chamberlain, envoy of the ruler to Babadag and Constantinople, grand *spățar*, grand chancellor and once more *ispravnik* of Bucharest⁶. Among others, he also became *ispravnik* (responsible) for the printing of the Bible of Șerban Vodă (1688)⁷. He was also successfully employed in diplomacy⁸.

Two days after the death of Prince Șerban Cantacuzino, which occurred on October 26, 1688, the brothers Cantacuzino imposed on the throne of Bucharest,

idem, Grigorie Brâncoveanu, in Arhivele Olteniei, no. 67-68, pp. 195-205; idem, Boierii Brâncoveni (supplements) in Arhivele Olteniei, XV, 1936, no. 86-88, pp. 353-358 and XVI, 1937, no. 89-91, pp. 69-76 and no. 92-94, pp. 290-305; Dan Berindei, Urmașii lui Constantin Brâncoveanu și locul lor în societatea românească, Genealogie și istorie, in (eds.) Paul Cernovodeanu, Florin Constantiniu, Constantin Brâncoveanu, Ed. Academiei, București, 1989, pp. 275-285; Ștefan S. Gorovei, Mihai Sorin Rădulescu, Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, Strămoșii, înrudirile și calea spre tron, in Ion Pătroi, Dinică Ciobotea, Dorin Teodorescu (eds.), Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, Ed. Universitară, Craiova, 2004, pp. 17-30.

⁶ For the functions of Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, see Nicolae Stoicescu, *Dicționar al marilor dregători din Țara Românească și Moldova, secolele XIV-XVII*, Ed. Enciclopedică, București, 1971, p. 126.

⁷ On November 10, 1688, when the new prince, Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, was on the throne in Bucharest, former ispravnik for the print of the Bible during the reign of his uncle, Șerban Cantacuzino, it was written on the fly-leaf that the Bible was also due to the new ruler, that had also paid for the rest of the expenses: „The Bible, meaning the Godly Scripture of the old and the new laws all translated from the Greek language for the understanding of the Romanian tongue under the order of the Most good Christian and enlightened Prince Ioan Șarban Catacozino Basarab Voevod and with the exhortation of he, Costandin Brâncoveanu grand chancellor, nephew by sister of his highness That after the glorification of the aforementioned ruler, Mighty God after the choice of the entire Wallachia, He has crowned with the reign and rule of the entire country of Wallachia. And in the days of his highness this godly thing has been done. That the whole expense he made. Printed first at the chair of the Metropolitan of Bucharest, during the rearing of his Most Holy father Kyr Theodosie the Metropolitan of the land and exarch, And for its communal good, given to the Romanian people. In the year since the making of the world, 7197, and from the rescue of the world, 1688. In the month of November day 10.” (Biblia adecă Dumnezeiasca Scriptură, 1688, ed. retipărită, București, 1997, p. XXIX and following).

⁸ Panait I. Panait, Ștefan Ionescu, *Constantin vodă Brâncoveanu. Viața. Domnia. Epoca*, Editura Științifică, București, 1969, p. 48 and following., 138 and following.

apparently surprisingly, their nephew Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, to the detriment of other nephew - their brother's son Gheorghe, who was not yet of age. As opposed to any other possible pretender to the throne, Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu was in no way a green youth. On the contrary, he was the right man at the right time – he was a pleasant good looking 34 years old, he was of princely blood, had been raised by the Cantacuzino family, he was one of them, he was well educated, he proved himself capable in his occupied positions, he was serious, he had a family and, especially, he seemed to be very obedient to his maternal uncles – who considered themselves to be the true rulers of the country. The ascent to the throne of Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu was accomplished by blending the imperial Byzantine ceremony that was inherited in the Romanian Principalities and the old principles of *jus valahicum*. According to these, apart from being of princely blood (*os domnesc* – which came from both the father's and the mother's side), in his right mind and body, the chosen for the throne also had to be proposed and accepted by those that he was to rule over. To these conditions, there was also added the necessity of confirmation by the Sublime Porte. The new ruler had the voyvodal kaftan set on his shoulders, gifted by the sultan to his uncle, the former prince, and then he was taken with great pomp to the Metropolitan, where apparently full of wonder at having been the chosen one, he accepted the assignment and took the oath before the boyars that formed the country council, the clergy, the baseborn⁹.

