Abstract – Dimitrie Cantemir, who reigned for less than one year, as a member of the Moldavian dynasty founded by his father, Constantin Cantemir, was far more important as a scholar and savant. Indeed, he influenced the culture of his time (but only slightly its history). He became, in 1714, a member of the institution that would later be known as the Academy of Berlin. In this specific intellectual context he wrote Descriptio Moldaviae, a geographical, political, and historical presentation of the Moldavian state, and Historia moldo- vlachica, a learned work on the origins of the Romanians from Moldavia, Muntenia (i.e., Wallachia) and Transylvania. Interpreting this project as single endeavour with two inseparable facets, these writings put forward a horizontal, synchronic description of Moldavia as well as a vertical, diachronic one. The first of them, with an adventurous narrative, includes an extensive chapter devoted to the geography of the three regions of Moldavia (Inferior Moldavia, Superior Moldavia, and Bassarabia). That description includes 45 distinctive settlements, most of them towns and villages (urbes and oppida); these reports are both written to scientific standards and literarily appealing.

Keywords: Cantemir, Moldavian history, Latin literature, geography, cartography.

The Cantemir dynasty is both slight and significant, in two different dimensions, of political and literary coordinates. The destiny of the Cantemir family was impressed with the seal of volatility, which seemed to be the only constancy throughout the life of its members. Different countries, different political scenes, different cultural environments favoured a never-ceasing change of fate on a span of three generations, that equalled the founding and perish of this political and literary dynasty. Dimitrie Cantemir is the nodal point of this rare human configuration.

His father, Constantin Cantemir, was preceded by generations that meant nothing in the history and are therefore absent in the documents that survived and, most probably, in the documents ever written. He presumably was a peasant, in the prestigious alternative of razes; the razesi of Moldavia were those who participated in the war without being supported or trained on public charge, nor were they paid by the ruling prince. They were driven by faith, and their loyalty was based on the certainty that, fighting against the pagans (Turks, actually), would preserve their immortal souls. As a reward for trustworthiness, the prince used to give them rights of land property or some public tasks. Subsequently, the razesi families had the benefit of social prestige and relative prosperity. Bearing on his face and body the scars of many battles, Constantin Cantemir grew to be boyar and entered the
highest families of the country; in 1685, at the age of 73, after participating in many campaigns of the Great Turkish War, assisting the Ottomans in their campaigns against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Habsburg Monarchy, he was invested voivode (id est, Prince) by the Aula Ottomanica. The step was immense and changed for ever (that means the succeeding two generations) the fate of his family. The fact that Constantin himself was illiterate and could only write his own signature (though remarkably competent in speaking foreign languages), as a trustful chronicler of his time acknowledged, is most likely to be the punctum mouens of the brilliant education he offered his two sons. He never thought of himself as the supreme accomplishment of the Cantemir family, but much more, as the foundation of a dynasty. The political treatises he secretly signed included this stipulation. The dynastic dream was the forceful legacy he left to his descendants. Dimitrie, his younger son, reigned twice, for less than one year (in 1693, for five weeks, and in 1710-1711, being succeeded/preceded by his elder brother, in 1695-1700 and 1705-1707). Nevertheless, he got far more recognition than his father, who reigned about ten times longer. While still a teen (15 or, maybe, 12 years old), in 1688, he was sent to Istanbul, as a guaranty of his father’s loyalty toward Aula: this was the convention and the long established practice. He had already benefited from the lessons of an outstanding Greek teacher, Ieremia Cacavela, both cautiously and astutely chosen by Constantin Cantemir. In Istanbul, the fruits of these first lessons are enormously multiplied by his thirst for knowledge and the motivating cultural challenge. The ample and intricate netting of his personality is set out here: modern sources now briefly describe him as a philosopher, historian, composer, musicologist, linguist, ethnographer and geographer. He became in 1714 member of the Societas Scientiarum Brandenburgica, afterwards known as Academy of Berlin. This institution played a decisive role in the genesis of two major works Cantemir wrote in his mature age (that was surprisingly fertile, given the length of his life: only five decades): Descriptio Moldaviae, a geographical, political and historical presentation of the Moldavian state, and Historia moldo-vlahica, an erudite work on the origins of the Romanians from Moldavia, Muntenia (id est Wallachia) and Transylvania. Considered as a unit with two inseparable facets, these writings put forward a horizontal, synchronic description of Moldavia and a vertical, diachronic one. After the death of Prince Cantemir, in Rusia, the Academy of Berlin vainly tried to regain possession of the works written on its own request. A manuscript of Descriptio was taken by his son Antioh Cantemir (better known as Antiokh Dmitrievich Kantemir, Russian Enlightenment man of letters and diplomat) in his European voyages, as envoy of Russia in London and minister plenipotentiary in Paris. In 1737, Antioh succeeded in publishing the map of Moldavia, in Amsterdam. The text of Descriptio finally appeared in German
VRBES AND OPPIDA IN DIMITRIE CANTEMIR’S DESCRIPatio MOLDAVIAE

Translation (Beschreibung der Moldau), in 1769-1770, as recognition of the role Academy of Berlin played in its genesis.

