

**The role played by the religious foundations and establishments  
erected by Prince Constantin Brancoveanu in the process of forming  
and developing our national culture**

Abstract

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I cannot begin this abstract without thanking Mr. Professor Ph.D. Vladimir Osiac for the great understanding he showed me. He helped me first to choose the right theme for my Ph. D. thesis. First, the subject had to meet my life and activity as a monk, on the other hand to scientific concerns I have for many years.

I started to work and study the life and achievements of Holy martyr Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu from my student years, i.e. 1996-1997. His personality charmed me. The failure I had with the first sketch of my paper made me more rigorous and determined to work harder. Moreover, the comments and advices from Mr. Professor PH. D. Vladimir Osiac and Mr. Professor Ph. D. Dinica Ciobotea enlightened me and allowed me to proceed towards the thesis restoration.

So I concentrated on defining the concepts of foundation and establishment, as a first issue that I had to solve in a personal way. In the present paper I defined the religious foundation as those Orthodox churches and monasteries fundamentally erected and sustained by the Holy martyr Prince on his own expenses. Thorough the subject discussed in this paper,

the establishment includes the churches and monasteries places repaired, enlarged and endowed by Constantin Brancoveanu, also the cultural institution, as Royal Academy of Bucharest, the whole process of forming and developing the Romanian national culture, to increase our cultural level, and to spread those Romanian achievements all around the world.

We exemplified the first category with Hurezi Monastery, the masterpiece of prince's creation. For the second one we focused especially on St. Sava Monastery in Bucharest, the headquarters of the Royal Academy.

For ease of survey I have divided the thesis into four main parts: Chapter I – The Prince, Chapter II – The Foundations, Chapter III – The Establishments, and Chapter IV – Beyond the Border.

At first, I tried to explain the origin and personal formation of the future prince of Walachia. Based on the documents and chronicles I could demonstrate that he came from a relatively new boyar family, nevertheless related by women with the Basarab's prince dynasty.

His father was brutally murdered. As he later stated, Constantin Brancoveanu was “fatherless since infancy”, and therefore have been raised by his mother Stanca, and by her brothers: Prince Serban Cantacuzino, Constantin Cantacuzino stolnicul (the seneschal), Mihai Cantacuzino spatarul (spatharius). All three Cantacuzino brothers were refined scholars educated at the High School of the Patriarchate din Istanbul and University of Padua. They have traveled and seen much, so they have been willing and able to invest enormously in their nephew. Also involved in the country ruling, they trained him through assigning various state dignities. The result of their labor was seen immediately. Although he didn't travel much abroad,

at the age of 34 Constantin Brancoveanu was fully trained for the throne, as internal “product” of Romanian people.

Immediately he started organizing the country government. He realized that he had to rely on the Orthodox Church. Its high members were the scholars of the time. With their help the state could and should be managed. The martyr Prince decided to build new churches, monasteries and palaces. In this respect I made a distinction between church and monastery, as first exclusively indicates the place of worship, while the second includes a complex of buildings with various social and religious functions.

Constantin Brancoveanu chose to do so because he realized that the rock stands and speaks in itself as time goes by. A new approach for the Brancoveanu’s edifices was the careful choice of their site by the prince himself. He always turned to flat land, avoiding uneven relief as hills or valleys. And when he could not do so, the nature has been subordinated to human. Also, the light was allowed to penetrate inside the churches. By doing so he applied the doctrine of St. John the Evangelist. Then he was deeply dedicated to decorate the new edifice’s windows and portals stonemasons. The result was the accolade arches and edges carvings as flowers – roses, and animals – wolf heads ornamenting the buildings. In this area highlighted Vukasin the Carver, who worked at Hurezi Monastery, and Lupu Saratan who worked in Buzau, at Coltea and at St. Georghe Nou Monasteries in Bucharest.

