NOTES FROM MANUSCRIPTS AND OLD BOOKS FROM MOLDAVIA I- IV, CORPUS EDITED BY IOAN CAPROŞU AND ELENA CHIABURU FRAGMENTS OF HISTORY

Maria Mocanu
University „Al. I. Cuza" of Iași
marioaralupu@yahoo.com

Abstract

Most of the books read in the Romanian Countries, contained, alongside with the text itself, hundreds of notes written on the white pages intended for bookbinding at the beginning or at the end, along the sides of the page or, most often, at the end of the text.

The volumes of documents edited by the historians from Iași cover a very long period of time, from March 13, 1429 until the little union of 1859; they provide a rich, heterogeneous and extremely interesting material which acquires a freestanding value and constitutes a distinct literature revealing a fresco of a bygone era.

Keywords:

Manuscripts, old books, history, language, culture.

The multidisciplinary nature of the old notes makes them real sources (unique through their characteristics) for researches in different domains to probe into Romanian history, language and culture. This very large variety of quasi-anonymous chronicles recomposes an image of the mental universe of the Romanian society from ages past.

The notes can be classified depending on the perceived and registered fragment of reality. Sometimes, the object of a record is represented by historical events eye-witnessed (or not) by the owners of the books, thus providing us with information about "history through the small ones" (according to the saying established by N. Iorga). As stated in the preface of

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the volumes of notes, these marginal texts provide precious information about different reigns, about the relations between the Romanian Principalities and the Ottoman Empire; they capture details referring to the military confrontations in the Romanian space, to the foreign occupation regimes or to certain territories of the country which were dominated by the great powers. F. Braudel cuts out several levels of historical time. The first level is the short duration fragmented by the current events, a micro-history. The second level is the time of conjuncture, of the major events, including segments of two-three decades, at most half a century. The long duration, the secular and multi-secular time is an historical time during which movement is very slow, quasi-immobile[1]. The marginal notes register especially the events circumscribed to the short duration and to the time of conjuncture, sometimes making reference to macro-history as well.

Here, we are not interested in the facts themselves, which we can easily find in any volume of Romanian history; our concern lies in following the way in which the "authors" of the notes mark such events of the "great history", the way in which they relate to them, whether they reflect on them in one way or another, as well as, especially, whether and how this type of texts evolves across the texts researched, from the 15th century until the middle of the 19th century.

The note of an historical nature gradually acquires the right to exclusivity: events of a political nature (more or less important) begin to be registered independently from those of a different nature, without having the function (a secondary one, that is true) of creating a broader framework for another type of information. The need (probably a conceited one) to register the major events the author participates in, eye-witnesses or is only contemporary with amounts to a certain concern for the past, usually a recent one.

"History" becomes relatively late a sufficient subject of notation, hesitant in the second half of the 16th century, and the number of such records did not increase spectacularly in the following century. In the 18th century, the marginal notes on a purely historical subject compete with

[1] T. Nicoară, *Introduction to The history of Collective Mentalities. Anthology*, Introductory study and translation of the texts, T. Nicoară, Cluj University Press, Cluj-Napoca, 1998, p. 90.

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those in which the historical event doubles other information; and towards 1850 this category of texts almost enjoys exclusivity.

The first "independent" notes of a historical nature only record information referring to reigns. In the 15th century we have only one such note, which has as subject the struggles for the throne, and the six notes from the following century also exclusively refer to the death of certain rulers and the enthronement of others, which is a reflex of the voivodal state (strengthening the central power). In the 17th century, the content of this type of text is diversified, but the prevailing one is that in which the main subject is the reign. In fact, the notes referring to the death of certain rulers, dethronements, enthronements, exiles, ruler exchanges between the two principalities, brief characterizations of the rulers, are all presented in all the four volumes (and they are numerous, given the political unrest and the short duration of reigns). The concern for different reigns exceeds the exclusive moment in which an increasing concern for the past is written and proven, and thus one of the notes is called "The ladder. So many rulers I have got to see before, since they made peace" (II, 563)[2], followed by the date of the peace treaty, 1790, and then by the record of the three rulers until 1795. Moreover, during the same period we find in a *Liturgy* a "note of the rulers of Moldova and the years they ruled and how many years they ruled and how many months, what it is like in here with ruler Dragoș who dismounted in Moldova, founded on the *Psalters* which have been recently printed in the Metropolitan Church of Iași, year 1795, March 14. And from 1352 until now it has been 443 years, between these years 109 rulers have been here in Moldova." (II, 564) We could say that the concern for rulers and reigns increases with time.

