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SOMMAIRE

Études

Marin Cârciumaru , Les decouvertes anthropologiques de la Roumanie	11
Dragomir Popovici , Observations about the Cucutenian (Phase A) Communities behavior regarding the Human Body I	25
Mircea D. Matei, Denis Căprăroiu , Quelques problems concernant la genese et l'evolution de la vie urbaine medievale dans les Pays Roumains	39
Nadia Manea, Honorius Motoc , Le consequences d'un traite conçu a Târgoviste en 1453	62
Mihai Oproiu , Quelques mots sur l'histoire de la Cour Princiere de Târgoviste	66
Maria Georgescu , The Princely Residence of Wallachia (the XIV th – XVIII th centuries)	76
Agnes Erich, Mihai Oproiu , The Târgovistean Cultural Societies from the end of XIX th century and the beginning of XX th century	86
Nicolae Ciachir , Concerning the History of the Romanian – Ottoman Political Relationship (1812-1914).....	89
Margareta Patriche , A new Approach on the Serbian-Bulgarian War and the Peace Treaty of Bucharest	97

Gheorghe Sbârnă , Problems of the Parliamentary Democracy during the first decade of the inter-wars period	102
Silviu Miloiu , Plans and actions for the creation of a Baltic Union in the inter-wars period	109
Ion Stanciu , American public and official attitude on political developments in Romania (1930-1939).....	117

Notes et discussions

Cristian Lascu , The Prehistoric Cave-Bear Cultic Site Gold Cave, Transylvania. Romania.....	127
Mihai Oproiu , Quelques mots sur “Le Chenal de Vieux” de Târgoviste.....	132
Mihai Oproiu, Sorina Nită , Note sur la presence de Ioan Bartholomeu dans le département de Dâmbovita	136
Radu State , Some considerations on the Greek influence during the XVII th century	138
Denis Căprăroiu , La contribution materielle de la population du département de Dâmbovita pour soutenir l’effort de guerre pour obtenir l’indépendance d’état de la Roumanie (1877-1878)	142
Ion Teodorescu , Documents inedits concernant l’application de la Convention d’Armistice de septembre 1944 dans le département de Dâmbovita	151
Violeta Puscasu , Un modele de Croissance de la population rurale dans le couloir du Sereth Inferieur	155
Radu State , The propaganda of the totalitarian government: Hitler-Ceausescu	159
Stefan Ispas, Carmen Antohe , Contribution to the knowledge of the evolution of Dâmbovita’s agriculture	166
Gheorghe Bârlea , Le role de prefixes en l’antonymie latine	171
Stefania Rujan , Synonymie – possibilities d’exploitation didactique..	183
Stefania Rujan , Les interferences lexicales et l’analyse contrastive ..	192

Chroniques

HOMAGE – Nicolae Ciachir, 50 Years of University Career (Margareta Patriche)	201
Le professeur Mircea D. Matei a 70 ans (Marin Cârciumaru)	204

Comptes Rendus

Maria Georgescu , Icones de Târgoviste, (<i>Doina Mândru</i>)	209
Mihai Oproiu , Inscriptiones et notes du département de Dâmbovitza, (<i>Radu Florescu</i>)	212
Maria Georgescu , The art of Brâncoveanu'epoch, (<i>Denis Căprăroiu</i>)	214
Alexandru Zub , The Calling of History. A crucial Year in post comunist Romanian, (<i>Silviu Miloii</i>)	217
Wilhelm Danca , Mircea Eliade – Definitio sacri, (<i>Ion Teodorescu</i>) ..	219

Targoviste - the princely residence of Wallachia (the XIVth – XVIIIth centuries)

*Maria GEORGESCU**

During more than three centuries, but for a couple of hiatuses, Targoviste was the princely residence and capital city of Wallachia.

The city of Targoviste is the result of a complex transformation process of the rural settlement it had been between the VII-th and the IX-th centuries (ascertained by archaeological discoveries). This was to become the very core of the future city, with a rapid evolution as regards town-planning as a result of the previous existence of an older periodical fair, followed by the setting up of a princely residence here. These circumstances contributed to the city development, which acquired marked town characteristics thanks to its capacity as a princely residence and then as a capital city of Wallachia.¹

Thanks to a favorable geographic position, the city developed on the bank of the Ialomita river, at the meeting point of the Sub-Carpathian hills with the Romanian plain. It was also this region that the Wallachian commercial road crossed, to connect Transylvania with the Danube, via Rucar-Campulung-Targoviste-Targsor-Braila.

The importance of the city's strategic position resulted from its being located close to the mountains, right in the center of this country, farther from the Turkish threat than the city of Bucharest and in a place that nature protected against being attacked thanks to the forests, the rivers and the marshes around.²

The moving of the princely residence to Targoviste suited the great boyars of Wallachia as well as the dignitaries and servants of the Court, who built here their residences as well as numerous churches, contributing thus to the city development, to the growth of its prestige. Craftsmen, merchants and numerous townspeople also came to settle here, their role in the intensification of the economic activity and in the population growth being of particular importance.

Alongside of the construction works that were carried out at the princely court, meant to steadily enlarge and embellish it, the ruling prince

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started building churches not only in Targoviste, but also in its vicinity, also repairing the already existing ones.

The aulic complex in Targoviste existed way back during prince Mircea the Old's reign (1386-1418), having been conceived by the ruler as a complex of buildings serving as residences to himself as well as to his courtiers and servants; the princely residence and the church were surrounded by a precinct wall provided with protection towers. It was known as the second such residence in Wallachia, after Curtea de Arges, consequent to the association to the throne of Michael the I-st (1391-1420), the ruling prince's son.