Very quickly after the ruler occupied the throne of Wallachia, he proved his qualities, but also showed that he was gradually removing himself from the tutelage of his uncles¹⁰. Among his first measures were those of change, at least in appearance, of the foreign policy carried until then by Șerban Cantacuzino (of unreserved and indiscrete inclination towards the Habsburg Empire). Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, right in his first year of reign, led a military action against the son-in-law of Șerban Cantacuzino, *aga* Constantin Bălăceanu. The latter was supported by the Habsburgs, through the army commanded by General Donat Heissler. In the fight of Zărnești (August 11, 1690), with the aid of

⁹ On November 13, 1688, Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, the new ruler, wrote to the abbot of Brâncoveni Monastery, Anaia, portraying the conditions in which he had occupied the throne “*We ascended to prince, and this my rule I would not have wanted, since your holiness knows that I wanted of nothing, but was a ruler in my house...and for some foreign princes to rule the country and the poor to upset mercilessly and to devastate the country, against them I took the burden of this reign*” (published by Ștefan D. Greceanu, *Genealogiile documentate ale familiilor boierești*, București, 1916, fasc. XX, p. 123).

¹⁰ For a quasi-unknown portrait of Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, made in 1694 in the Târnăvița Church, Radovan, Dolj County, where he contours already a dynasty distinct from the Cantacuzino, being depicted together with his eldest son, bearing the title of “voivode” in the portrait, see Dinică Ciobotea, *Ctitoria brâncovenească de la Târnăvița* (Comuna Radovan, Județul Dolj), in (eds.) R. Șt. Vergatti, C. N. Vergatti, *Unchiul și nepotul: Matei Basarab și Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu*, collection of articles, Ed. Science Press, Baia Mare, 2014, p. 310 and following.

Prince Imre Thököly and of the Tartars, Brâncoveanu gained a terrible defeat against the Austrians and killed *aga* Constantin Bălăceanu. Thus, he consolidated his power and prestige¹¹.

Right after Zărnești, Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu moved on to the formation of a military fleet on the Danube. It was a necessity for the eradication of piracy practiced by the Turks and the Greeks. Of course, this fleet had to be part of the sultan's "little fleet", which had its command in Belgrade. Brâncoveanu built the first vessels in 1691 in Calafat¹². It is an indication of the Turkish documents that corrects the previous data used by C. Rezachevici, who wrote that the fleet would have been made in 1697 at Giurgiu¹³. The vessels built in Calafat were small, of the caique type, which had eight oarsmen and a captain. They were mainly used to track piracy practices. Two large ships, sheikhs, were also built, also in Calafat, which had a crew of 52 people - oarsmen, sailors trained for fighting and mooring pirate ships, a cannon, two gunners, a commander and helmsmen. All this is mentioned in the Turkish documents of the Grand Viziers Archive (BOA) in Istanbul. This autonomous fleet determined the imposition of traffic safety on the Danube for all commercial vessels. It brought a financial boost for Wallachia and for the Sublime Porte also.

Because Brâncoveanu had immense pecuniary obligations to Constantinople – amongst others he had to supply even more grains – he started to fertilise the Bărăgan Plains. The demand for grains of the Ottoman Empire was thusly largely satisfied. In fact, the fertilisation of a large part of the Romanian Plains had begun during the rule of Matei Basarab by the brothers Udriște and Cazan Năsturel, who had built on the shore of Lake Greaca a resplendent Renaissance manor connected to their immense Bărăgan estate. Brâncoveanu's actions to this end were not without hardship, since he found himself to be in a period of micro-glaciation¹⁴.

The permanent ally of the ruler of Wallachia was, as was natural, the Orthodox Church, the Metropolitan of Wallachia and, sometimes, the Eastern patriarchates. To all he gave great gifts. Naturally, the prince took action, by repairing the places of worship that were in need, erecting and consecrating new ones. Here there can

¹¹ See C. Rezachevici, *Constantin Brâncoveanu, Zărnești 1690*, București, 1989, *passim*; Paul Cernovodeanu, *În vâltoarea primejdiilor. Politica externă și diplomația promovate de Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714)*, București, 1997, pp. 13-14.

¹² See document of I Receb 1104 / 08.03.1693, which declares that the boats (șăicile) were built in Wallachia by Brâncoveanu craftsmen in Calafat, in 1106 Anno Hegira (=1691-1692 A.D.) (acc. Mihai Maxim, *Constantin Brâncoveanu și otomanii la Dunărea inferioară (alte documente otomane inedite, 1693, 1695, 1703)*, in „Acta Moldaviae Septentrionalis”, Revista Muzeului Județean Botoșani, XVI, 2017 (published posthumously), p. 150-156).

¹³ See C. Rezachevici, *Elemente noi în oastea lui Constantin Brâncoveanu*, în vol. *Constantin Brâncoveanu*, ed. cit., 1989, p. 107-109.

¹⁴ Radu Ștefan Vergatti, *Câmpia română în concepția de cârmuire a lui Constantin Brâncoveanu*, in Ialomița, Revistă a Muzeului de Istorie și Etnografie a Județului Ialomița, II/1979, pp. 439-449.

be recalled two significant examples: the Hurezi Monastery, that with its five churches is the largest Orthodox monastery on Romanian lands, and the Church of New "Saint George" Monastery in Bucharest, built with the aid of architect Veseleil, the last great personal foundation of Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, that through it dominated the city.

