

DIMITRIE CANTEMIR
(1673-1723)

LIFE

Referred to as Qantemir or Qantemiroğlu in Turkish sources, Dimitrie Cantemir was born on 15 Rajab 1084 /26 October 1673 in the town of Sălișteni within the borders of the Principality of Boğdan (Moldavia). He was the son of Constantin Cantemir (1096-1104/1685-93), a mercenary of peasant origin who later became the Prince (Voivode) of Boğdan. After seventeen years of service in the Polish army his father became aide-de-camp of the Wallachian prince Grigore I Ghica (d. 1085/1674). Being illiterate himself, Constantin did his best to provide a good education for his sons Antioh and Dimitrie, both of whom would later become princes of Boğdan. D.C. studied Latin, Greek, literature, and philosophy with Jeremias Cacavelas (d. > 1109/1698).

Constantin had been living in Istanbul since 1099 /1688 when he died in Rajab 1104/March 1693. Upon his father's death, young Dimitrie became the prince of Boğdan instead of his older brother Antioh, who was the legal heir. It is possible that the *boyars* preferred the younger prince because they thought that it would be easier to control him. D.C.'s rule lasted only three weeks, however, because of the opposition, intrigues and the large amounts of money spent by the Wallachian *voivode* Constantin Brancoveanu (d. 1126/1714). After he returned to Istanbul, D.C. studied at the Academy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with chief translator Alexander Mavrocordatos (d. 1111/1709), geographer Meletius (d. 1116/1714) who was the Archbishop of Arta, grammarian Iacomî (d. ?), and Chrisantos Notaras (d. 1143/1731) who later became the Patriarch of Jerusalem. D.C. also studied Turkish with Yanyalı Es'ad Efendi (d. 1142/1729-30) and Turkish music and *tanbūr* with Kemānī Aḥmed Çelebī (d. 1132/1720) and Ṭanbūrī Angeliki (d. 1101/1690). D.C.'s fame as an excellent *tanbūrī* not only won him access to the households of high-ranking officials but also enabled him to entertain his friends at his palace in Ortaköy.

His guests included prominent statesmen such as the Crimean Khan's chamberlain Davul °İsmā'îl Efendi (d. ?), his assistant treasurer Laṭîf Çelebī (d. ?) who studied music with D.C., İbrāhîm Paşa (d. ?) who held the office of the treasurer during the grand vizierate of Qara Muştafâ Paşa (d. 1095/1683), *defterdâr* Firārî Ḥasan Paşa (d. after 1113/1701-02), Rāmī Meḥmed Paşa (d. Dhulhijja 1118/March 1707), and artists such as Levnī (d. 1144/1732). D.C. was also interested in art collecting, painting, and



HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

architecture. He drew plans for several churches in Russia where he took refuge after 1123/1711.

D.C. recognized the weaknesses of the Ottoman army after he participated in the Battle of Zenta in 1108/1697 on the Ottoman side with the Moldavian forces under the command of his brother Antioh Cantemir. Following the defeat at Poltava (1121/1709) and after the Swedish King Charles XII took refuge in the Ottoman Empire, war with Russia began (1120/1710). In accordance with the suggestion of the Crimean Khan Devlet Girāy (d. after 1125/1713), D.C. was elected the Voivode of Boğdan (3 Shawwal 1122/25 November 1710). According to the historian Neculce (d. 1157/1745), D.C.'s close friend Davul İsmā'īl, the chamberlain and chief treasurer of the Khan, played a significant role in this appointment.¹

During his reign (3 Shawwal 1122-25 Jumada I 1123/25 November 1710-11 July 1711) D.C. became convinced that the Ottoman Empire had entered a period of decline. He switched his allegiance to the Russians. According to one report, D.C. petitioned Istanbul for permission to contact the tsar in order to learn about Russian plans and was granted total freedom by the trusting Ottoman government.² This was immediately before his secret negotiations with Tsar Petro I (d. 1137/1725) regarding his defection that began in Dhulqada 1123/January 1711. Most of the *boyars* supported D.C.'s actions. D.C.'s conduct, however, resulted in the deaths of many Moldavians in battle and the pillage of the country by Crimean forces. Not trusting the local rulers thereafter, the Ottoman government followed a policy of direct appointment for the office of the *voivode* in Moldavia for nearly a century (1123-1236/1711-1821) and assigned to this position only Phanariots who were former translators at the imperial council (*dīvān-ı hümayūn*).