Finally, the 18th century and the beginning of the following one is a time of armed conflicts – the wars between the great powers, whose sphere of interest also included the principalities and which are evoked in the pages of the notes. The century begins with the fact that the Empire refused

[2] Due to frequency, the references to the texts of the *Notes from manuscripts and old books from Moldova*, a corpus edited by I. Caproșu and E. Chiaburu, Demiurg, Publishing House of Iași, 2008-2009, vol. I – IV, will be made as follows: the number of the volume will be written in Roman numerals, between round brackets, followed by the page number in Arabic numerals.

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Russia's first attempt to enter Southeastern Europe[3]. Peter the Great's defeat at Stănilești (1711) is registered by a witness: "know that since the Russkies had come to Moldova and confronted the Turks in (Stănilești) on the Prut and they fought for 3 days and 3 nights and even when the fourth (day) came, they did not go back, and the Tatars came along and they pillaged Moldova. And I, Miron the priest, I was at Codru Tigheciului, surrounded by Tatars, for 12 weeks, (in) forest houses, until the Muscovite army struck Brăila and they defeated it and then the Russkies went back to their country, and a new ruler was enthroned, Neculae voivode. 7219" (I, 389). In less than 120 years, six wars with the same protagonists (1716-1718, 1735-1739, 1768-1774, 1787-1792, 1806-1812, 1828-1829) turn Moldova's territory into a battlefield for repeated political incursions[4]. The wrath of the foreign armies[5] (of the three empires: Ottoman, Russian and Austrian) is omnipresent in the Moldavian principality, which is why it is often statistically registered in a pattern in which only the nationality of the invaders changes: "7278 <1769> Sept(ember) 21, the Russkies came to Iași" (II, 193), then "the Russkies left Moldova in 1772" (II, 211), but the country did not even have the time to breathe, because another note mentions that "since the Russkies came the third time to Moldova, in 7277 and they killed for three day(s) and three nights in 7281 <1773>, in March, 1 day" (II, 214). Then the same text, with different protagonists: "Know that since the Germans had come to Moldova 7283 <1775> [...]" (II, 243) or "Know that since the Turks had come to Moldova" (IV, 269). In the 19th century, Toma the seneschal writes in the *Amendment of the Law*: "I began to write for the army persecutions, which I have seen in the years of my life, ever since I was 18" (III, 306), which is, indeed, followed by a detailed text about the military confrontations which were contemporary with the author. Another recovery by memory and "a note of a few lines and when the Russkies and the Germans came to our country, Moldavia" is owed to the economist "C. Soutzescu"; concisely and objectively, he accounts "the first arrival of the

[3] Fl. Constantiniu, *An honest history of the Romanian people*, Revised and enlarged edition, 4th edition, Encyclopedic Universe Gold, Bucharest, 2010, p. 146.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 163.
[5] Șt. Ștefănescu, *Romanian history of the 18th century, between tradition and modernity*, Bucharest University Publishing House, 1999, p.32.

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Russkies", "their second arrival with the Germans", "the third arrival" etc., until "the sixth arrival" of the Russians (IV, 473) – scrupulously noting, in all cases, the circumstances (the wars during which they were belligerent parties). Also, this century is marked by invaders (Tatars, Cossacks), followed by robberies and murders. If certain notes mention, concisely and objectively, the event: "Know that since the Tatars pillaged Moldova, in Sept(ember) in forty days, in the year 7267 <1758>", other notes are detailed: "In the year 7267 <1758> Septe(m)ber, the Tatars pillaged Moldova, the south part, 6 lands and there was great slavery, ‘cause they attacked without a word and they burnt Focşenii and they even reached Rîmnic in Wallachia.[...]. And they looted empires without a word. And after they settled their reign, they received order from Ţarigrad and they went with the boyars from Moldova to the Tatars and they fulfilled all the loss suffered by the country from the Tatars." (II, 78)