In relation to the church, Brâncoveanu made great innovations in ecclesiastical mural painting, using his court painters Constantinos and Pârvu Mutu Zugravul. During his time in the votive painting, the founder, who was represented alone or at most with his limited family, was replaced by his entire kinship - the Cantacuzinos and the Brâncoveanus. This can be seen in the paintings from Filipești, from Hurezi, from Sinaia, etc. The existence of the whole kinship, over several generations, shows that a potential sinner had to face an entire family, not just the church founder. Finally, in the „Great church” of the Hurezi Monastery, Brâncoveanu is represented twice. In the first mural painting he is posed as a child, with the princely's crown held above his head by his mother. Here he shows himself to be a follower of faith in the foreknowledge of God. He was destined from birth to become the prince.

This idea of foreknowledge of God is also shown in a book written by Ion Cariofil, Sevastos Kimminites and Constantin Cantacuzino, printed by Antim Ivireanul. Patriarch Dosithea Nottaras was quite angry with this book and wrote a reprimand to the three in which he stated that the (Divine) laws were not made in the mountains of Valachia, but at synods in Constantinople by patriarchs and high hierarchs.

As builder of new places of worship, or restorer of many others, or in his quality of donor of money, goods, holy objects etc., in the country and abroad, Brâncoveanu could be considered as the most important church founder of middle ages in Valachia¹⁵.

Brâncoveanu also developed the cities, in which he created or reorganised large commercial centres. An illustrative example is that of the city of Craiova: there, he built the large inn of the Hurezi Monastery, a remarkable place for commerce, storage, transit, and sale of goods. Preoccupied by the development of the cities, he attracted new settlers for the urban areas: artisans, merchants. He proceeded to systemise the street network of the cities. Therefore, in Bucharest he traced the Mogoșoaia Bridge (Street), forming the South-North axis, the future Victoria Avenue. He did not shy away from demolishing the houses of grand boyars

¹⁵ From an immense bibliography regarding the donations and endowments given by the ruler to the church, see Panait I. Panait, Șt. Ionescu, *Op. cit.*, p. 383 and following; Iolanda Țighiliu, *Domeniul lui Constantin Brâncoveanu*, in *Constantin Brâncoveanu...*, ed. cit. (1989), pp. 74-94 (see especially the Table at pp. 86-93); Dinică Ciobotea, Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, *Aspecte privind viața economică a Țării Românești în epoca lui Constantin Brâncoveanu*, in *Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu...* ed. cit., pp. 58-107.

for his urban plans, for example the palace of his late uncle Șerban Cantacuzino. The new access way that connected the Princely Court to that which was to become the Mogoșoaia Palace, the Mogoșoaia Bridge (Street), he provided with paving: the “bridging”¹⁶ with wooden beams with grooving called *savac*¹⁷, through which the residual waters were drained and then everything poured into the Dâmbovița River, but such were the times. In the same period, the city started to have public illumination, with lanterns, therefore the role of the *masalagii* (torch-igniters) diminished. The cafes also got more frequent – places for people to debate, simultaneously, their daily life problems – that had appeared in the city earlier on¹⁸.

Brâncoveanu built royal palaces in his centre of power, Bucharest, but also at the outskirts of cities or on his estates, inherited or bought. Brâncoveanu proved himself to be a refined commanditaire, that created veritable “houses for enjoyment”, with loggias – his creation, on beautiful waterlines and broad green meadows. Thus, his residences – palaces, manors, were places of respite, but also of protection, of defence outside the city limits from any attacks, whether from the dissatisfied boyars, or the poor, or the Turks, or the Austrians. Here there can be named Mogoșoaia, Potlogi – two wonderful palaces along the road that connected Bucharest and Târgoviște, Obilești (disappeared), Doicești, the remaking of the Sâmbăta Palace, the remaking of the Brâncoveni (Olt) Palace etc. All these royal houses / palaces were built while keeping in mind the principle of connection to water and nature, in the sense of plains or forests in the vicinity of the building¹⁹.

The ruler realised the importance of literacy for the evolution of the society in which he lived. Therefore, he decided to develop the Princely Academy founded in Bucharest by his uncle, Prince Șerban Cantacuzino. We know this because on August 28, 1683, a pupil (*spudeu*) of this Princely Academy called Mihail wrote

¹⁶ „The streets seem to be an uninterrupted bridge being paved from one edge to the other with massive boards, ten yards long, and wide of the same number of digits, and this work, as costly as it may seem was taken further between all the buildings of the city, on a length of several miles, counting them together” (account by Edmund Chishull in *Călători străini despre țările române*, vol. VIII, curated by Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca-Bulgaru, P. Cernovodeanu, București, 1983, p. 199).