The oldest manuscripts (copies) of this work (A and B) are to be found in the Russian archives that inherited the Asiatic Museum of the Imperial Academy of Science in Sankt Petersburg; at present, they are included among the documents of the Oriental Institute of the Academy of Science in Petersburg (Fond 25, D. 7 and D. 8). These manuscripts got to be known to Romanian scholars by the end of the XIXth century, throughout a copy made manu propria by I. C. Mas-sim and, later, by Al. Papiu-Ilarian, that produced the first Romanian edition, bearing the marks of its epoch and particular circumstances. Another Latin manuscript is a copy dated around 1760 and, being the probable source of the German translation of Joh. Ludwig Redslob, 1769, corrected by D. Büsching, is to be considered a valuable witness-codex. By the XVIIIth century dates a different copy (C, known under the name Sturzanus), work of a scholar, who intimately knew Latin language, that emended A and B. It has recently been published the first critical edition of Descriptio Moldaviae, accomplished by late professor Dan Slusanschi.

One extensive chapter (IV) of the first part, on Geography of Moldavia, is devoted to the three regions: Inferior Moldavia (incolis Czara de dzios dicta), Superior Moldavia (incolis Czara de sus dicta) and Băsăria. Each of them is described according to an administrative division in agri and, for each ager, are mentioned the settlements – urbes, oppida, munimenta/fortalia.

This chapter (I.IV) includes 45 distinctive settlements, most of them towns and villages. The description format is surprisingly constant, so that these pages of Descriptio might be transformed into a collection of modern cards (the fiche type), with twelve segments:

1-2. geographical information, either placing the settlement inside the ager, or related to another settlement, frequently using precise data (distance units, compass reading); proximity to water;
3. etymology, whenever something interesting and/or plausible is to be said;
4. the protection facilities and/or, rarely, naturally protected settlements;
5-7. the status of the settlement: generic (including the commercial potential), political and religious;
8. historical events related to the settlement;
9-10. buildings and inhabitants;
11. decay from an illustrious status;
12. Cantemir’s personal inquiries on the specific settlement.

Not all the data are to be found in every of the 45 descriptions, which, therefore, might seem irregularly accomplished. What is a loss in rigid information becomes a quality of a literary text that, covering the needs of a precise description, is to be read with constant interest and delight.
The driest and, not surprisingly, most recurrent information regards the proximity to water of each and every settlement. Though some of the “cards” lack the general geographical coordinates (considered somehow obvious), none of them lacks the aquatic element, except for those few that do not have a certain water source, with a known name, defined as variety (flumen, rivus, rivulus etc.). So: Iassi is ad fluvium Bahluy, Tyrgul Frumos is ad eundem Bahluy fluvium, Roman is in confluente Moldavae et Sireti fluminum, Wasluy is ad hostium rivuli Wasluy, ubi se in Barlad conicit, Tecuzio is ad fluvium Barlad, Czete de Pamint is ad eandem ripam (id est, Barlad) Foczanii is ad amnem Milcov, Adziud is ad fluvium Sireth, Giergina is in orientali Sireti ostio, Falczi is ad Hierasum, Tigine is ad Tyratem, Kissnou is ad flumen Bicul, Orhei is ad fluvium Reut, Soroca is ad Tyratem, Hotin is equally ad Tyratem, Dorohoi is baud procul a Ziziae fluminis fontibus, Stephanesti is ad Hierasum (with the historically relevant detail that the Turks, expurgato amne, established a navale, “dock”, and a promptuarium, “storehouse”), Czernauci is in boreali Hierasi ripa situm, Cozmin is ad amnem Cuczur, Radauz is ad eundem (id est, Suczava) amnem, Piatra is ad flumen Bistrichiam, Bacovium is in insula Bistriaziae flvii, Causzenii is ad fluvium Botna (with the supplementary remark that [Botna] exiguum spatio eam regionem tangit), Tartarpunar is ad ripam Tyratis (with another aquatic detail: [rupi] e cuius radicibus fons limpidissimus emanat), Tint is ad flumen Ialpuh, Töbák - Pontum tangit, Akkierman is in ipso Ponti Euxini littore sita, Kilia is ad septentrionale Danubii ostium, Ismail (the region, ager, and its fortress, identically named) – interiores Danubii ripas legit, Cartal (and Isakcze, jointly presented) is ad Danubium, ubi Ialpuh flumen recipit, Renii is ad Danubium situm.

Some of the settlements are named in direct connection to the water in the vicinity: Barlad is defined as urbs ad fluvium cognominem, Niamcz is ad amnem cognominem, Lapussna is ad rivum sunovnumon situm; in few cases, there is no special remark, except for the obvious name overlapping: Siret is ad [...] angulum Sireti fluminis sita, Trotusz is ad amnem Trotusz.

Only five descriptions lack any information regarding water: Kracsuna, Husz, Harlev, Cotnar, Pharaoni.

By contrary, some towns are flourishing as a direct result of a water presence: Galacz is emporium totius Danubii celeberrimum, nevertheless Stephanesti, vide supra, with navale and promptuarium.

Explicitly or implicitly, the homonymy settlement/water works as an etymological explanation; Suczava is ad amnem Suczava, qui ipsi et nomen dedisse videtur.

Regarding etymologies themselves, there is a constant care toward a scientific approach and a neat marking of popular beliefs. Relevant or not, the second section, devoted to Superior Moldavia, except for the obvious one just mentioned, on Suczava, includes no etymological explanation. Cantemir briefly – and rather confidently – tells the legend of Iassi, as place originally inhabited