The diversity of the military events of the epoch is fully reflected by the notes. The sequence of events can be reconstructed justly and correctly, based exclusively on these sources. The beginning of hostilities during the Russo-Austrian-Turkish war: "1786 Aug(ust) 5, the war began, the Ottoman Empire with the Russian and the Caesar Empire" (II, 435), is sometimes made with the same formulation mentioned above, an almost statistical one: "Know that in the year 1787, April 7, the Turk Kingdom and the Russki Kingdom broke peace, the fourth time after emperor Peter.' (II, 453) The unfolding of certain battles is laconically captured in a manuscript of *The Lives of the Saints in March*: "When the Russkies defeated Hotinu, in 1788 July 2, and when they battled in the same year at Ieş, the Germans and the Turks, on June 30" (II, 469); followed by the peace between the warring parties: "Know that since peace was made with the Turks in the year 1792 May 6 [...]" (II, 514), after which the Russians become neighbors with Moldova: "the Russkies took a part of Vozie, which was Tatar land, from the Turks, to Dubăsari, on the banks of Dniester, as it is seen until today" (II, 496). In other cases, peace is concluded to the detriment of Romanian territorial integrity, the annexation of Eastern Moldova representing the subject of several notes from 1812 (or subsequent), "when the Russkies took possession of the region of Bessarabia and they settled the border on the banks of the Prut" (III, 304).

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"Still in the century of suffering" (III, 524), as a contemporary calls the 19th century, the "revolts" have also a great impact in different marginal notes. Thus, related to the events of 1821, the notes highlight especially the slaughter of the Turks in Iași and Galați who "killed each other through terrifying deaths, without any kind of reasons, which was totally unfair"; with bitter irony, the author notes the contrast between the *Christian* name of the killers (Eterists) and the deed itself: "which was committed with the unfair judgment of certain Christians" (III, 496).

"*The Great Rebellion*" (IV, 357) from 1848 is summarized in a volume from the *Lives of Saints* as follows: "In 1848, there was a revolution in the town of Iaşi among the landowners of the country of prince Mihail Sturdza, in Alecu Mavrocordat's houses, sparking off the flow of the uprising." (IV, 349) The purveyor ***Demetrius Dragoş***, who is obviously on the side of the Moldavian ruler, writes thus: "*Let be known when the landowners from here in Ieş/Iaşi, in Moldavia and Wallachia, rebelled against the ruling princes and that from Bucharest, Bibescul, abdicated and ran away while this one from Ieş/ Iaşi, Mihail Grigoriu Sturza, as a hero stood and as a brave one, catching some of the rebellious landowners, tied them and banished them over the Danube river to the Turkish fortresses.*" (IV, 355) The Crimean War (1853-1856) is the subject of several marginal notes "*Let be known when the Russians entered the second time, fighting in a battle with the Turks, with the French, with the English, with other empires and with many more in the year 1853 on June, for 14 days [...]." (IV, 458) The abbot* **Benedict** *notes "to be known": "At the year 1859, on February, in Focşani, at Saint Ioan (John) monastery I welcomed his Greatness, Prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, ruler over both countries Wallachia and Moldavia.*" (IV, 529)

The events in the Occident are also echoed in the studied texts. The Philo-Russian attitude transpires from the use of the locution: "*At the year <1> 812 the Russians beat France. Napolion fled from Moscow like hell (ca chica toporului)*" (III, 295). Another brief entry from an old Register (Catastih) shows the same lack of sympathy for the Emperor of France: "*The wicked Napoleon "Bonne parte" (instead of Bonaparte)";* the author even deploys a pun to underline his intention *"or let's say "Bad part", Voltir's wicked disciples.*" (III, 309) Elsewhere, however, another author is

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not vehement: "*Let be known since when Napoleon escaped from Elba [...] and came again to Paris as emperor, being welcomed with all the joy by all the armies of France" (III, 356).*

What we find specific of these marginal notes from the political history domain – concise or not – is the objective note, most of the times records of wars, of foreign invasions etc. The armed conflicts represent a familiar condition of the Moldavians; these conflicts are treated as an ordinary fact, the texts recording in approximately the same formulations, the alternation of the main belligerent actors[6], without the least insistence on the misery of residents in a theatre of military operations. But sometimes (in few cases in fact) the affective implication is increased by certain personal commentaries. According to the Christian mentality of those times, the great calamities (famine, diseases, wars) are put in a direct casual connection with the divine wrath provoked by human sins. In this respect, in the year 1733 since the "*fel marshal" was walking in the Country of Moldavia and "slaved" (instead of enslaved) it and a lot of damages have made...*" is a direct consequence of human behaviour: "*God abandoning us for our sins...*" (I, 467). On the contrary, fifteen years later "when the Tatars stepped in Moldavia" the failure of their penetration in the capital has mystical origins, "but they could not enter because of the presence of the "Saint Wood" the repeated attempts having no consequence, "although they decided once and twice to enter at the year 1748, month September." (I, 559) We remain in the same register of emotional involvement: "*Let be known when the Country of Moldavia was in great need because of pagans, Turks, who came like grasshoppers to "grasp"... people's souls." (II, 465)* At another time the notation of the struggle of the *"Sultan with nohaii"* is an opportunity for judgments of value. The Sultan fled *"from fear of the nohailoru ... as it is the custom of the Turkish to run away as females (women) and you don't know that the Turkish is coward and the Moldavian is fearful"* (II, 59), and in support of the truth of these observations there are