¹⁷ For more description of the “bridge”, of the *savac*, of the traces discovered by archaeologists of the Palace of Șerban Cantacuzino, demolished at Brâncoveanu’s orders, see R. Șt. Vergatti (Ciobanu), *Pe urmele stolnicului....*, ed. cit., pp. 140-145; in the mentioned pages there can also be found descriptions of the archaeological traces of the palace built by Șerban Cantacuzino.

¹⁸ The first written mention of a café in Bucharest is from 1667, that was called “cahvenea” and belonged to a Turk, Hamie, former *seymen* of the Sultan (acc. C. C. Giurescu, *Istoria Bucureștilor*, București, 1966, p. 326).

¹⁹ From an extremely rich bibliography we will mention V. Drăghiceanu, *Curțile domnești Brâncovenești: IV. Curți și conace fărămate (1. Conacele: Obilești, Schiei, Pitești, etc., - 2. Curțile: Caracal, București.- 3. Curtea și Mănăstirea Brâncoveni)*, loc.cit.; V. Drăguț, N. Săndulescu, *Arta brâncovenească*, Ed. Meridiane, București, 1971, passim; Ștefan Ionescu, *Epoca brâncovenească*, Ed. Dacia, Cluj, 1981, passim.

down on the margins of the sheets of a miscellaneous manuscript his thanks to professor Sevastos Kiminites, for his help given during the time in which he was deciphering the wonderful “golden verses” of Pythagoras²⁰. The Princely Academy of Bucharest was founded by ruler Șerban Cantacuzino for the education of his children. Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, however, made it so it would rise to the level of a “faculty of arts” from Western Europe. The remarkable merits of Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu regarding the continuation of activity and evolution of the Princely Academy of Bucharest were, among others, bringing, in 1707, among other scholars of the time present in Bucharest, the new Patriarch of Jerusalem, Hrisant Nottaras. With his aid he reformed the curricula of the Princely Academy. What is interesting is that there was a request for delivery in the Romanian language, which meant that not all students originated strictly from the boyar ranks, since teaching in Romanian was essential for the pupils that did not understand Greek. In the boyar houses the youth were educated and also spoke Greek, which was not a practice among the common people. Therefore, the delivery in Romanian also at the Princely Academy in Bucharest suggests that access to these studies had to be assured according to merit as well, and not only birth. The number of students in the Academy, according to Prof Alexandru Helladius, was of around 150-200. Furthermore, at the Princely Academy of Bucharest young foreign people came to study.

In 1707, Tsar Peter I (1682-1725) sent to Bucharest two young men from the Naval Academy in Petrograd. They were to study and spy upon the situation in Wallachia that was a target of attention for the future expansion of the Tsarist Empire. Perhaps the most important section of the Princely Academy was Medicine. This is explainable. Among the most important alumni is, for example, Iacob Pylarino, courtly medic of the ruler, who remained famous for his method of variolation in the fight against Variola. Through doctor Pylarino there also arose the issue of use of drinkable water. He advanced the hypothesis that water could carry diseases if contaminated and not cleaned. This situation led to a more careful control of the water bearers. Another element that made the study of medicine flourish was the establishment of the Colțea Hospital, foundation of *spătar* Mihai Cantacuzino. This was found within the Colțea Monastery, the church of which was founded on December 4, 1704. The new Colțea Hospital was designed after the model of the Franciscan hospital in Venice, *Antico Spedale della Pietà*. Using a new system in the patient-medic relationship, the former was researched, diagnosed, hospitalised, treated, mitigated, or healed and discharged. Thus, the old principle that some sick houses shared, where usually there were no medics, was abandoned. The entire expense necessary for the sick in the hospital was covered by the Colțea Monastery and a “congregation” of benefactors. The hospital had 24 beds, 12 for women and 12 for men. In the hospital foreigners were also treated,

²⁰ The Library of the Romanian Academy, Manuscript section, mss. greek no. 167, f. 38.

but especially people lacking resources. In the hospital there appeared a novelty: the pharmacy. Here there was found, for free, the medicine required by the hospitalised. At the same time, the pupils that were to become medics did, for a period decided by their teachers, their training in the hospital. The alumni received a diploma and became medics. Many of the pupils of the Princely Academy, regardless of their specialty, have been sent by Brâncoveanu on his own expense in foreign university centres, even at Oxford. Many of them entered the service of European crowned heads. Some of them thanked Brâncoveanu, for example through reverential volumes²¹. Although the Colțea Monastery was built in the city centre, close to the Princely Academy within the Saint Sava Monastery, the ruler did not participate in its consecration. This was a sign of public split of the Cantacuzino family from their nephew, Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu. *Spătar* Mihai Cantacuzino complained to Tsar Peter the Great. He, considering himself to be close to the Cantacuzino brothers, harshly reprimanded the ruler in Bucharest. The tone that the Tsar used, who wrote as if he addressed the leader of a gubernia in his Empire, made Brâncoveanu very upset²². The prince broke all relationships with his uncles, *spătar* Mihai Cantacuzino and *stolnic* Constantin Cantacuzino.

