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Contents

• Editors' Note	5
<hr/>	
• I. Defining Borders – Defining Societies	7
<hr/>	
I.1. The Written, the Painted and the Imagined	
Some Considerations regarding <i>Historia Ducum Venetorum</i> Șerban Marin	9
<i>Il Lexicon Marsilianum</i> e la lexicografia rumena nel seicento Levente Nagy	29
Historical Tradition, Legend and Towns in the Moldavian Chronicles Laurențiu Rădvan	41
I.2. Church, Law, State and Profit	
Histoire du développement de la législation canonique et civile ayant pour objet les biens temporels de l'Église Liviu-Marius Harosa	67
Confessional Identity – National Identity. The Elites of the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church and the Catholic Autonomy from Hungary during the Dualist Period (1867-1918) Ion Cârja	89
Aspects modernisateurs dans les discours politiques de Elemér Gyárfás András Máté	105
Contribution of Romanian and European Legal Elite to the Definition of the <i>Unjust Enrichment</i> Concept Ciprian Paun	115
<hr/>	
• II. Roads to Modernity – Returns to the Past	141
<hr/>	
II.1. Modern Forms of Medieval Legacies	
Between the Memory of the Customary and the Code of Law: Crimes, Penalties and Social Identities in Pre-Modern Moldavia (17 th Century – First Half of the 18 th Century) Cătălina-Elena Chelcu	143
Reinventing Middle Age: the inauguration of the statue of Stephen the Great (Iași, 1883) Liviu Brătescu	157

The Cult of Brătianus Between the Two World Wars in Romania: Actors, Characters, Means and Forms of Expression	173
Ovidiu Buruiană	
II.2. The Birth of a Society	
Le rôle social de la promenade à Bucarest et à Iassy (première moitié du XIX^e siècle)	195
Dan Dumitru Iacob	
Nobility and Power in Moldavia at the Beginning of the 19th Century	209
Cristian Ploscaru	
Fils égaré ou traître incurable ? La figure du contrerévolutionnaire dans l'imaginaire politique roumain du 1848	227
Nicolae Mihai	
• III. The West in the East – The East in the West	251
<hr/>	
III.1. Oriental Fears and Aims	
Ideological and Practical Means of Survival in Front of the Ottoman Empire in the Late 1400s	253
Alexandru Simon	
Geopolitics and strategies in the Black Sea region (1939-1947)	273
Mioara Anton	
Shaping the Image of the Enemy in the Political Cartoons During the Cold War	285
Paul Nistor	
III.2. <i>Drang nach Osten</i> and Survival in the East	
Tekendorf – von einer sächsischen Gemeinde zu einer Glaubens- und Nationalitätengemeinschaft	301
Mihai Draganovici	
Deutsche Schulen in Rumänien während des Ersten Weltkrieges	313
Carmen Patricia Reneti	
The Repatriation of the Germans from Latvia and Romania at the Beginning of World War II: Some Comparative Aspects	333
Bogdan-Alexandru Schipor	
• List of Authors	343
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Nobility and Power in Moldavia at the Beginning of the 19th Century

CRISTIAN PLOSCARU

IN THE traditional Romanian society, the lineage, origin and longevity of the family were of great importance, conferring the “right” and “primacy” for nobility, higher social acceptance and chances for an easier and faster integration within the “nobility class” and, in time, even within the country’s “noblesse.” For those who were named boyars, “the origin of their family” was very important as concerns the community’s perception regarding the social status of the new boyar and his family, legitimizing the ascension of those originating from “old Moldavians, *mazili*”¹, meaning from ruined boyars² or from “old *mazili* and captains, free, land-owning peasants (*năzeși*),” meaning old families, belonging to an autochthonous lineage, even though they did not have boyars among their ancestors³. In exchange, the new boyars “who rose from the mass to lose their origin” or who came from “strangers,” “foreigners by lineage and by place,” were included among the “upstarts” and the “arrivistes” by most of the boyars by lineage, regardless of the rank they managed to acquire⁴. The “low-class” descent did not include many of the land-owning peasants who were the noblest of the peasants, but at the same time the least noble of the boyars⁵. Free peasants’ “nobility,” who claimed the existence of noble ancestors, often with attested genealogic documents, elaborated to protect their lands and to reduce the taxes⁶, and sometimes only with the support of oral, local traditions⁷, gave the land-owning peasant the chance to take advantage of life circumstances in order to “rise to nobility,” provided that he were the individual owner of a “chosen part” of the land, of “immobile fortune” and the “protégée” (“the man”) of a boyar within the Divan. Iordache Murguleț, although a boyar, he was proud to “have a good time in the peasant style,” reproaching to his sister-in-law Anița

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that she and her husband Constantin Murguleț got used to “nobility leisure and could not give it up”⁸.

The only ones who did not serve a “master,” still a boyar, when they did not work within the Principality’s administration (officials changed every year, and many boyars were “left outside” for one year or more), were the boyars within the regional and departmental administration, belonging to families who had continuous great “princely services,” sometimes even in the Divan, and whose lineage and “nobility status” seniority inherited from the parents did not allow them to take the service and the protection of a “master,” a boyar like them⁹. The number of families whose members did regular services for a “master” was rather great in each Principality, meaning several dozens, some of which included, according to the formal criterion of the high office, within the “first class,” and others, the majority, incorporated in “the second class,” temporarily or on a long-term basis, as the boyars didn’t have access anymore to the functions within the Divan, from *vel ban* and *vel agă* (Moldavia), and *vel clucer* and *vel paharnic* (Walachia) upwards. Often, these families, “the great families” within the social elite were generically called “the privileged class,” excluding the low or newer boyars, the *mazili* and the *privilegheți*, exactly because the members of the “privileged class” did not have another “master” besides the prince, doing only “princely services,” regardless of them belonging to the “first class” or to the “second class.” While talking about the abuses committed in the administration of the Principalities while he was a child, during the reign of Grigore IV Ghica, Nicolae Crețulescu talked about “the self will and arbitrariness of lower and higher authorities” within the departments (*ispravnici, sameși, zapci, zloțași*, etc.), but “likewise in the case of the *privileged class*”, meaning the families within the social elite, and the “nobility” by lineage within the departments¹⁰.