When the Ottoman-Tatar allied forces defeated the Russian-Moldavian league at the Battle of Stanilești-Falciu (Falçi) near the River Prut, many soldiers of the losing side fell captive to the victors. As a result of the Treaty of Prut between the Ottomans and Russians D.C. took refuge in Russia and became an advisor to the tsar. 448 *boyars* including Neculce as well as 4.000 Moldavian commoners followed him to Russia. In accordance with the promises he made at Lutsk, Tsar Petro I initially granted D.C. the Kharkov region. Due to the proximity of that region to the Crimea, however, he later brought D.C. to Moscow, granted him a town of 15.000, an annual salary of 6000 rubles, and two mansions in Moscow.³ Following his wife Casandra's death D.C. fell ill briefly. Six years later, in 1131/1719, he married for the second time. Three years after his second marriage he went on a Caucasian expedition as Tsar Petro's advisor on Eastern affairs and travelled to Derbend in Daghestan. In Dhulhijja 1134/September 1722, he paid a visit to Astrakhan. When his illness relapsed, however, he returned to Moscow and died there on 19 Dhulqada 1135/21 August 1723.

WORKS

① *Historia incrementorum atque decrementorum Aulae Othomanicae* (Longer title: *Demetrii Principis Cantemirii incrementorum et decrementorum Aulae Othman-*

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

[n]icae sive Aliothman[n]icae Historiae a prima gentis origine ad nostra vsqve tempora dedvctae libri tres)

D.C. began writing this work in Istanbul, continued after 1711 in Russia, and completed it in 1717. After D.C.'s death, his son Antioh Cantemir managed to get the first English translation of this work published during his embassy in Paris and London (London, 1734-35). French (Paris, 1743) and German (Hamburg, 1745) translations and the second English edition of the work (London, 1756) appeared in the years that followed. The first Romanian translation was published in 1876, and two Turkish editions appeared in 1979 and 1998. All of these translations of D.C.'s work were based on its original English translation.

Up until the publication of Joseph von Hammer's studies, the translations of D.C.'s work into Western languages constituted the principal source of reference on Ottoman history, especially for European diplomats. Hammer criticized D.C. strongly and argued that he was extremely ignorant about Ottoman language and institutions.⁴ It turns out, however, that Hammer did not have access to an accurate translation of D.C.'s work. In 1984 Virgil Candea discovered and published an autograph copy of *Historia* at the Houghton Library of Harvard University.⁵ According to Candea, "the comparison of the original Latin text with its English translation published by N. Tindal in 1734-35 reveals an unexpected truth, that Tindal and all translators after him who used his rendition published an abridged version of the work." Candea found that Tindal not only omitted certain passages from the original text but also made inappropriate changes and failed to provide the quotations in Arabic letters.⁶ D.C., on the contrary, transliterated Ottoman terms in both the Arabic and Latin alphabets. The unexpected discovery of *Historia*'s original copy in Latin to a certain extent compensates for the dearth of documents at the Prime Minister's Archives in Istanbul.⁷ According to Andrei Pippidi, *Historia* was first written in Greek between 1118-22/1706-10, completed after 1126/1714 (the date of the last event mentioned is 1717), and translated into Latin.⁸

According to D.C., the decline (*decrementa*) of the Ottoman state began immediately after the last significant Ottoman territorial gain, namely the annexation of Podolya as the result of the 1672 expedition of Qamaniçe (Kamianets-Podilsky). The defeat at Zenta, which D.C. witnessed, appears to have made a strong impression on the author. Marsigli (d. 1141/1730) and Montesquieu (d. 1168/1755) propagate D.C.'s concepts of *incrementa* and *decrementa* in their works.