[6] M. Gheorghiu, *Din istoria timpului liber: însemnări pe cărți în secolul XVIII*, (From the history of leisure time, notations on books in the 18th century.) *http://institutulxenopol.tripod.com/xenopoliana/pagini/6.htm*, 15th March 2013

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their own feelings "and I was there as well [...] and saw those all who had written, all are real" (II, 59).

I mentioned on another occasion that the marginal notes foresee hopes that the worshipping Russia shall escape the Balkans from the Ottoman yoke; a text from 1828 clearly expresses this desire: *"[...] the Great Neculai Pavlovici, chosen by God as emperor of the Russians, whose army by the blessing of the merciful God, today (1) 828 April 25, Wednesday was left to crush the pagans (agareni), army which is worth to be praised, seeing it by myself coming into our homeland, Moldava, much joy brought in my heart and happiness in my soul [...]* " (III, 631). A marginal text from the same year is particularly interesting in relation to the attitude toward the two great powers. It seems that the note contains a dialogue between two different authors. While the first part deplores the Russian domination "*Let be known that when the Muscovites (Muscali) came in 182 (8) in December and stood until April and 8 days laughed ... everyone to be paid and know how much we suffered for everyone to say: Oh, ah*", the second one is a reply to this lamentation: "*Who has written here above, does not know that you know that he says about the/Muscovites and mourns, but when the Turks come, what will he do? Pity him!"* (III, 641); the conclusion of the latter is certain: from the two evils, the smallest evil is the Muscovite.

A "patriotic short poem" written by "Ștefan Șandru himself" arouses interest. It starts pathetically and rhetorically by mourning the current state of the country: "*O! Miserable Romanians / Leaving the weapons from your hands / You have reached this state / Worthy of weeping.*" The author reproaches his compatriots their passivity in the face of foreign invasions and their lack of connection to European culture. This is the reason why "*we are stepped on by another invader (ghinte) / like the mindless ones / How many times they depleted us /and ravaged our homeland."* There follows of course the urge for "high education" and sacrifice for the country. It invokes the Roman origins of the Romanians; gradually, from the direct address, on terms of equality, "*Oh! My compatriots, / of Trajan's grandchildren*" the stake increases by passing to the "Oh! High builder". God is called to protect this nation, to light up and to plant in the heart of every Romanian the desire to make their country flourish. In such a way, of course, "*more will be glorified / the Name of the Holy*" (IV, 31). In a firm and solemn tone,

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with many invocations, the poem reveals, however, the plight of a people impended by foreign rulers to use its own resources. The theme is the country – a modern concept, recently framed in the general European context. The national idea transpires in other notations from volumes as well.

Structurally, within this category we can distinguish three types of marginal notes: specific are those notes which record the information shortly and to the point, in a journalistic manner, without any emotional involvement on the part of the writer; they are followed by more elaborate notes which either capture an event in detail or present a cluster of several laconic "news" of the first category. Finally, especially in the 19th century, a certain type of historical record is highlighted: the retrospective records recording several historical events are intermingled with personal ones at the beginning, exclusively historical later. Interesting is the fact that, although independent of other happenings, some such historical records are all placed under the temporal sign by adverbs or specific phrases: "When the Muscovites beat at Hotinu in the year 1788, on 2nd July and had / there was in the same year, another battle at Ieş, that of the Germans with the Turks, on the month of June 30th " (II, 469).