On the basis of this difference, observable in the daily attitude of the boyars towards one another, V.F. Malinovski, the Russian consul at Iași, made a distinction between the “local boyars” (in other words, “boyars by lineage”) and “other ranks or functions,” introducing within the last category those who had local functions (not “the Greeks”), but who were not acknowledged as true “nobles” by the nobility orders¹¹. In Bessarabia, Filip F. Wiegel made the same clear differentiation between only “seven or eight families – Sturdza, Balș, Rosetti, Donici, Krupenski, Paladi, Catargi and Râșcanu, “who “descend from Moldavian boyars” and “the rest of around 80 *so-called noble* families,” who “were the servants [in fact, clerks – o.n.] of boyars”¹². Among the eight families abovementioned, Sturdza, Balș, Roset, Paladi and Catargiu had belonged to the “first class” Moldavian boyars, but the members of the Donici, Crupenschi and Râșcanu families were constantly included in the “second class” category¹³, and only seldom a boyar within the family managed to have his way into the “first class”¹⁴.

Nevertheless, Wiegel identified a veritable social rupture between the three families of “genuine” boyars and the rest of the boyars in Bessarabia acknowledged by the Russian in the new province, the latter descending from “boyars’ clerks,” from “delegates, entrepreneurs and [...] administrators” of the lands belonging to genuinely “noble” and society-acknowledged nobility lineage Moldavian boyars¹⁵.

For example, younger or older boyars within the Cuza, Vârnav, Miclescu, Greceanu, Crupenschi, Donici, Cananău, Bașotă, Buhuș families (Moldavia), almost completely excluded from the functions within the Divan towards the beginning of the 19th century, given the history and the tradition of high “princely services” of their “parents” and their “ancestors,” were not allowed to trespass their inherited social condition, becoming “clerks” for the boyars within the Divan. The social status and condition of these boyar families within the regional administration (*ținutașe*) were generally considered by the social history papers as rather close to the new boyars and to the low boyars (*boiernași*), to the *mazili* and the lineages, forming together the so-called “secondary boyarship” of the Principalities. Nevertheless, the low boyars, the *mazili* and the lineages, together with the *privilegheți*, traditionally performed services of “clerks” also on the lands of these “boyars by lineage” of within the regional administration, not only for the boyars within the Divan, belonging to the social elite¹⁶.

The boyarship within the regional administration who only had “princely services” had a clearly higher social status and condition than the newer and the low boyarship, even though, in numerous cases, the high office criterion said “otherwise,” the nobility ranks of certain boyars within the second category having similar or even higher ranks in some cases. In 1803, Vasile Hermeziu, Ioniță Gane and Constantin Adam, descending from low boyars from the region of Suceava, advanced and became while Iordache Cananău, Iordache Balș and Ioniță Vârnav were only *pitar*, collector of duties on spirits (*căminar*), and steward (*stolnic*)¹⁷, respectively, very close or inferior ranks to the abovementioned ones, the social status difference being dictated by the family lineage, ensuring to the last a higher position, of genuine “nobility,” despite the rather low rank, explicable because they were young. This situation, specific to the internal hierarchy of the boyarship, according to the social tradition reference points, was still alive in the memory of Alecu Cantacuzino, descendant of the Moldavian Deleni, who recalled that “the sons of those families of patricians [the great families – o.n.] when they had to start the public service school,” while they were young, their “rank was taken for that of their clients,” meaning of the boyars within “lower” families, but older, and with a publicly-acknowledged inferior status¹⁸.

In these circumstances, incorporating the two categories – noble families by lineage, within the regional administration, on one hand, and newer, as well as low

boyars, on the other – within the structure of a relatively unitary, so-called “secondary boyarship,” by taking into account only the high office criterion, does not respect at all the particularities of the social order and organization of the Romanian Principalities, and the characteristics of the hierarchical conception specific to the autochthonous boyarship. While disrespecting the formal criterion of the high office, social reality turned out to be far more complex, reordering the boyars within the “first class” and those within “the second class” into another social and order of power. But, even more importantly, according to other criteria, such as family tradition, including the continuity of “great princely services,” the acknowledged longevity of the “lineage” also played a crucial role.

Between the families of the „boyarship by lineage, within the regional administration” and those of the social elite, the preoccupation for the lineage, for the longevity of the families and the continuity of high functions generated a true *legitimacy competition*, of “justifying,” *placing the criterion of longevity* and that of *the origin, the “nobility,” above the formal and often contested, but institutionalized criterion of the high office*. Within these disputes, more and more visible starting with 1790, accentuated after the changes introduced by the Russians in Bessarabia offered a model in this matter, the boyarship by lineage, within the regional administration, tries to assert its legitimacy of noble origin in comparison with the boyars by birth of the social elite, contesting the longevity and higher “nobility” of the families within the autochthonous social elite, providing papers and written proofs of “nobility” from the ruling Divan, on the basis of certain “noble lineages” and ancient “documents” belonging to the family. Far from being “a brood of new riches,” as many of the low boyars, this boyarship by lineage, within the regional administration, by combining members within the two first steps of “nobility,” proud of its longevity, was, on one side, hostile to the “new riches” boyarship, recently risen to “nobility,” and, on the other hand, it contested the monopole of the “country’s pillars” over the “nobility” and the power within the State¹⁹.

These families had cultivated, starting with the last years of the 18th century, the image of *great boyarship by lineage*, noble by birth, as the “country’s pillars.” The increasing number of solicitations regarding this kind of “documents” and “written proofs,” claimed by various boyars within this category from the ruling Divan is the result of these preoccupations, but also of the Russian influence, who had suggested them an efficient method of getting a document-attested “nobility” comparable to that of “great families.” The authorities of the Empire had asked for the validation papers concerning the nobility from most of the Moldavian and Walachia boyars in Russia immediately after the Peace of Iași (1792), and, at least in Moldavia, there was an increase in the number of princely documents and books on the subject. Following the example of the boyars who

had “emigrated” to Russia, the noble families by lineage, within the regional administration, started to see these documents and written papers as means to fight the attempts of the social elite to self-nominate as unique “nobility” of the country, with the right of nobility, given the continuity of the “great lineages” in the functions of the Divan. Costandin Tăutu, “the son of Toader Tăutu,” belonging to a family of great lineage, much envied at the time²⁰, but deposed and having only low services, “barely known among the low boyars”²¹, got in 1793 from Prince Mihail Suțu an “exemption paper,” on the basis of old “princely books and proofs,” confirming that his “lineage goes back to Ioan Tăutu, who was High Chancellor, being related to great boyars and distinguished families”²². He elaborated that “old genealogical tree” that Ioan Murariu discovered at the State Archives in Botoșani, without being able to date it. That “lineage,” with around 100 persons, ends with Costandin, the son of Toader Tăutu and had among the ascendants relatives of “great boyars and distinguished families”: Boul, Moțoc, Paladi, Cantacuzino, Sturdza, and Turculeț²³.