The Harvard manuscript of *Historia* in Latin, which D.C. corrected himself, contains sections entitled *Praefatio* (p. 1-40), *Incrementa* (Libres I-II; p. 1-246), *Decrementa* (Lib. III; p. 247-530), *Annotationes* (ad Lib. I-II; p. 1-279) and *Annotationes* (ad Lib. III; p. 1-206). The 1064-page copy consists of a 579-page main text and a 485-page section including notes on Ottoman institutions and civilization. The chronological part of the work begins with Süleymân Şâh (611/1214) and continues up to the year 1123/1711.

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

In the long preface (*Praefatio*) to his work D.C. compares the Muslim and Christian calendars (*Hegira cum Aera Christiana comparata*) and discusses the subject of the Turkish people and their name (*De gente et nomine Turcarum*). Following H^vāce Sa^cdeddīn (d. 1007/1599), D.C. also traces the genealogy of the House of °Osmān back to Yāfes, the son of Noah (*Genealogia Prosapiae Aliothmanae*).

While the first part of the work deals with the rise (*Incrementa*) of the Ottoman state, the second part focuses on its decline (*Decrementa*). The first part begins with Süleymān Şāh and covers the period until the annexation of Podolya region from Poland as the result of the Qamaniçe expedition (1083/1672) during the reign of Meĥmed IV (1058-98/1648-87). In this part, the titles are arranged chronologically according to the names of Ottoman rulers and include the nicknames of some of the sultans. For example, “Sultan Murad I. Chodavendikiar,” “İldirim Baiezyd,” “Mehe-med Fatih,” “(I.) Selim, cognomento Javuz,” “Suleiman I., cognomine Canuni,” “Sultan Selim II. cognomento Mest” are six of his titles. Although it is generally accepted today that Bāyezīd I (791-804/1389-1402) was the first Ottoman ruler to use the title “Sultan” and Mehmed II (848-50/1444-46 and 855-886/1451-81) to call himself “Pa-dişah,” D.C.’s use of both “Sultan” and “İmperator/Padişah” for Orĥān Beg suggests that he was influenced by the official ideology of his time.

The second part of the work, entitled *Decrementa Aulae Othmanicae*, deals with the decline of the Ottoman Empire. It is arranged, like the first part, chronologically. This section covers the period between 1083-1123/1672-1711, which corresponds to the reigns of sultans from Meĥmed IV to Aĥmed III (1115-42/1703-30). Since the work was completed in Russia, the last pages are entitled “Petro I, the Ruler of the Russian-Greeks” (*Petrus Primus, Russo-Graecorum Monarcha*). This part of *Historia*, which relates the developments during D.C.’s lifetime, is of greater historical value because the author refers to both his own personal experiences and to the eye-witness accounts of his family and friends to describe both the region (Eastern and Central Europe) and the time period under discussion. For example, D.C. participated in the historically significant expeditions of Zenta (1108/1697) and Prut (1123/1711) and met with prominent Ottoman and European statesmen.

Despite chronological inadequacies, the ‘Notes’ (*Annotationes*) are still valuable because they include important information about Ottoman civilization.⁹ Sections in which D.C. relates Ottoman realities he witnessed are the liveliest parts of the work. He includes colorful and interesting stories and his personal observations and opinions. In *Historia*, D.C. goes beyond simply relating the events and includes a social, economic and cultural evaluation. He reveals the reasons behind and connections between the events he describes.

D.C. only referred to a limited number of written sources and did not record his citations correctly. Perhaps the former *voivode* of Boĥdan wrote the work during his hurried escape to Russia after the Battle of Prut without the help of the first version of *Historia* or other documents. Later the prince complained about the lack of good libraries in Russia. Lack of access to Ottoman texts may be the reason why D.C.’s

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

Historia does not mention the name of Kātib Çelebī (d. 1067/1657), one of the most famous authors of the 17th century.

