

Constantin Mavrocordat – Romanian Culture Promotor

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Abstract

For a long time the Phanariot age was considered a dark era and the reforming Prince Constantin Mavrocordat's modernizing activity almost ignored. The signification of the Phanariot Prince's reform policy has to be revalued in the European and Romanian context of the 18th century. The enlightened Prince would reform the administration, justice, fiscal system and education setting up unexistent institutions at that time in Romanian Countries. Both in history and especially in culture, his role as a reformer is undisputable. His efforts in modernizing the Romanian society carried out in a document published in "Mercure de France", 1742 with a suggestive title as Constitution. His reigns signified a renovating period of the political, social, administration and enlightenment ideas.

Keywords: *Constantin Mavrocordat, library, school, reform, institution, Constitution*

For a long time, the Romanian history had a negative perception of the Phanariot age. Nevertheless... looking deeply one can discover cultural "facts" according to the European model of the age and also public innovating policies for that era. A man of his time, Constantin Mavrocordat established in Moldavia and Romanian Country a reform policy which, being so completely new in reorganization, the whole political and social life turned the West Countries attention. All the Romanian society moderning directions

carried out in a very important document published in 1742 in *Mercure de France* with a suggestive headline – Constitution. That document, a scroll from 1741 “*contains in nuce all the Phanariot Prince’s later reforms*” (1) in taxes, administration, justice, army, education and culture, being “*the first great effort to reorganize the entirely social and political life of the country [...] pointing out the directions in which Constantin Mavrocordat’s successors will manage or not*” (2).

The Prince’s reform policy asserts him as the most important of the Phanariots, the only who would approach public institutions in a new perspective – justice, education, army.

If about the fiscal field, Nicolae Mavrocordat’s son uses the old system – a unique tax payable in four yearly blocks knowing exactly who paid and who didn’t, including an important reduction of fiscal privileged ones, about the social field, reported to the native princes the Phanariot is an innovator. Serfage abolishment and establishing a fair report between the landlords and compulsory service peasants “*is the most important and long lasting of all his new laws.*” (3)

In addition to Constantin Mavrocordat’s social policy it has to be pointed out that the rules of the boyar institution would support radical transformations. The same about conditions of granting the title of a boyar. Thus, it was decided that a boyar could be only the person accepted in a more or less high official position. Before that, the criterion was landowning. High officials, from the ban to field lord stewards were named great boyars or velits, the others were second rank boyars. The first were exonerated from any taxes, others being binded to pay some of them.

In administration field, the reformer prince creates a new institution, the subprefect in order to charge the three essential sectors of state life – fiscality, administration and justice. Those would be paid by state treasury.

A new element consists of the Phanariot Prince’s decision to use in administration the Romanian language instead of Greek.

In justice, Mavrocordat would reorganized the existent structures investing the subprefects with court powers and establishing a law court in every district.

Without any doubt the decision of reorganization the old institutions and organizing new ones had an important role in modernizing the Romanian Countries, at that time under the sovereign of the Sublime Port.

The Romanian military history cannot ignore the Phanariot’s attempt in setting up a national army even in a low number. According to Nicolae Iorga, the idea of establishing a national army is remarkable in order to born a new society which “*until then showed its vitality only in political intrigues*”. (4)

His policies in justice, army, social life and administration had been doubled by remarkable cultural reforms, Constantin Mavrocordat being a vivid spirit and high educated by his father Nicolae Mavrocordat, the philosopher prince, who increased his knowledge talking a lot about policy, philosophy and new books from the famous library of Vacaresti.

N.A. Katsaitis, a Greek geographer established in Iasi for an official position relates “*On the other hand, this prince is a very learned man spending a lot of hours, day and night, in reading. He loves the erudites paying them with generosity. He can also*

speak common and academic Greek, Turkish, Latin, Italian, French, Moldavian and Valachian, the last one being in fact the same language.” (5)

The cultural institutions reformed by Constantin Mavrocordat would be the most valuable institutions of the 18th century: Library, School and Handwritten or printed book.