In 1815, the Racoviță boyars, with only low functions at the time, got a document attesting that “their lineage [...] is of Moldavian boyars by birth [...] proven to be great patriots”²⁴, and Alecu Calimach (autochthonous) received a diploma acknowledging him “all the privileges of the nobility”²⁵. In a *Triodion* offered by Constantin Vârnav to the church of Bârzești there was a note regarding the family of Vârnav, “originating in Moldavia, two hundred years ago”²⁶. Toma and Săndulache Stamatini claimed to be descendants of the great family of the Movelești²⁷, Iordache Drăghici of the Walachia family Drăghici, related to the Cantacuzinos²⁸, and the Sionești “fabricated” a glorious, but fantasist genealogy²⁹. This practice, which became a habit, did not disappear during the regulatory period. In 1833, Dimitrie Duca received an “authenticating notice,” not from the State, but from various boyars, attesting that he is the son of the deceased *ban* Pavăl Duca, and nephew of Gheorghe Duca, nobleman from Bessarabia³⁰.

As far as they are concerned, “the great noble families” by birth attempted at also assimilating a “nobility” that was not accessible to other families, claiming princely ascendances, Romanian or foreign, and the ongoing continuity in “making sacrifices” and in “services” of the land, mostly concerning the high functions of the Divan belonging to “our fathers and forefathers.” The claims of the social elite within both Principalities had a relative historical basis and, maybe even more importantly, they are acknowledged in this way by the traditional Romanian society of the beginning of the 19th century³¹. Besides the continuity, the “*sirava*” of great families, “related to the princes at involved in the ruling process,” as distinctive element of “nobility,” we also had the idea that the nobility of these ruling lineages would be validated by the “sacrifices” of their ancestors³².

On the other hand, the great noble families by birth insisted upon being differentiated from the boyarship by lineage outside the social elite, appealing to those reference points of the autochthonous traditions and administration practices meant to certify their superior “nobility” and to *confer a historical “justification” of their claimed monopole over the great functions within the Divan*, using their influence at the court and their power over the ruling prince. As regards them having almost all great functions within the Divan, it is true that “we are maybe one of the sole [of the few – o.n.] countries in Europe, where from father to son (e.g. at Balși, at Băleni, etc.) there have been the same functions for over seven generations (*vel* magistrate, *vel* chancellor, etc.)”³³, but, in comparison to the first half of the 18th century, only at the end of it and at the beginning of the 19th century did the great autochthonous „noble families” by birth (Bălșeștii, Roșeștii, Sturdzeștii, Cantacuzinii, Ghiculeștii, Pălădeștii and Catargii in Moldavia, Brâncovenii, Bălăcenii, Bălenii, Goleștii, Ghiculeștii, Filipeștii, Văcăreștii and Crețuleștii in Walachia) manage to impose a true “oligarchic” monopole over the high functions within the Divan (*ban*, chancellor, High Steward, treasurer, hetman and *aga*), repeatedly and significantly called “*services of the land*”³⁴. While enumerating the “great families,” Ion Tanoviceanu righteously asserted that “in order to play a [political – o.n.] role in Moldavia at the end of the previous century [the 18th – o.n.] and at the beginning of this century one had to be a Rosetti, Balș, Cantacuzino, Sturdza, Ghica, Paladi or Catargi,” forming the veritable social elite of the country, regarding of the services provided at a certain point³⁵.

In these conditions, marked by the erosion of the social distinction ensured by their ranks, the “great autochthonous families” tried to acquire a legitimacy based upon the representations of the tradition regarding its “oligarchic” political primacy and the outstanding power in the State and the society. The difference from the previous period was that, since the reforms of Constantin Mavrocordat and the practices related to the process of becoming a boyar, instituted by the Fanariot princes, one could not have the title of boyar without a princely decree, even though he was a landowner and that the “community” acknowledged his inherited “nobility. There was an exception for the sons of the great noble families whose lineage was highly renown, and they had continuity regarding the functions within the Divan, with the honorific title of chancellor or chamberlain even since they were very young, “from their birth,” without a confirmatory decree from the chancellery of the prince. In a study which started the discussion on this social history and genealogy matter, Alexandru Perietzianu-Buzău came to the conclusion that „the so-called low chancellor [s.a.] was [...] was given at birth to all the sons of low chamberlains, meaning to all the nephews of a boyar, without a confirmation from the chancellery of the

prince”³⁶. We can easily see that, in order to get this honorific title, the son of a boyar had to be at least the third generation of boyars in his family – a minimal condition confirmed by the society in the light of a tradition to be integrated in the “boyarship by lineage”³⁷.

Interested in introducing a clear distinction between the autochthonous social elite and the rest of the boyarship by lineage, the top noble families by birth of both Principalities have looked for *other titles* for their sons before they turned 18, with higher symbolical meaning, according to the tradition of each Romanian Principality. Starting with the end of the 18th century, several very young Moldavians within the Balș and Sturdza families appear with the title of *vel* spatharus, *vel* magistrate or *vel* treasurer. Without many direct testimony of them having received these great ranks “by birth,” the “cocoons” are mentioned with that function, before they turn 18, “at that time [...] 25 years old,” and the minors could not get such functions in reality³⁸. Alecu Balș is attested as *vel* treasurer in 1792³⁹, while he was in fact far too young to have such a function⁴⁰, that his father, “the old *treasurer* [my italics] Iordache Balș, great and strong boyar”⁴¹ “left him as inheritance,” as title, for all his life. The youngest, Iancu Balș received the title of *vel* spatharus, before having the first function of *halè*, *vel comis* in 1812, inferior function to that of spatharus⁴², but, once he moved to Bessarabia, Iancu Balș gave up on his youth title, preferring the more famous one of chamberlain of tsar Alexander I⁴³. Iordache Bălșucă, the son of *vel* chancellor Constantin Balș Ciuntu had the title of *vel* treasurer in 1801, when he was only 25 and before becoming *vel* spatharus in 1812, inferior function to that of *vel* treasurer, but effective this time⁴⁴. Costache Sturdza, the son of the dreaded and peevish treasurer Săndulache Sturdza had the title of *vel* spatharus when he wasn’t even 20, in 1809 and before receiving any *hale* function⁴⁵, and Alexandru Sturdza, the son of *vel* chancellor Mihail Sturdza, the head of the Sturdzești “folk music band” around 1800, had all his life the title of treasurer, even long before he had ever occupied this function, during the Turko-Russian war (1828-1829)⁴⁶. In Walachia the titles given to the sons of boyars by birth were far more diverse, as the old functions of *vel paharnic*, *vel clucer*, *vel stolnic* have remained within the Divan, keeping their symbolical value, unlike the Moldavian case. Before the introduction of this trend, the future great *ban* Constantin Năsturel was during his early youth “chamberlain, as any boyar’s son”⁴⁷, but his son, Radu Năsturel Herescu, “the hunched” (1750-1874) received another title “at birth,” that of *vel paharnic*⁴⁸, unlike the “deposed” descendants of another son of the abovementioned *ban*. Șerban Năsturel’s children, who changed their names in the monastery into Macarie, Stoica and Ion Năsturel have continued to wear “by birth” the title of “low chamberlain,” “low chancellor,” respectively.