The painting inside churches also brings out a number of novelties than prior shown and discussed. That painting is different from the Byzantine school. Parvu Mutu Zugravu (the Painter)’s and Constantinos’s new “schools” of painting during the reign of Brancoveanu brought a new painting background, the backlight. In this way the dull and dark of

Byzantine school was removed from Romanian painting. Also, the human figures in the paintings of that period are all expressive. And each character has his personality. That was the time when large family and church founders' group were painted, such those at Hurezi, Filipești, Prince Petru Cercel's Royal Church in Targoviste, and so on. Fashion time is also shown in characters clothing. The saints, the princes, the boyars, the priests, the artisans, and peasants, women and children, all of them appear now in paintings, leaving us a real fresco of the Romanian society. A very interesting novelty in time and space is the master-craftsmen figures painted on the monuments they worked at. Thus, in the church porch of Hurezi Monastery appears Vukasin the carver, Manea the foreman of masons, and Istrate the carpenter, and inside Filipești church one can see even today a self-portrait of Parvu Mutu Zugravu (the Painter) with his pupil Stancu.

In the same period, during the reign of Constantin Brancoveanu, the art of icons progressed. Along with wall portrait, it was the ancestor of easel painting, also reflecting Parvu Mutu Zugravu and Constantinos's schools.

Minor arts – embroidery, silverware, and bookbinder – had glory years during the reign of Brancoveanu, too. Well known is an Istanbul nun called Despinetas working at Hurezi embroidery workshop shone through her skills. Noteworthy is that silverware local schools were formed, parallel to those of Transylvanian craftsmen. Such schools were in Oltenia region, at Ramnic and Segarcea. In the same time, the Transylvanian craftsmen have changed their style of working precious metals distinctive for Walachia in accordance with the exact requirements of the Prince, creating beautiful original pieces.

The organized education has developed in prince Brancoveanu's establishments, as well. The elementary school evolved in regular churches.

Such were St. Gheorghe Vechi and Coltea Church in Bucharest, the Episcopal Church of Ramnic, the old Madona Dudu Church in Craiova, etc. Those who teach there were priests. They were literate. The higher education during Constantin Brancoveanu was splendidly illustrated by the Royal Academy of St. Sava in Bucharest. It was the first modern higher education institution in the South-East Europe, similar to the Arts faculties of Western Europe. From there emerged a new kind of man – the intellectual, and a new type of book – the handbook.

In relation with the handbook, instrument of intellectual work till nowadays, during the Brancoveanu' reign five royal printing were established and worked in Bucharest, Snagov, Ramnic, Targoviste and Buzau. Extremely talented people as Bishop Mitrofan of Buzau, and Metropolitan Antim worked there. Many books of great importance to religion and education came out of presses by their hands. Thus were the Evangel translated at the beginning during the Prince Serban Cantacuzino reign, the Liturgy translated by Antim adopted in all Walachian churches, and the Tipicon.

One must not forget Constantin Brancoveanu's action to support the Romanian printed books spreading abroad, in the other Romanian countries, especially in Transylvania, and in the world, too. This was the case in Syria at the request of Aleppo Patriarch, in Georgia at the request of King Wachtang IV, and in the Sublime Porte, for the benefit of Orthodox people living there. In 1700 in Bucharest was issued "Praschinatarul Ierusalimului si a toata Palestina" the first book ever printed in this part of the world in Turkish language, using the Ottoman-Turkish alphabet, being a religious book for Orthodox use. This latter Brancoveanu' act of culture was

particularly bold because in Ottoman Empire printing was forbidden by law imposed by Islamic religious leaders.

Some of the Royal Academy students were sent by Brancoveanu to further studies to Istanbul, to Padua, Venice and even at Oxford. The Royal Academy fame has become so great that Tsar Peter the Great sent scholars to study in Bucharest.

In 1704 in addition to the Academy a modern hospital was opened next to the Coltea Monastery. This hospital had a different conception than an asylum. In Coltea hospital the patient was admitted, treated, and discharged. On the contrary, in so called “infirmaries” was the old concept of patient admission and there’s oblivion.

I also feel compelled to emphasize that in the present paper I didn’t approach Saint and Martyr Prince Constantin Brancoveanu’s political actions towards Moldavia and Transylvania. Those actions were issues tangential to the extent that was needed to clear up some problems derived from cultural history.

I dare to hope that in those few words I have managed to reveal a new interpreting of the role played by the foundations and establishments erected by prince Constantin Brancoveanu in forming and developing our national culture and therefore to disclose the essence of my work.