② *Descriptio Moldaviae*

The work was composed in 1128/1716 at the request of the Berlin Academy, of which D.C. was a member since 1714. It focuses on relations between the Ottoman state and the Principality of Moldavia. This monograph was written in Latin and later published in German (1769-70 and 1771), in Russian (1789), and in Romanian (1825). The detailed and accurate map of the Principality of Moldavia, which he also included, was later published separately for the first time in 1745 in Amsterdam.

The work consists of 3 parts: 1. Geography, 2. Politics, 3. Religion and Education. D.C. displays competency in geography, linguistics, and sociology throughout this volume. Especially important for Ottomanists are the 2nd (the election of *voivodes* of Boğdan), 4th (the yearly or three-yearly approval of ruling *voivodes*), 13th (Boğdan's former and current incomes), and 14th (the tributes and offerings paid by Boğdan to the Sublime Porte) sections of Part II. In other sections D.C. focuses on the autonomy of the principality and Ottoman-Romanian commercial relations.

③ *Vita Constantini Cantemyrii*

In this work D.C. relates the life of his father and his struggle against his rival Constantin Brancoveanu (d. 1126/1714), the *voivode* of Wallachia. Composed in Latin and completed between 1714-1716, the *Vita* was first published (in Russian) in 1783.

④ *Hronicul vechimii a Romano-Moldo-Vlachilor*

After completing *Descriptio Moldaviae*, D.C. worked from 1717 until his death on a comprehensive work in Romanian entitled *Hronicul vechimii a Romano-Moldo-Vlachilor* (The History of the Antiquity of Romanians). It treats the Latin origins of the Romanian people and the continuity of their settlement in the Carpathian-Danube-Black Sea region. Although D.C. was not able to complete this work, two complete volumes were published in 1835-36. The critical edition of two drafts in Latin, entitled *De antiquis et hodernis Moldaviae nominibus ve Historia Moldo-Vlachica*, were also published in Bucharest in 1983.

D.C. is known to have planned a work on the administration and institutions of the Ottoman state entitled *De regimine othomanidum politico* or *De regimine Othmani imperii*, which would have included sections entitled “De disciplina othomanidum civili ac morali,” “De moribus ac indole huius gentis,” and “De disciplina eorum militari”.¹⁰ Another less known work by D.C. on Ottoman civilization and religious life is *Kniga sistima ili sostoyaniye muhammedanskiya religii*, which was published in Russian in St. Petersburg in 1722.¹¹ In this work D.C. treats topics like Turco-Muslim calligraphy, the superiority of dervishes to Christian monks, the beauty of the language of the Quran, and the prohibition of forced conversion in Islam. The Ottoman

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

history entitled *Historia incrementarum atque decrementarum Aulae Othomanicae*, the work on Muslim doctrine entitled *Kniga sistima* and the book on Ottoman administration entitled *De regimine Othmani Imperii* were probably conceived of as a trilogy by D.C. In conclusion we would like to recognize D.C.'s personal contribution to Ottoman civilization as a noted musician.¹²

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Manuscript: Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University, Houghton Library MS Lat 224, 3 books, 1064 pages (I consulted this copy).

Editions: (1) *Creșterile și descreșterile Imperiului Otoman*. Facsimile edition of the manuscript Lat-124 [i.e., 224] at Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., with an introduction by Virgil Căndea (Bucharest, 1999). (2) *Demetrii Principis Cantemirii incrementorum et decrementorum Aulae Othman(n)icae sive Aliothman(n)icae Historiae a prima gentis origine ad nostra usque tempora deductae libri tres*. Praefatus est: Virgil Căndea; critice edidit: Dan Slușanschi (Timișoara, 2001).