Conserving the fortune of the orphan “cocoon” within the “great families” started to preoccupy more and more the Walachian nobles by birth, while the passion for luxury and the “plague” of playing cards had cancelled the “inheritance” rights of some of the boyars within the social elite. “In order to prevent the disappearance of noble houses” out of “children’s fault [...] as they are old and still spenders, as some of the great noble houses have perished,” the Divan of Ion Caragea elaborated a “report to the prince” on August 15, 1814, requesting the prohibition for boyars’ sons “without tutors” of their parents’ fortune, “even if they are married,” “to borrow [...] or to make business” with the merchants within the country, without “permission” from the “superior clergy and with their signatures”⁴⁹. In a report of the following year “the superior clergy by birth” for the “sumptuousness of the crews [of the boyars’ carriages – o.n.] to be limited according to *each class, rank and position*” (my italics) of the boyars, who give in to luxury according to the fortune, without taking into full account the tradition and the boyars’ “good manners”⁵⁰. These social differentiation practices applied by the boyarship of the Walachian social elite triggered the reaction of “some young boyars [...] unhappy [...] about giving certain titles to *boyars’ sons* and insisted for *these functions to be abrogated or for them to have the same functions*” (my italics)⁵¹. As it can be easily seen, we were talking here about ranks, not about effective functions, and about eliminating the practice of giving these titles only to *certain boyars’ sons*, within the families of the social elite, and not about eliminating the respective functions. The regulatory legislation was to enforce this social differentiation practice, based upon the political power of the boyars by birth. In February 1835, *The project was established the ranks according to the functions* proposed to the Moldavian Administrative Assembly suffered an “alteration,” after the idea of chamberlain Costin Catargiu, who asked for „*young sons of the great boyars* who will win through their learning and will get diplomas [...] to be received [directly – o.n.] into the sixth class [of ranks – o.n.],” meaning that of cupbearer, steward, and delegate, while the sons of low boyars had to get into each “class” at one time, the first being the ninth class, that of *sătrari* and *jitniceri*⁵².

Until the years of the autochthonous ruling, the complicated social and political practices of preserving the best social position possible, of differentiating from other “nobility” categories have strictly followed the horizon of “*family structures*,” and the sources do not offer the idea or even the thought of a “class identity,” belonging to social „macro-groups,” as the historiographic understanding of the “great boyarship” and the “secondary boyarship.” Such a division into social “classes” was not familiar at the time for the *traditional social system*, and the “rise” to nobility of “lower” families did not imply the “equality” of privileges and prestige, was not the expression of an “equality spirit,” but it meant

exactly the opposite, a differentiation, climbing the social “hierarchy,” the essential stake being the *prestige, the acknowledgment*, which, “inherited” by the children, integrated the whole family into a social and “power” universe. If in the Romanian society at the turn of the century we can sport a social “community of interests” which could be transposed or, why not, balanced against at the **political level**, the sources indicate two such “groups” or “identities” – the “great families” of each Principality, the „*noble families by lineage*” within the regional administration departments), who had an “internal political struggle” in order to consolidate their prestige and their “power” in the society and in the State, but who, in fact, constituted up to twenty families in each Principality, the rest of the boyarship playing a secondary role, given their positions of subordinates of the higher boyars, their “masters,” to whom they swore “faith” and “obedience” in exchange for „their “protection” and “enrichment.” Until the years of the organic regulations, the political confrontation took place *within the great boyarship by lineage*, opposing those that the sources call “the country’s pillars” (their families) to certain “rebels” from the great families within the regional administration, who, almost with no exceptions, had among their grandparents or ancestors people with great functions within the Divan, and they received a serious hit in their interests after the constitution (around 1800) of what the testimonies call “the magnates’ system” or that of “the great families.” From the perspective of the social origin of the “National Party,” the conclusion directs the investigation towards studying the solidarities and the social links (including the family), and towards the subsequent political loyalties, *with reference to these families*, re-evaluating the role of a “bourgeoisie” or of a “peasantry boyarship,” considered as one of the most important, inside of each an “egalitarian spirit” seems to have been promoted, as social fundament of constituting the *National Party*.

During the regulatory period, the great noble families by birth opposed the tradition of the “nobility system” of the previous period, with its social prestige symbols (the beard, the mantle, the canes, the height of the hat – *calpac*, kissing the hand and the margins of the hat – *işlic*, etc.), to the administrative hierarchy of the ranks imposed by the organic ruling, which laughed at these old “good habits.” Worried of the great number of new boyars among the “employee” in the administration and the justice, “new people” without noble origins or nobles by lineage, the great boyars claimed the inclusion within the “noble class” of certain clerks that they had previously despised and called “upstarts.” A testimony signed by metropolitan Veniamin Costache and by some great boyars by birth reads that the magistrates, the border clerks “since the old days” in “our Moldavian territory,” had belonged to the “nobility system” and that “they were entitled to *wear beards* in order to be recognised, and that they should also be allowed to *wear canes*, in order to take part in the Divan in matters of

the borders [my italics],” being mostly “known as boyars’ sons”⁵³. The signers (chancellor Dimitrie Sturdza, chancellor Constantin Cantacuzino [Pașcanu], Costache Conachi – chancellor and knight, Alexandru Ghica – chancellor and knight, Neculai Canta – chancellor and knight, Costachi Balș – chancellor and knight, treasurer Iordache Ghica, treasurer Alecu Sturdza, magistrate Iordache Balș [Bălșucă], magistrate Vasile Beldiman, chamberlain Manolachi Radul, chamberlain Vasile Veisa and chamberlain Dimitrie Bran), most of them boyars by birth of leading families, intentionally “forgot” that these clerks had never been integrated into the “nobility system,” had never worn a “beard,” or “canes” and that they participated at the Divan Assembly as “witnesses” to the trials, and not as “rightful” members. Despised and lowered for such a long time, seen as “clerks” and “unimportant” low boyars, “upstarts,” these magistrates could now be compared against as low, but “genuine nobility,” to the new regulatory administrative “systems.”