It is well-known that the Mavrocordats library from Vacaresti Monastery made up by Alexandru Mavrocordat the Exaporit and Nicolae Mavrocordat, Constantin's grandfather and father was a prestigious institution of its age. From Jacques Boucharde's book dedicated to Nicolae Mavrocordat one can find out that their library contained classical Greek and Latin, patristical and biblical books: “*Nicolae had Mishna published by Surenhuys in 6 volumes, Amsterdam, 1698-1703 with Maimonide's adnotations. By Maimonide himself had an old edition of More nevochim (The Lost Guide). One could also find the bilingual edition of Itinerarium by rabin Benjamin de Tudele*“ (6) Of course, the cultural horizon of young Constantin was opened by famous library which he will be attached until his last day, increasing it with a large number of books and manuscripts brought from East, France and Italy. “*Abbot Desfontaines, a quite known French literate dedicates his edition from Virgil and he thanks to cardinal de Fleury, Ludovic the 15th minister in 1741, August. The official asked abbot Sevin to send him the Royal library catalogue.*” (7)

As in great modern libraries, the reformer Constantin enriched his father's with new printings using the so named method of change. Vasile Mihordea's well-known studing informs us that in exchange of the manuscripts sent to Royal library from his own collection, the prince got precious editions existing in double copies in Paris. (8)

Nowadays, from the imposing library wished for by Pope Clement the 12th, the king of England, George the 2nd, emperor Carol the 6th and king of France Louis the 15th, you can still find a few copies at the Academy Library from Bucharest.

Such a *book lover* cultural personality couldn't ignore the *school*. He tried to reform this field getting some innovating measures very important for the future Romanian education development.

A first significant historical measure consists of using the Romanian language in primary and medium schools: “*Thus, at Prince's Academy the students would learn Greek, the cultured language of East, Latin, the cultured language of West but in the same time, the language of our ancestors, too.*” (9)

In 1734, the prince will also set up the school checking. The Moldavian metropolitan bishop would be compelled to check if the profesors did their duty “*to learn and enlight them in a good moode*”. (10)

Perhaps the most important reform was to transfer the Academy of Iasi spendings just to the treasury, and in Romanian Country, in order to have more classrooms for the Academy, he moved the monks and Superior Fathers to St. Sava Monastery.

Culture promotor and great book lover, Constantin Mavrocordat sent fifteen youngsters, boyar sons to Venice and also gave clothes and food to poor brilliant students. Between 1741-1744, beeing a Moldavian prince, he will lay down Latin and Arabian as school subjects.

Ion Neculce, in his famous *Chronicle* offers an enthusiastic image of the prince's educational policy:

“His highness Constantin thought about learning places reinforcing the Greek and Slave already existing. He also set up Latin and Arabian schools calling all the immigrants children to study each language they wish to have scholars in Moldavia as everywhere in the world.” (11)

The author of *Chronicle* who said: “He loved to learn, to be surrounded by people from all corners of the world to know what happened there and Porte agree him” (12) would be asked to do some fiscal history treatises, an innovation in fiscal research having a good insert if we consider the moment – between 1741-1742 when it was set up a fiscal reform in Moldavia. The chronicler worked hard finishing his task as he did before in *Chronicle* where he wrote down about the two Moldavian reigns of Constantin Mavrocordat: “from his majesty’s order I wrote down everything I saw and rememberd and I knew those true are. In addition, I wrote about the old people tales, but I was not sure those were entirely true.” (13)

Enlighted and real reformer Constantin Mavrocordat reorganize the monastery life. He order some sort of documents named “Ocolnica” in order to find out how many monasteries existed and what were their problems.

In professor Florin Constantiniu’s opinion, “Ocolnica” consisting of ten documents between 1593-1657 followed by high ierarch and high official names could be considered a great cultural fact.

“In addition with monastery life organization there is one of the most remarkable cultural fact carrying out of Constantin Mavrocordat – printing of the first documents historical collection.” (14)

As his father Nicolae Mavrocordat did before, Constantin wished to establish his own place in history being obsessed all his life by writing a history of the two Roumanian countries.

If Nicolae, the writer prince asked three scholars – Nicolae Costin, Radu Popescu and Axinte Uricariul to write down his Moldavian and Wallachian reigns, Nicolae will ask two instructed Greeks, Constantin Daponte and Petru Depasta. It’s a pity that their work, despite of its pedantic tone was far away from the Prince’s political, cultural and reforming opera even he reigned more than twenty years.

In spite of inauspicious historical context and the discontinuity of reigns, the enlightened Prince’s “cultural work” lasts for eternity. It depicts the Prince’s lifetime wish, as Pertu Depesta used to say, “to turn the gets country into an icon of Hellada”. For short, in a high cultured country.

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