Translations: *The history of the growth and decay of the Othman empire... Written originally in Latin, by Demetrius Cantemir, late prince of Moldavia. Tr. into English, from author's own manuscript, by N. Tindal... Adorn'd with the heads of the Turkish emperors, engraven from copies taken from originals in the grand seignor's palace, by the late sultan's painter*. Trans. N. Tindal (London, 1734-35); 2. edition: (London, 1756). Other translations based on Tindal's English translation: *Histoire de l'empire othoman, où se voyent les causes de son aggrandissement et de sa décadence. Avec des notes très-instructives*. Par S. A. S. Demetrius Cantimir, prince de Moldavie. Trans. M. de Joncquières (Paris, 1743). *Geschichte des osmanischen Reiches nach seinem Anwachsen und Abnehmen, beschrieben von Demetrie Kantemir... Aus dem Englischen übersetzt* (Hamburg, 1745). *Istoria Imperiului ottomanu crescerea si scaderea lui cu note forte instructive de Demetriu Cantemiru principe de Moldavia*. Trans. Dr. Ios. Hodosiu (Bucharest, 1876-78). *Dimitrie Cantemir: Historian of South East European and Oriental Civilizations. Extracts from The history of the Ottoman Empire*. Ed. Alexandru Dușu and Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest, 1973). Translation based on the Romanian edition: *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Yükseliş ve Çöküş Tarihi*. Trans. Özdemir Çobanoğlu (3 vols., Ankara, 1979; 2. edition: 2 vols., Istanbul, 1998).

② *Descriptio Moldaviae*

Manuscript: In 1875 it was located in St. Petersburg at the Asia Museum (Azijskii muzei) of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Edition: *Descrierea Moldovei: Traducere după originalul latin de Gh. Gușu. Introducere de Maria Holban. Comentariu istoric de N. Stoicescu. Studiu cartografic*

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

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HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

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¹ I. Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, ed. G. Ștrempel (Bucharest, 1982), 509; *Romen Kaynak ve Eserlerinde Türk Tarihi. I. Kronikler*, ed. Mehmet Ali Ekrem (Ankara, 1993), 98.

² Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Prut Seferi ve Barışı*, vol. 1 (Ankara, 1951), 331.

³ I. Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, ed. G. Ștrempel (Bucharest, 1982), vol. 1, 111.

⁴ Joseph von Hammer, "Sur l'histoire du prince Cantemir," *Journal Asiatique*, IV (1824), 32-45.

HISTORIANS OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

C. Kafadar H. Karateke C. Fleischer

⁵ *Demetrii Principis Cantemirii incrementorum et decrementorum Aulae Othman(n)icae sive Aliothman(n)icae Historiae a prima gentis origine ad nostra usque tempora deductae libri tres*. Praefatus est Virgil Căndeă, critice edidit Dan Slușanschi (Timișoara, 2001).

⁶ Virgil Căndeă, Introduction to: *Creșterile și descreșterile Imperiului Otoman*. Facsimile edition of the manuscript Lat-124 [i.e., 224] at Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., with an introduction by Virgil Căndeă (Bucharest, 1999), p. CI.

⁷ Cf. Mihai Maxim, *Romano-Ottomanica. Essays and Documents from the Turkish Archives* (Istanbul, 2001), 172-197; C. Bîrsan, *Dimitrie Cantemir and the Islamic World* (Istanbul, 2004), 11-12.

⁸ V. Căndeă, Introduction, p. C, note 112.

⁹ *Dimitrie Cantemir: Historian of South East European and Oriental Civilizations. Extracts from The history of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Alexandru Duțu and Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest, 1973), 323.

¹⁰ Virgil Căndeă, Introduction to: *Sistemul sau Intocmirea religiei muhammedane* (Bucharest, 1977; Bucharest, 1987).

¹¹ Romanian translations: *Sistemul sau Intocmirea religiei muhammedane*, ed. Virgil Căndeă (Bucharest, 1977; Bucharest, 1987).

¹² E. Popescu-Judet, *Prince Dimitrie Cantemir: Theorist and Composer* (Istanbul, 1999); Namık Sınan Turan, "Bir Doğubilimci ve Müzik Teorisyeni Olarak Prens Dimitrie Cantemir," *Müzik ve Toplum*, 14 (January-February 2005), 12-15.

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