The same aspects of “distinction” and “great longevity” made the noble families by birth to “discover” the passion of the genealogical research, “the love” for blazons and other aristocratic symbols, which had previously only accidentally caught their attention, for particular cases and for high political stakes⁵⁴. While elaborating the Cantacuzino genealogy during the time he was in Russia, *ban* Mihai Cantacuzino was influenced by the interest for genealogy of the Russian nobility during the reign of Catherine II⁵⁵, often using himself the term “genealoghii,” rarely used in the Principalities at that time, comparative with the “*sir-ana*” or the “lineage” of the great families⁵⁶. Certain terms borrowed from the Russian vocabulary, such as “*obavnice* relatives,” by which Mihai Cantacuzino meant autochthonous, but which really meant of noble descent, “by blood,” unveils this aspect⁵⁷. This model contrasted with the “example” of the Oriental Turkish-Fanariot elite, characterized by rapid ascensions and falls, by the instability of the structures and by the fragility of its hierarchies, by the failure in setting certain specific behavioural values and norms, for a “noble” identity and for social prestige, by differentiating it from other categories, but which clearly imitated the “habits” and “moods” of the ruling houses, the Grand Vizier, the Grand Dragoman or the Fanariot prince⁵⁸.

The right “by blood,” through which the family tradition of the great noble houses were combined within the historical tradition of the State, become more important in the aristocratic perception of the time, within the French, German or Russian space, in comparison to other state criteria, conferring to the noble of the court, with or without a function within the administration, a special status and the supremacy within the social-political order of the Ancient Regime⁵⁹. The blood descent was not that much related anymore to conserving the territorial patrimony or the knightly mindset, as now the essential aspects

were family genealogies, titles, blazons, “aristocratic” manners and other “etiquette” elements, in order to determine the identity of the great Occidental nobility who claimed their noble longevity⁶⁰. On the other side, the Austrian and Russian pressure upon the Ottoman Empire made the Balkan noble elites to have their hopes high again regarding the “liberation” from the Ottoman domination. Besides the religious connotations, related to old Byzantine “orders of the crusades”⁶¹, these elites have strongly reiterated their Byzantine political inheritance and they tried to maintain for themselves a status comparable to that of the European nobles regarding the nobility. The memory and descent from “Greek lineages, from ancient families during the Constantinople Emperors”⁶² combined with studying the genealogies of the Balkan Medieval princely families, resulting in heraldic compositions, with blazons, “real or imaginary, of the princes of Bosnia, Serbia, and Bulgaria. Greek or Macedonian merchants, new riches, settled in the Habsburg States, and struggled to obtain noble diplomas and blazons decorated with Byzantine elements”⁶³.

Given these external influences, the few genealogies of the great autochthonous families elaborated in the first half of the 19th century in the Principalities, taking over – more or less accurately – elements of the European genealogic model, without getting too far from the local tradition of noble lineages⁶⁴, explicitly reflect the desire to differentiate themselves from the rest of the autochthonous or “foreign” noble families who got to high ranks, but who could not claim the same illustrious and ancient origins. In these genealogical “tables” and “armorials,” the documents referring to buying, exchanging or inheriting lands constitutes now attested evidence, as lineages don’t prove anymore “the proof of being autochthonous,” the right to have or the primacy over “the services for the country,” but they are meant to attest, taking into account the family continuity, longevity and noble origin of the respective family. One of the first such attempts was an “armorial” of the Moldavian family Balș, comprising 16 persons within four generations, forefathers of the children of Grand Treasurer Iordache Balș – Alecu, Ioan (Iancu) and Ecaterina⁶⁵. Elaborated and edited by Iordache Mălinescu in 1842, the lineage of the Costache family was “the author’s worship of the great metropolitan Veniamin Costachi and a flattery” of the “pretentious *agă* Gheorghe Costachi” and of “Mihail Boldur Costachi, general and hetman [...] of Moldavia”⁶⁶. These armorials and genealogical tables represented, among others, a symbolical resistance form of the “great families” towards the so-called “people without character” promoted by the princes and, later, towards the administrative hierarchy imposed to the great autochthonous boyarship by the organic ruling, who had severely “mixed,” according to the criterion of the rank, “the genuine nobility” with the “upstarts,” “employees” of the States chosen from “low class” families. In exchange, the lineages elaborated by the

boyarship within the regional administration had still in view validating “the appropriating right” for that “family” and attesting certain land rights⁶⁷.



Notes

1. Translator’s note: the *mazili* were low boyars or low boyars’ descendants, with no public functions.
2. For example, Ghergheleştii, “ancient Moldavians, *mazili* from the region of Dorohoi” (Costandin Sion, *Arhondologia Moldovei. Amintiri și note contimporane. Boierii moldoveni*, Text ales și stabilit, glosar și indice de Rodica Rotaru, Prefață de Mircea Anghelescu, Postfață, note și comentarii de Ștefan S. Gorovei, Bucharest, Minerva, 1973, p. 55) or the Caracaș family, “ancient Moldavians, *mazili* from the region of Vaslui” (*ibidem*, p. 121). A certain Ștefănache Gherghel was a *mazil* and had an “immobile fortune” at Călinești (the region of Suceava) around 1803 (*Uricariul cuprinzătoriu de brisoave, anaforale și alte acte ale Moldovei din suta XIV-a până la a XIX-a*, VII, Iassi, 1886, p. 242; *Condica liuzilor*), later rose as boyar, tax gatherer, “for Prince Calimah” (Scarlat Callimachi) (Costandin Sion, *op. cit.*, p. 56).
3. The Codreni, according to Costandin Sion, originated in “ancient *mazili* and captains, land-owning peasants from Boțești, the region of Fălciu” (*ibidem*, p. 103).
4. *Ibidem*, pp. 48-49.
5. Valentin Al. Georgescu, *Preemțiunea în istoria dreptului român. Drepturi de protimisis în Țara Românească și Moldavia*, Bucharest, 1965, p. 34.
6. George-Felix Tașcă, *Paharnicul Pană de la Galați și descendența sa până azi*, in “Arhiva Genealogică”, V (X), 1998, no. 3-4, p. 109. The pertinent observations of Ion T. Sion regarding the historical value of the land-owning peasants’ lineages elaborated during the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, ca, as well as any family lineage, fluctuant according to the documentary evidence (Ion T. Sion, *Considerații cu privire la spițele de neam răzeșești*, in “Arhiva Genealogică”, V (X), 1998, no. 3-4, pp. 119-120, 124), compulsory for any genealogical study, cannot be fully compared for this study, as the authenticity of the lineages through which a person supported at a certain point his nobility claims does not influence the utility of the source for a research having as purpose the ascensions to nobility, not the historical solidity of the evidence shown to get it. Also, we are interested in the society’s perception regarding the authenticity of these nobility ascensions and not their historical validity *per se*. In other words, the historical truthfulness of Iordache Drăghici’s claims of originating from the Walachian Cantacuzins is far less important this research than whether this lineage *was seen as true or false by the contemporaries*.
7. Ion T. Sion identified similar oral traditions in the case of two villages (Umbrărești, the region of Tecuci, and Suraia, the region of Putna) “far away from each other”, but which had the same manner of talking about their origin (*ibidem*, p. 125).
8. *Acte botoșănene și dorohoiene*, in “Revista istorică”, X, 1924, no. 4-6, p. 199 (July 20, 1820, Iordache Murguleț to his sister-in-law Anica). The fact that Iordache