The former, the seneschal, from as early as the time of Șerban Cantacuzino, was at the head of the Princely chancellery. This was developed with trained, competent personnel, who knew how to speak and write in all widely-used languages of Europe, according to the rules and diplomatic protocol. The chancellery, at the same time, sent trusted people to the great empires: at Moscow, Gheorghe Castriotul and the brothers Corbea from Brașov, in Constantinople and Babadag, as *kapikâhaya*. boyar Vergo, at Venice good relationships were maintained with the Zecca Bank through grand treasurer Văcărescu etc. However, although the chancellery was of the state, royal, Brâncoveanu considered it, rightfully so, as working for its creator, for seneschal Constantin Cantacuzino. Therefore, this was reason for great upset. The ruler removed his uncle, the seneschal from the head of the chancellery. However, it is without a doubt that

²¹ For the Princely Academy, see R. Șt. Vergatti, *Câteva observații asupra Academiei Domnești Brâncovenești*, in idem, *Brâncovenești. Sfinții martiri Brâncoveni*. Culegere de studii, Ed. Arhiepiscopiei Argeșului și Muscelului, Curtea de Argeș, 2014, pp. 31-94.

²² R. Șt. Vergatti, *Din relațiile domnului Constantin vodă Brâncoveanu cu țarul Petru I cel Mare*, in idem, *Brâncovenești...Culegere de studii*, ed. cit., p. 116 and following; *Istoriceskie sviazi narodov SSSR i Rumânii b XV-naceale XVIII v. Dokumenti i materialî b treh tomah, tom III, 1673-1711 / Relațiile istorice dintre popoarele U.R.S.S. și România în veacurile XV – începutul celui de-al XVIII-lea. Documente și materiale în trei volume*, vol. III, 1673-1711, editing committee: I. S. Grosul, A. C. Oțetea, Ed. Nauka/Știința, Moscova, 1970, p. 262, doc. nr. 87; the answer of Brâncoveanu to Tsar Peter I in G. Ardeleanu (= S. Goldenberg), *Știri privitoare la istoria țărilor române în corespondența împăratului Rusiei Petru I*, in „Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Medie”, I, 1950, nr. 1, p. 213.

through the talents of seneschal Constantin Cantacuzino and the chancellery that he had created there were established, either through mail, or through personal relationships, international connections²³. When needed, encoded language was used. A significant example to this end is the correspondence with the brothers Corbea who were in Moscow. In addition to encoding the writing there was also imperiously necessary to dissimulate the written messages. Since the road on which envoys went towards Moscow, towards Warsaw, towards Cracow went through Baturin that was under nationalist hetman Mazepa, the letters had to be hidden either in the lining of the envoys' hats or in the axle of their carts²⁴. Usually, the mail circulated faster than during our times. Such an example is seneschal Constantin Cantacuzino that wrote to Lord Paget from Bucharest to London, requesting eyeglasses. The mail took one week to return, quickly bringing the boyar in Bucharest his requested eyeglasses²⁵. The reception for English Lord Paget at the Brâncoveanu court in 1702, as told by one of the members of the English delegation (pastor Edmund Chishull), impresses through its description: the plenty of the façades, of the cultural universe of the discussions held in Greek with the ruler's sons²⁶. Here there must be mentioned that the expenses for the voyage of the English embassy to the Danube were supported by the Sublime Porte, and those through Wallachia up to Transylvania – by the Romanian prince²⁷.

An essential factor for the foreign policy of Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu and seneschal Constantin Cantacuzino was their effort to defend the Christian Orthodox in the Sublime Porte. The first step in this direction was to stop the actions of Atanase Anghel. He took advantage of the good will of the ruler and deceived him. He took a large sum of money from him, 6000 *galbeni (ungari d'oro)*, and fled to Transylvania. There, in 1698, he gathered a synod, unaccepted by the local priests. Regardless, he forged the documents and declared the union between the Orthodox church of Transylvania (that was under the Metropolitan of Wallachia) and the Catholic Church²⁸. This rendered the seneschal to name him,

²³ Radu Ștefan Vergatti, *Pe urmele stolnicului Constantin Cantacuzino*, ed. cit., p. 233 and following.

²⁴ Idem, pp. 237-237.

