

On the Occasion of an Anniversary:

DIMITRIE CANTEMIR (1673-1723)

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UNESCO is commemorating this year Dimitrie Cantemir's 300th birth anniversary. Formerly an Ottoman subject and now considered one of the leading Romanian historians, Cantemir is still accredited in the scientific circles of the world. His name was among a handful of illustrious men on the façade of Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève in Paris; now, he is on the distinguished anniversaries list of UNESCO. His works on history, philosophy, logic, ethics, theology, geography, literature, philology and even music have all left landmarks not only in the Romanian circles, but also in many European capitals. For the Turkish researchers he is principally a historian. However, to indicate how diversified Cantemir's interests have been, I may refer to the assessment of an authoritative work as the *Istoria Literaturii Române* (by the Academiei R.S. România) to the effect that I.I. Radulescu "is the second personality in Romanian literature after Cantemir."

Cantemir's name is pronounced to every foreigner as he enters a scientific or literary circle in present-day Romania. Having been there thrice, I have heard Cantemir's name as often as the other leading figures such as Horia, Cloșca and Crișan (who led the people's rising in 1784), Tudor Vladimirescu (the leader of the 1821 insurrectionary movement), Nicolae Bălcescu (one of the principal men in the 1848 revolution in Wallachia) or Alexandru Ion Cuza (who headed the Union of Principalities in 1859). Foreign researchers are repeatedly briefed on this leading Romanian historian by the Romanian colleagues. For instance, Prof. Aurel Decei, whose knowledge of Ottoman history is remarkable, had several times taken pains to familiarize this author with the intricacies of his country's history and its past relations with Turkey. Cristian Popișteanu, the editor of the *Magazin Istoric* and the author of the best-selling *Romania și Antanta Balcanica*, interested him in the 1848 Romanian revolutionaries

who had migrated to and died in Turkey. The directors of the Iorga Institute of History provided him with material on the leading Romanian historians. Prof. Ion Matei disclosed his findings on Ahmed Vefik Pasha's relations with the Romanians and agrarian characteristics of his country during the Ottoman period.

Coming particularly to Cantemir, it is difficult to believe to what extent he has been elevated to the altar of a national hero in his native Romania. I have observed that his deeds are no secret to a section chief in the Ministry of Electrical Energy or to a petroleum engineer at the Ploëști fields. Cantemir is very popular in Romania because he helped to keep alive the national tradition of his people, ranking in this respect with Maior or Kogălniceanu. His works, as well as editions in about ten languages, are of course available for all in the main libraries. The modern Romanian prints are now available in every corner of the country. His works are sold side by side with the other classics in the remote bookstores of even small towns. In the libraries, they stand next to the volumes of the *Contemporanul*, *Revoltă*, *Fratsia*, *Lampa* or *Nadejdea*.

It is inevitable that one becomes familiar in Romania with many aspects of Cantemir's colorful personality and vast fields of interest. One recalls Romanian endeavours to introduce to the visiting foreign scholars Cantemir's *Descriptio Moldaviae*, the original Latin of which is at the Academia România. One is naturally interested in the frequent Turkish phrases that adorn this book, which ought to be rendered into the widely-read modern world languages. One feels centended that excerpts from Cantemir's *History of the Ottoman Empire* is now available in a new edition. Edited by A. Dutu and P. Cernovodeanu, with a foreward by the renowned Turkish Professor Halil İnalcık (who is also the President of the International Association of South-East European Studies), this volume presents Cantemir's notes based on his personal experience derived from a long stay in the Turkish capital. The Romanian colleagues remind visiting foreign scholars that it was Cantemir's notes based on his personal accounts, with references to first-hand knowledge, that are actually worth quoting in our time. His description of personalities, institutions, geography or monuments are of much interest today. The *History* itself is at many quarters already criticized as containing "blunders".

This is not to say that Cantemir's *History* has been without value. On the contrary, it was, for long, the first serious undertaking. The Romanian scholars take pride in numerous translations, pour on their visitors all evaluations of Cantemir, requesting from them cooperation in quoting new Ottoman documents that will shed further light on Romanian history. The Turkish scholars may conduct research based on the hitherto un-used documents. Further evidence on the life and deeds of the Romanians in Turkey will be contributions to Romanian history. One welcomes studies devoted to Cantemir's stay in Turkey, considering that it covers more than two decades. Even his comparatively brief stay in Russia has been well evaluated long before the 300th anniversary. One may refer here to Ciobanu Ștefan's book, depicting Cantemir in Russia and published as early as 1925. The publications on the occasion of the anniversary on Cantemir's life are very illuminating, but necessarily short and repetitive. Other studies (for instance, P.P. Panaiteșcu's book on Cantemir's life and works) might have been translated and published in full.

In fact, Cantemir is not the only leading Romanian who spent long years in Turkey. Ioan D. Negulici (1812–1851), Barbu Iscovescu (1816–1854) and Grigore Ipatescu are among the Romanian revolutionaries who left their native land after the events of 1848. They have all reached the Turkish town of Bursa, where they lived, died and remain buried in unknown places. Further evidence on Cantemir as well as such men are probably lying at the Turkish archives at the national and provincial levels.