- and Constantin were brothers results from *Act de întărire al lui Ioniță Sandu Sturdza* (Gh. Ghibănescu, *Documente*, in “Ion Neculce”, I, 1921, fascicule 1, pp. 94-95).
9. We do not include here the various services of a boyar towards another boyar, also called “services”, but having another status, related to the particular and family relationships among the boyars. When a boyar gave to another boyar an “empowerment” to sell his land or when he asked another boyar to set the borders of a “parcel”, he did not ask for a “service” in the sense of a command from the “master” to the “servant”, but he solicited a service from him. Even though, in order to get the service, he did sometimes appeal to his superior rank, he “asked” the another boyar for his “service”, he did not command him, and called him “brother”, “nephew” or “cousin”, even if they were not related. That is why borders were set of princely order, and the “empowerment”, if the land was sold, was financially rewarded, like a mediation service, a favor. It was the same with the “service” of recuperating a debt from a third party, on the basis of a document handed over to the intermediary, who, in case the matter got to the courthouse, represented the creditor boyar as “bailiff”, without implying that he was the “servant” or that the boyar was the “master”. Also, in trials for lands, the boyars constituting a party in the trial sent their “bailiffs” to represent them, but not always among the land’s administrators, also called “bailiffs”, but sometimes among the boyars who were good at legislation or those who had “taken over” the land. In “the great trial of Vrancea”, Iordache Roset Roznovanu chose as “bailiff” for the trial of 1814 the oldest of his father-in-law’s sons – of his first wife (Constantin Balș Ciuntu), meaning Iordache Balș Bălșucă, who of course, did not do a “service” for a “master”, but a favour according to family and power interests (*Uricariul*, II, Iassi, 1852, p. 1; December 1814, *Hrisovul Domnului Scarlat A. Calimah pentru procesul dintre vistiernicul Iordache Roset cu răzeșii vrânceni*).
 10. Nicolae Kretzulescu, *Amintiri istorice*, București, Editura ziarului „Universul”, 1940, p. 24.
 11. *Documente privitoare la Istoria României*, colecția Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, serie nouă, IV, *Rapoarte diplomatice ruse (1797-1806)*, sub îngrijirea acad. Andrei Oțetea, București, 1974, p. 416 (Iași, July 28, 1802, V. F. Malinovski to V. P. Kociubei).
 12. Filip F. Wiegel, *Observații asupra stării actuale a Basarabiei*, apud Ștefan Ciobanu, *Cultura românească în Basarabia sub stăpânirea rusă*, Chișinău, 1923, p. 19.
 13. Vezi Costandin Sion, *op. cit.*, pp. 66, 101, 227 and Gh. Bezviconi, *Familia Krupenski*, in “Din Trecutul Nostru”, VII, 1939, pp. 5-54.
 14. In 1727, Darie Donici was country *vel vornic* in the Divan of Grigore II Ghica (Ion Neculce, *op. cit.*, p. 364). Costache Crupenschi, the father of Iordache Crupenschi (spatharus in 1810), had been *vel vornic* (Gh. Bezviconi, *op. cit.*, p. 7).
 15. Filip F. Wiegel, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
 16. About Theodor Várnay, landowner at Petia (Suceava), Dimitrie Ghițescu said that “he was a man with no culture, *with a fatuity of great family, empty on the inside*” (my italics), claiming to be “a great noble”, in comparison to low boyars and *mazili* (A. D. Xenopol, *Din amintirile unui boier manciéntovean din jumătatea întâi a veacului XIX. Dimitrie Ghițescu 1814-1889*, in “Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice”, second series, XXXII, Bucharest, 1910, p. 1008).
 17. *Uricariul*, VII, pp. 241-254 (*Condica liuzilor*).

18. *Epistolă adresată lui Edgar Quinet, în 1856, de A. Cantacuzin*, în „Convorbiri literare”, XVIII, Iași, 1885-1886, p. 444.
19. In fact, not been integrated within the “secondary boyarship”, or within the “great families” of the social elite, it provided the authors and supporters of the political idea called “constitutional”, din of the period preceding the Organic Regulation. It believed to have its origins in the “Movilești, Dabijăști [...] Racovișăști, Tomșăști [...] and Costinești, Efstrătești, Stroicești, the descendants of magistrate Boul, magistrate Buzum, Moțotești, the descendants of chancellor Dubău, chancellor Ghenghi, magistrate Urechi, Necorașăști, the descendants of hetman Balica and hundreds others”, who had also been part of the “loyal and submitted family”, entitled to the great functions of the country’s Divan (Ionică Tăutu, *Scrieri social-politice*, foreword, introductory study, notes by Emil Vărtosu, Bucharest, 1974, p. 112; March 2, 1824, *Copie de pe o scrisoare ce au trimiis un boieriu din Moldavia către dumnealui logofățul Grigorași Sturdza, la Cernăuți*). In 1819, when a couple of boyars from the “great families” of Walachia claimed a monopole of the functions within the Divan, arguing that only they have “the genuine noble lineage” and “the true nobility”, “other very important boyars did not agree with this claimed origin”, stating that “us, those who call ourselves as having noble origins, if our lineage were researched, wouldn’t we be put to shame in front of lower boyars, within the second and the third class?”, “holding in their hands attesting papers and other documents, proving that they come from great princes and boyars, meaning *bani*, magistrates, chancellors, spatharuses and others [...] Buzeștii, Căpleștii, Calofereștii, Priscenii, Stăneștii, Popeștii ands others” (Zilot Românul (Ștefan Fănuță), *Opere complete*, foreword, introductory study, notes by Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă, București, 1996, p. 115).
20. Costandin Sion, *op. cit.*, pp. 274-275. They said of the Tăutești that they would have been related to the family of prince Dragoș”, who dismounted (*ibidem*, p. 274).
21. *Ibidem*, p. 275. In this case, too, Costandin Sion proves to be remarkably accurate, as shown by the document of Mihail Suțu since 1793, acknowledging to Costandin Tăutu the right “to be included *within the lineage* [my italics]”, as his father, Toader Tăutu, both deposed from the rank of boyar to that of “boyar servants”, with no rank or document to attest their nobility (*Uricariul*, VII, p. 56; December 3, 1793, *Carte de scuteală de la Mihail Const. Suțul Voevod*).
22. *Uricariul*, VII, p. 55.
23. Ioan Murariu, *Un vechi arbore genealogic al familiei Tăutu*, in “Arhiva Genealogică”, I (VI), 1994, no. 1-2, pp. 161-162.
24. Gh. Ghibănescu, *Surete și izvoade*, VIII, *Documente racovișesti*, Iași, 1914, p. 214.
25. Nicolae Iorga, *Documente privitoare la familia Callimachi*, II, Bucharest, 1903, p. XXVI, n. 2.
26. Gh. Ghibănescu, *Cuzeștii (monografie istorică)*, Bucharest, 1912, p. 105.
27. Costandin Sion, *op. cit.*, pp. 160-161.
28. *Ibidem*, p. 69.
29. Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Postfață*, in Costandin Sion, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