²⁵ Idem, *Ceasul, ochelarii și Evul Mediu*, in the volume of the fourth international symposium „Limbi, culturi și civilizații europene în contact. Perspective istorice și contemporane”, Târgoviște, 2-3 noiembrie 2007, pp. 22-26.

²⁶ R. Șt. Vergatti (Ciobanu), *Pe urmele stolnicului Constantin Cantacuzino...*, ed. cit., pp. 233-266.

²⁷ *Călători străini despre țările române*, vol. VIII, ed. cit., p. 199 and following.

²⁸ R. Șt. Vergatti (Ciobanu), *Pe urmele stolnicului Constantin Cantacuzino...*, ed. cit., pp. 252-253.

constantly, in the documents, “Satanache Anghel”²⁹. The ruler and the seneschal acted as one, continuing to aid the Romanians in Transylvania³⁰.

Since Tsar Peter I, according to his plans, wanted to expand towards Western Europe and had obtained the victory at Poltava in 1709 against king of Sweden Charles XII, the Russians attempted to open their way towards the conquest of Constantinople. The shortest way was through a population that was not opposed to the tsar, in theory, since it was Christian and, especially, Orthodox, that of Moldova and Wallachia. Consequently, the Tsarist diplomacy attempted to draw to their side the ruler of Wallachia. They paid him to supply the necessary food supplies when the Russian army was to reach the Prut River to fight the Sublime Porte. He attracted Brâncoveanu’s governors to Russia’s side. Of course, the attitude of Brâncoveanu was seen as an action of treason against Sultan Ahmed III (1703-1730). The ruler of Moldova, Dimitrie Cantemir (1710-1711) chose to openly join the tsar’s side with his small army and was to immediately take refuge in Russia, thus saving his life. Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu gathered his army and made camp near Urlați, from where he could retreat in safety. He found himself in an impossible situation: he had an obligation to assist or even supply the army of the Sublime Porte and at the same time he promised to feed the tsarist army. Of course, he did not think that the simultaneous obligations were to appear so soon. Additionally, the nephew of the ruler, *spătar* Toma Cantacuzino, had fled to the Russian Empire along with a part of the cavalry. In July 7-11, 1711, during the decisive battle at Stănilești on the River Prut, the tsar with an army of 38.000 people was defeated by the grand vizier, who had 150.000 soldiers. It was a difficult moment for Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu. Toma Cantacuzino and his uncles, seneschal Constantin and *spătar* Mihai, had betrayed the ruler of Wallachia to the tsar³¹. At the same time, Sultan Ahmed III and grand vizier Gin Ali Pasha were accusing him of treason and decided to remove him from the throne. The decision was made for the days of Easter, 1714.

During the Holy Week, on Tuesday, in Bucharest there arrived an envoy of the sultan, *kapucu* Mustafa Aga, who was apparently bound for Moldova. He had an escort of only 12 janissaries with him³². The number varies. Another source, an

²⁹ Letter addressed by *stolnic* Constantin Cantacuzino to David Corbea, July 20, 1704, text written in Latin, copy in Moscow, Central State Archives, Old documents, Fund 68, 1704, no. 4, pp. 88-90.

³⁰ George Popoviciu, *Unirea românilor din Transilvania cu biserica romano-catolică sub Împăratul Leopold I*, Lugoj, 1901, passim; Silviu Dragomir, *Românii din Transilvania și unirea cu biserica Romei*, in SMIM, III, 1959, pp. 323-339; Ștefan Meteș, *Relațiile bisericii românești ortodoxe din Ardeal cu Principatele Române în veacul al XVIII-lea*, Sibiu, 1926, passim; Mircea Păcurariu, *Istoria bisericii ortodoxe române*, vol. II, București, 1981, p. 295 and following.

³¹ R. Șt. Vergatti (Ciobanu), *Pe urmele stolnicului Constantin Cantacuzino...*, ed. cit., pp. 272-275.

³² Șt. Ionescu, Panait I. Panait, *Op. cit.*, p. 280.

anonymous contemporary account, speaks of an escort of 30 janissaries with which he came to the princely court³³. The *kapucu* was an old acquaintance of the prince. He received him and got off the throne to salute him amicably. But the *kapucu*, to everyone's astonishment, threw on his shoulder the black shawl, the sign of deposition, said the fatidic word "*mazil*" and shoved the ruler when he wanted to sit back in his throne. Constantin Brâncoveanu, amazed, went at the window to call upon his guards, but nobody was in the courtyard. Of course, if the royal guard had come, the janissaries would have been crushed. Del Chiaro reports however that the action had been well planned, in secret, and furthermore the doors of the hall had been closed and were guarded by the janissaries, prepared to intervene forcefully³⁴. There must also be said that none of the boyars that participated in the event had the courage to physically defend the prince, although they were all armed. They had been verbally threatened with an invasion of the country, which was prepared. The *imbrohhor* was expecting with a numerous army on the road between Giurgiu and Bucharest.