From the first notation of a historical character to the last one, from the change of rulers, pagan invasions, incoming and outgoing foreign troops to battles and peace treaties, etc., many texts are framed in a concise pattern, where the event is a concise and objective note on the pages of a book, recorded for remembrance: "*Let be known when the Muscovites came into the Country of Moldavia and plundered and burned it."* (I, 373) The events are connected by the copula: "*Let be known when the emperor Peter came to Moldavia and fought with the Turks and Prince Dumitraşcu went with him and the Tatars plundered the country"* (I, 388). At the opposite end there are notes which break the specific pattern of laconism by providing full details about the event. Related to *The History of the Romanian Country*, a note specifies that "*the history of Moldavia is starting from here"* (II, 278); this is followed by many mournful interjections in the episode of Grigore Ghica's murder in 1777 and by information on other misfortunates from the prince's entourage as well. The notation is by no means exhaustive and the author is aware of this: "*And there have been many things, which are not written here.*" At other times, despite their prolix appearance, the notes are actually

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a conglomerate / a record of objective first-hand "news", chronologically presented. Such is the case of a text which notes, starting with 1799 and ending with 1803, the succession of some rulers, banishments and coronations: "*in 1799, in March, his Greatness Prince Alexandru Ioan Calimah was banished and his Greatness Prince Costandin Ipsilant put on the reigning robe. In 1799, on May, his Greatness Prince Costandin Alexandru Ipsilant was crowned and reigned for more than two years. In 1801, on 21st June, his Greatness was banished as well [...]*"(III, 154); and the note continues in the same manner.

With this text we move on to the category of notations with a retrospective character, of annals. Oriented to the near or remote past, this type of marginal texts attempt, through voluntary memory, to recover certain facts deemed worthy of being written down on the white sheets /pages of a book. If we compare such a record with those from the 15th - 17th centuries, we find major differences: joining in the making of history, individuals have the courage to write down facts that do not belong only on the cultural sphere (a book). Among the first notes of this type, an anonymous record from 1768, covering a period of about seven decades, presents the events chronologically, in a precipitated and stereotype manner, up to the present moment. The Solar eclipse of 1699 is followed (almost consecutively) by the taking of Cameniţa by the Turks, after which: "*It is known when the Emperor Petru came to the Country of Moldavia and fought with the Turks at Stănileşti, at the year 7219 <1711> June 29th. When Prince Mihai fought with (the) Germans in 7225 <1717> January 15th ; and during Prince Mihai's reign there was the famine in 7226; and the welfare from 7227; and when the Prince Mihai pulled out the cattle in 7234; and when Prince Grigore Ghica went to the Woods in 7235; and when the Muscovites(moscalii) came for the second time in 7247; and when Tatars plundered the Southern part 7265 <1756> September 14th ; and when the big earthquake was in 7245; and when the Muscovites(moscalii) (came) for the third time in Moldavia, in 7277 <1768>on September and Prince Petru Aron (came) in the Country of Moldavia Prince.*" (II, 179) Other records start from remote facts from the distant past "Let be known when the Old Prince Ştefan ruled, and the remaining son Bogdan surrendered Moldavia to the Turkish in 6964 (1456), 6964 (1456)", thus

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maintaining the pattern of the formulation and selection of events (not in chronological order) until 1769 (II, 192). At other times, the events cover a shorter period – for example, 1769 -1775 (II, 241). It is certain that this type of records is increasing especially in the 19th century. Chronology is not an important rule for the recovery of history itself. On a manuscript named "Of Geographic Place (Obşte)" a note of this type begins with the explanation "*I wrote here a lot of notes (veleturi) for many things that have happened and at what times and years, as I have written down below"* (III, 145), which would be valid for all retrospective historical notes. After reaching the year 1802, (with a line that does not keep any order) the author of the text returns to years 1366, 1504, 1293 and 1454, as if it seemed unbearable, though, to leave the realm of the past to return to the present day. Most of these notes follow the same pattern: the juxtaposition of events recorded laconically by "let it be known ", "to let" or "when". Sometimes, the entire notation, even if it records past events over nearly a century, is extremely operative: "1757, the slavery of the Country from the South: *1769 the first Muscovites came. 1788 – the arrival of the Germans. 1821 – the Turkish' captures*."(III, 486); the text stands under the nominal sign, while the predicate is lacking for the sake of brevity. It seems that in order to counterbalance the situation, in the History of the Romanian Country ... a note is entitled "the history of Moldavia starts here", being followed up by three pages of Moldavian history (III, 502). One thing is certain: from the texts that timidly record a reign, a case of banishment or a crowning to the long notes whose density is supported by a minimal formulation, there is an entire historical journey to be glimpsed in the marginal notes of the 17th-19th centuries.

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