30. They signed as chamberlain Iordache Jurje, chamberlain Ioan Jora, spatharus Ion Codreanu, *agă* Iordachi Manu, spatharus Alecu Sturdza, *agă* Gheorghe Bogdan, a certain spatharus Iamandi, aga I. Iamandi and a *ban* Miclescu (Iacov Antonovici, *Documente bărlădene*, IV, *Acte de la mulți șoltuzi și dregători ai Bărladului*, Bărlad, 1924, p. 308; May 8, 1833).
31. Neagu Djuvara, *Les Grands Boiars ont-ils constitué dans les principautés roumaines une véritable oligarchie institutionnelle et héréditaire?*, în „Südost-Forschungen”, XLVI Band, München, 1987, pp. 34-41.
32. Paul Cernovodeanu, *Clanuri, famili, autorități, puteri (Țara Românească, secolele XV-XVII)*, in “Arhiva genealogică”, I(VI), 1994, no. 1-2, p. 86. “The sacrifices” of he great boyars referred to dangerous tasks, that the “country” expected them to accomplish, facing “the danger” in order to protect the other “inhabitants”, “poor” and powerless. In 1801, confronted with the danger of becoming “the enemy of the Russians” and menaced with the “invasion of the Russian troops” in Vidin, pasha Pazvantoglu asked the Russian delegate at Vidin, a certain Constantin, the mediation of the Walachian Divan and “especially that of *ban* Ghica [*ban* Dimitrie Ghica – n.n.]” in his conflict with Prince Alexandru Moruzi (*Documente privitoare la Istoria României*, Colecția Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, serie nouă, IV, pp. 308-309; Bucharest, January 14, 1801, *Declarațiile curierului rus, Constantin, cu privire la conversația sa cu Pasvantoglu și la amenințările lui Kara Mustafa*). Seeing how much the pasha trusted the Walachian *ban*, the Divan asked him, “in the name of the country”, to “sacrifice himself” (my italics), going to Pazvantoglu’s house, hoping that his involvement would put a stop to the “games” of the soldiers of Pazvantoglu in Oltenia and in the Danube plain, and the old boyar was really risking his life (*ibidem*, IV, p. 309).
33. Alexandru Perietzianu-Buzău, *Genealogiile țănănești*, in “Arhiva Genealogică”, V (X), 1998, no. 1-2, p. 235.
34. Neagu Djuva, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43. In his study, historian Neagu Djuvara insisted upon a phenomenon of conserving the “power” observed in case of ten “great families” in each Principality, investigating the presence of the members of various autochthonous families in the Divan, during 1771-1821. The conclusions generally coincide with the results of this investigation, but I do not agree with the opinion of the great historian regarding the fact that the “oligarchic character” of the “great families” is foremost proven by their presence in the Divan, as there are situations when the presence of only four of five families in the Divan (Balș, Ghica, Roset and Sturdza in Moldavia, Ghica, Văcărescu, Brâncoveanu and Filipescu in Walachia) indicates a “balance of power” between these families, but there are also numerous situations when we have the presence of seven or eight families and “the power” was *actually* more “concentrated”, many of the officials within the Divan with the ranks of magistrate or with lower ranks being the sons-in-law or nephews of the two Grand Chancellors, having other names (in Moldavia), cumulating “the power” at the level of only two “great families”.
35. I. Tanoviceanu, *Traducătorul din 1803 al Menechmilor: Vornicul Alexandru Beldiman*, în „Arhiva. Organul Societății Științifice și Literare din Iași”, IX, 1898, nr. 3-4, p. 173.