Therefore, the ruler abided the request of the *kapucu*, being overwhelmed by the act of treason around him. The *kapucu* extracted a document from which he read the accusations of the Sublime Porte against the ruler in Bucharest. Anton Dörner, researcher from Cluj, published an anonymous manuscript in Latin, found in the Library of the Academy in the Cluj subsidiary, representing an account in a diplomatic language of somebody that was possibly in Bucharest at the time, perhaps even in the ruler's entourage. In the document there were written, among other things, the accusations read by the *kapucu*:

- the secret meeting of the prince in Brăila with the envoys of Tsar Peter I.
- the promise of the Romanian ruler to supply food to the Russian troops that came to fight the sultan in 1711.
- the residence of the prince, always changing, which made his surveillance by the Ottomans a difficult endeavour.
- the increased fiscality on the population, which made gathering the tribute harder (although in 1703 the tribut had doubled on the occasion of his appointment as prince of Valahia for life³⁵).

³³ Anton Dörner, *An unpublished manuscript about the relegation of voivode Constantin Brâncoveanu*, in Acta Musei Napocensis, S. Istorie, nr. 38, 2014, p. 40.

³⁴ Anton Maria del Chiaro, *Revoluțiile Valahiei*, translated by S. Cris-Cristian, Iași, 1929, pp. 135-136.

³⁵ See Berât /the edict of life nominalization (kayd-i hayva/hayat) of Constantin Brâncoveanu, as prince of Valachia („Voievod al Țării Românești”/Eflāk Voyvodası) of 15.06 - 24.06.1703 și also of doubling of the cizye (tribute) of Romania - from 141,718 and ½ guruș-u esedî to 262,000 guruș-u esedî or 524 puches of golden coins every Ramadan (see M. Maxim, *Constantin Brâncoveanu și otomanii la Dunărea inferioară (alte documente otomane inedite, 1693, 1695, 1703)*, ed. cit., p. 165. The edict (berat-ul) was granted to Brâncoveanu in June 1703 in Edirne

All these accusations were stated as treason against the sultan.

After Constantin Brâncoveanu and his family were put under guard in their apartments, the envoy of the sultan read from a *firman*, the next day, the name of Ștefan Cantacuzino, son of the seneschal, cousin of the deposed ruler. He was the new ruler named by the sultan. Of course, the account of the episode was made later by Ștefan Cantacuzino to remove all his guilt for Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu being deposed. It seems that when he heard the name of his replacement, Brâncoveanu only said “better you than a stranger”. Brâncoveanu, along with his entire family: his four sons, his wife, his daughters that were in Bucharest (one of them being arrested with her husband at the same time in Constantinople), his sons-in-law that were there, and grand *clucer* Ianache Văcărescu (whose wife, Stanca, was cousin of Lady Marica Brâncoveanu) were taken to Constantinople under guard. His third son, Radu, was to marry the daughter of former ruler of Moldova, Antioh Cantemir. If he had gone towards her, he could have acted to soften the fate of his family. Another son of the prince shared the same idea, Ștefan. But he too was stopped by the ruler in his attempts to act.

The deposed ruler did not obtain neither aid from the Ecumenical Patriarch or from the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu considered himself entitled to their help given the number of gifts he made to the churches, hierarchs, and clergy. But when they arrived in Constantinople, Constantin Brâncoveanu was thrown in prison in the Yedikule Tower, in the so-called “pit of blood”. This was a dungeon chamber without light, without fresh air, where not even a candle could burn. In that place the Romanian prince and his sons were tortured for almost four months. Brâncoveanu could have saved himself if he would have given over his entire wealth to the Turks and had renounced the Christian faith for the Mahomedan one. The proposal of the grand *mufti*, to this end, however serious, was rejected by Brâncoveanu. He understood what it meant to be Christian and not betray the faith. The sultan decided to execute Brâncoveanu, all of his four sons, and Ianache Văcărescu on August 15, 1714, during an important Christian celebration – The Assumption of the Mother of God and, at the same time, the birthday of the ruler. The beheading of the six Romanians was to take place in the garden of the Topkapi Palace. The sultan observed the beheading from his imperial *kayik*, from the sea. To witness this dreadful show, there were also invited foreign diplomats – the envoys of the king of France, of the Kingdom of Netherlands, of the Habsburg Empire, Shapirov, the Russian envoy. The envoy of the Habsburg Empire attempted to obtain the annulment of the sentence, but did not succeed. It is said that the youngest son of Brâncoveanu asked the sultan to spare his life since he was very young, and offered to convert to Islam. Brâncoveanu, if this was indeed the case, reprimanded him and he took back his request. After all six of them were

(Adrianopol), after Brâncoveanu used the principle of political balance and the diplomacy of bribery the ottomans.

executed, their heads were set on pikes and carried on the streets of Constantinople. Their bodies were also displayed “pinned on the large gate of the Seraglio...for all to see. But in the evening they were thrown into the sea” (account by Baron Hochepped). From there, the fishermen fished the bodies, which are said to have been taken to the Monastery of Halki Island due to Patriarch of Jerusalem Hrisant Nottaras (Shapiro’s account). The Monastery of Halki, founded by former grand *dragoman* of the Porte Panaiot Nicoussios, had benefitted from Brâncoveanu’s gifts. The funeral service was held due to Patriarch Hrisant Nottaras. Unfortunately, all searches made on Halki Island, where today there is a Turkish military base, had no results and no other research can be conducted while it has this status. In any case, this was a unique display, of extraordinary cruelty – the execution of a Christian ruler and his entire family at the order of the sultan in front of the crowds and a select public, represented by the envoys of the great powers to Constantinople. Also impressive is the carrying of the heads of the executed on the streets of Constantinople and the exhibition of the bodies on the main gates of the Seraglio, in public. There have been other rulers killed at the order of sultans – such is the case with Petru Cercel, that was thrown into the sea while travelling from Constantinople to Egypt, but, although the accusations against him were strong, his assassination was not turned into a macabre show. The execution of the prince and his sons and the information that they perished because they did not wish to renounce Christianity made a strong impression on the entire Europe.

Several years after the execution of her husband and sons, Lady Marica, after having been freed with her daughters and sons-in-law from Turkish captivity, returned to the country with her nephew Constantin, the sole scion on the masculine line that was left alive. She came with the new ruler of the country, Ioan Mavrocordat (at the end of 1716), that held a favourable view of her. He was put on the throne instead of his brother, Nicolae Mavrocordat, who was a prisoner of the imperial Habsburg army. Ioan Mavrocordat was very close to Lady Marica Brâncoveanu, he had much respect for her.

In 1720, in the month of June, while Nicolae Mavrocordat returned to the throne, Lady Marica Brâncoveanu obtained the approval to bury, in the New “Saint George” Church, the earthly remains of her husband that she was able to recover and bring to the country. They were placed in a tomb dug near that of Prince Ioan Mavrocordat, that died a short time before, from the plague, on February 23, 1719. The tombstone in the New “Saint George” Church in Bucharest, placed then by Lady Marica – not by her alone – has no inscription. It is decorated similarly to that of ruler Ioan Mavrocordat: a frame with rinceaux, having the coat of arms of Wallachia at the upper side and the symbol of death with the scythe at the lower side. Above the slab there was suspended a large silver chandelier, weighing 12 kg and with a height of 50 cm. On the chandelier there was inscribed with 0.9 cm letters the following inscription: „+ *This chandelier, that was given to New Saint George,*

lights the place in which there rest the bones of I, blessed Prince Costandin Brincoveanu Basarab Voivode I and is made by the Lady of his highness Mariia, that also believes in Our Lord, also here to rest her bones. July in the 12th day, year 7228."³⁶. It was said that Lady Marica brought the remains of her husband and one of her sons. While true that the inscription on the chandelier only mentions „*the bones of I, blessed Prince Costandin Brincoveanu Basarab*”, the anthropological analysis has shown that in the tomb there were placed the earthly remains of more people (most probably of the ruler and of one of his sons – maybe the eldest, but it cannot be determined with certainty to whom they belong; additionally, they were mixed with other burials).

The tragic end of Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu has also impressed the international public opinion and the European political environment. His end however impressed most the inhabitants of Wallachia and the Romanians in general, wherever they were found. In the library of the Romanian Academy there have been discovered, at least until now, ten Romanian manuscripts containing verses and folk songs of anonymous bards, that took over and diffused along time, on all territories inhabited by Romanians, the history of the terrible martyrdom of this most cherished ruler and his sons.

In 1934 in Bucharest there was organised an ample commemorative manifestation headed by King Carol II and Patriarch Miron Cristea, that wanted to exalt the deeds of the ruler, “boyar of old and Christian prince”, briefly evoked in these pages.

For his life, for everything he did, for respecting the Christian faith to which he sacrificed himself and his sons, the Prince Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu, his four sons and Ianache Văcărescu were placed among the Romanian saints according to the solemn proclamation of the synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church on June 20, 1992.

³⁶ Virgil Drăghiceanu, *Mormântul lui Constantin Brâncoveanu Basarab Voevod*, in BCMI, Anul VII, Fasc. 27, iulie-septembrie 1914, p. 122.