36. Alexandru Perietzianu-Buzău, *Postelnici și logofeți prin drept de naștere?*, in “Arhiva Genealogică”, I (VI), 1994, no. 3-4, p. 166.
37. In Walachia, Stoica Năsturel, grandson of *ban* Constantin Năsturel (who died in 1765), belonging to a great family, is registered in a document of 1814 as chamberlain, even though his age could not allow him to have this function, thus possessing it “since birth”, and his son, Ion Năsturel, appears as chancellor, still “since birth” (Petre Ș. Năsturel, *Postelnic din naștere, postelnic “din fașă”*, in “Arhiva Genealogică”, V (X), 1998, no. 3-4, p. 23).
38. Neagu M. Djuvara, *Familii de aromâni în România*, in “Arhiva Genealogică”, V (X), 1998, no. 1-2, p. 21.
39. Mihai Dimitrie Sturdza, *Familiiile boierești din Moldova și Țara Românească. Enciclopedie istorică, genealogică și biografică. Abaza-Bogdan*, București, 2004, p. 254.
40. His father, Iordache Balș had married princess Maria Mavrocordat, the mother of Alecu Balș, in 1763, but he became a widower, as she died in 1770 (*ibidem*, p. 254). Probably, Alecu Balș was around 25 in 1792.
41. Radu Rosetii, *Amintiri*, I, *Ce-am auzit de la alții*, ediție îngrijită și prefață de Mircea Anghelescu, București, 1996, p. 37.
42. Mihai Dimitrie Sturdza, *Marele comis și șamberlan Iancu Balș*, in idem, *op. cit.*, p. 280; Gh. Bezviconi, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
43. Filip F. Wiegel, *op. cit.*, in Gh. Bezviconi, *Familia Krupenski*, pp. 28-29.
44. Mihai Dimitrie Sturdza, *op. cit.*, p. 256.
45. Gh. Ghibănescu, *Spița familiei “Costachi” (după acte și documente)*, in “Ion Neculce”, IV, fasc. 4, 1924, p. 226 (Iași, 25 mai 1809; *Act de vânzare între C. Conachi și Șerban Costache Negel, pentru casele lui C. Conachi din Iași*).
46. Gh. Ungureanu, *Familia Sion. Studiu și documente*, Iași, 1936, p. 21.
47. Petre Ș. Năsturel, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
48. P. V. Năsturel, *Originea boierilor Năstureli. Studiu istorico-genealogic*, in “Revista pentru istorie, arheologie și filologie”, X, Bucharest, Carol Göbl Institute, 1909, p. 9.
49. V. A. Urechia, *Epitropia evgheniților*, in “Literatură și artă română”, I, 1896, p. 376.
50. *Ibidem*, p. 382 (February 13, 1815, Anaforaua boierilor epitropi ai evgheniților).
51. *Documente privitoare Istoria României*, Colecția Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, serie nouă, IV, pp. 352-353 (Bucharest, January 28, 1802, *Notă informativă despre evenimentele din București și din sudul Dunării*).
52. *Analele Parlamentare ale României*, V2, Bucharest, 1895, pp. 624-630 (*Proiectul pentru potrivirea rangurilor pe posturi*), p. 631 (February 6, 1835, *Îndreptările făcute de către Adunare în proiectul înaintărilor*).
53. *Documente*, in “Ion Neculce”, V, 1925, fascicule 5, p. 218 (November 19, 1841, *Numirea și cinstea Vornicilor de Poartă*).
54. See Ion Ghica, *O pagină din istorie*, in idem, *Opere*, I, Edited by Ion Roman, Bucharest, 1957, pp. 337-342.
55. Lee A. Farrow, *Between Clan and Crown. The Struggle to Define Noble Property in Imperial Russia*, University of Delaware Press, 2004, pp. 96-116.
56. See *Pre slăvita viță a pre luminatului și pre înălțatului domn Io Nicolae Alexandru voievod*, elaborated in 1727 by Nicolae Roset, made boyar by the Austrians, in “Trompeta Carpaților”, IV, 1866, pp. 423-425.

57. *Genealogia Cantacuzinilor de banul Mihai Cantacuzino*, publicată și adnotată de N. Iorga, București, 1902, p. 414.
58. N. Iorga, *Prefață*, in Idem, *Documente privitoare la familia Callimachi*, I, pp. I-CCXV; Virgil Cândea, *Rațiunea dominantă. Contribuții la istoria umanismului românesc*, Cluj-Napoca, 1979, pp. 21-29.
59. See the brief, but very suggestive considerations of Neagu Djuvara in the study *Genealogie, istorie și psihanaliză*, in “Arhiva Genealogică”, I (VI), 1994, nr. 1-2, p. 141, stating that “in the 18th century, [...] when France dominated Europe demographically and culturally, the political staff is recruited [...] almost exclusively among an administrative nobility”, that of certain noble families at the North of Loire.
60. See Robert Muchembled, *Societatea rafinată. Politică și politețe în Franța, din secolul al XVI-lea până în secolul al XX-lea*, translated by Ilie Dan, Chișinău, 2004.
61. I. C. Filitti, *Ordinul Constantinian al Sf. Gheorghe*, in idem, *Arhiva Gheorghe Grigore Cantacuzino*, Bucharest, 1919, pp. XXXIV-XXXVI.
62. *Genealogia Cantacuzinilor*, p. 413.
63. Mihai Dimitrie Sturduza, *Familia Balș istoria unei genealogii*, in idem, *op. cit.*, p. 258.
64. Paul Cernovodeanu concluded that in the Romanian Principalities the first genealogical documents “did not concern, except in a very low degree, the analytical method of the descendants’ tables” (*Importanța tabelor de ascendenți pentru genealogie și istorie*, “Arhiva Genealogică”, I (VI), 1994, nr. 1-2, p. 155).
65. The armorial was called *Însemnare anătătoare de 16 neamuri ale boierilor Alexandru și Ioan Balș și a surorii sale Ecaterina Toranu di pi tată și di pi mamă*. See Maria Dogaru, *Un armorial românesc din 1813. Spița de neam a familiei Balș dotată cu steme*, Bucharest, 1981, pp. 75-98. Sever Zotta assumed that the armorial was necessary for those boyars to get the title of Austrian chamberlain for Alecu Balș, starting from its structure upon 16 “neighbourhoods”, also found in the Habsburg Empire (See in *ArhGen*, II, 1913, no. 4-6, pp. 98-99). Taking into account the fact that Alecu Balș did not get the title, but that his brother Ioan Balș, who lived in Bessarabia, got the title of chamberlain of the tsar before 1818 (Gh. Bezviconi, *Boierimea Moldovei dintre Prut și Nistru*, Bucharest, 2004, p. 15), we find more accurate the theory that the armorial was elaborated to recognise this title to Ioan Balș.
66. Gh. Ghibănescu, *Roșieștii și apa Idriciului*, p. 18.
67. In 1819, the Moldavian Divan enforced a lineage of the cavalry commander from Botosani Iordache Șendrea, whose family “should start with the year 1287, from hetman Șăndre to the cavalry commander, comprising 22 plates” (Alexandru Perietzianu-Buzău, *Vidomstie de boierii Moldovei aflați în țară la 1829*, in *ArhGen*, II (VII), 1995, no. 1-2, p. 159, n.1), elaborated “for the territorial claims of the Șendrești,” reiterating “older claims and tradition” for their family (Maria Magdalena Székely, Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Nepoții lui Ștefan cel Mare*, in “Arhiva Genealogică”, V (X), 1998, no. 1-2, p. 112).

Abstract

Nobility and Power in Moldavia at the Beginning of the 19th Century

In a book entitled *Language and symbolic power*, Pierre Bourdieu defined the relationship between identity, language and representation the fact that identity is the subject of mental representations, as acts of perception and appreciation, knowledge and recognition of people, expressed through a language that reflect their interests and assumptions. Understanding ethnic and social identities in this manner, an interdisciplinary research must relate to the representation as part of historical reality, not as a deformation reality, furthermore, to examine the confrontation between representations, as mental images conveyed by various social actors, trying thereby to justify a position of power in society and state.

In this conceptual horizon our paper is placed, which aims to examine in the context how social and political actors from the Romanian Principalities elite built their legitimacy of competing in the competition for power by appealing to a language full of representations of identity, in the fight for the political power and the social prestige.

Keywords

identity, power, representations, social prestige

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