The first documentary mention about Targoviste as a princely residence and capital city which came to replace Curtea de Arges dates from 1396 and was discovered in the travel notes of Johann Schiltberger, who had participated in the battle of Nicopole: *"I have been in Wallachia and I visited its two capital cities, called Arges and Târgoviste"*.³

By the beginning of the XV th century, Targoviste was known as a city and the fact that the princely residence was moved here contributed to the rapid development of its town life. The document by which ruling prince Mircea the Old granted certain privileges to the merchants of Liow in 1403 specifies that Targoviste was the only city where customs duties were paid.⁴ Another document, issued between 1417-1418, ascertains the fact that prince Michael the I-st, the son and associate to the throne of Mircea the Old also had his residence in Targoviste: *„from my own self's houses and from my own self's very city, Targoviste"*;⁵ it was from here that he made several donations to the Cozia and Cotmeana monasteries, while Dan the II-nd's document (1422-1431), dating from 1424, was issued *"in my own city, in Targoviste"*.⁶

Since 1418, Targoviste remained the only princely residence and capital city of Wallachia and in 1465 Bucharest became the second one.

It was during the XV th century that Targoviste became a symbol of the Romanian people's struggle for the country's independence. Mircea the Old, in 1397 and Iancu of Hunedoara, on 2 September 1443⁷ defeated the Turks on the Ialomita river, while Vlad the Impaler (1456-1462, 1476) defeated Sultan Mohammed (Mehmet) the II-nd⁸ in the vicinity of Targoviste, in June 1462.

By the end of the XV-th century, prince Vlad the Monk started certain building works and, in 1494, he brought master-builder Michael from Sibiu to Targoviste to build *"a fortified city or a castle"* (probably some fortifications of the princely court buildings).⁹

The political stability during the reigns of princes Radu the Great and Neagoe Basarab favored the country's economic and cultural upsurge. It was from their court in Targoviste that Radu the Great (1495-1508),

Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521), Radu of Afumati (1522-1529) and Patrascu the Kind (1554-1557) established relationships and concluded alliances with the other Romanian Principalities, in the XVI-th century. And it was also in Targoviste, in April 1522, that Radu of Afumati waged one of his twenty wars against the Turks.

The moving of the Metropolitan Church of Wallachia in 1520, during Neagoe Basarab's reign, from Arges to Targoviste, where it remained until 1668, when it was moved to Bucharest, determined the growth of the political importance of the princely residence in Targoviste.

Among the foreign travelers who visited the princely residence and the capital city during this period, we mention Anton Verancsics (Verantio)¹⁰, who described Targoviste as follows: "In Wallachia, Targoviste (Tergovistum) is the only city of some importance, which is quite large, being also the capital city of the country"; Felix Petancic¹¹ tells us that "*Targoviste (Targovisius) is the capital city of the Romanians (Metropolis Valachorum) and the special residence of the ruling princes.*"

Francesco de la Valle¹² of Padova describes the city as follows: "*Targoviste (Tragovista) is a not too large city, located on the plain and surrounded by walls. The castle in that city, in which the ruling prince resides, is surrounded by very thick oak poles*". The Dealu Monastery is described as follows: "*there is a monastery on the hill facing the city, rather a very large abbey...*", while Pierre Lescalopier¹³ tells us that: "*Targoviste or Tervis in everyday language, the capital city of Wallachia (Metropolis Valachorum) and the princely residence of the reigning princes is inaccessible...*"

Prince Petru Cercel (1583-1585) brought the princely residence back to Targoviste, enlarged the princely Court and started new buildings and defense works; he built a palace and the great princely church, set up the first foundry known in Wallachia and planted beautiful gardens near the palace.

The foreign travelers who visited the princely residence in Targoviste during this period made remarks on its grandeur. Franco Sivori¹⁵ of Genoa tells: "*In the month of February 1584, His Highness decided to change His residence and to retire to a city called Targoviste (Tergovist), a one and a half day's journey from Bucharest, this place being much more distinguished and handy; there, the ruling princes had had their residence some time ago*".

The princely Court is described as follows: "*The Prince's palace, built by his ancestors, is large and its architectural style is accurate; His Highness enlarged it soon, by adding to it beautiful, impressive rooms. Sparing neither efforts for money; he ordered a fountain to be made on the esplanade, bringing the necessary water from a source which was at an*

almost four miles' distance from the city, making it flow under the ground, through some thick drains made of fir-tree wood; at the same time, the Prince ordered a beautiful church to be raised close to the palace so that His Highness could enter it from his rooms through a covered bridge, without being seen. He then ordered some enormous and very beautiful cages to be made for the wild animals in the beautiful gardens, which were located right by the palace".

Frenchman Jacques Bongars¹⁶ told in 1585 that "*Prince Peter built a small but beautiful palace in Targoviste*".

It was ruling prince Michael the Brave (1593-1601) who raised the prestige of the capital city of Targoviste thanks to his victory against the Turks on 18 October 1595 and to the fact that he concentrated in this place all the diplomatic actions meant to secure the political union of the three Romanian Principalities¹⁷ (The Treaty of Alliance between Michael the Brave and his boyars, on the one hand and Emperor Rudolf the II-nd's delegates (on the other, was signed at the Dealu monastery).

Michael the Brave established his princely residence in Targoviste subsequent to the liberation of the city which had been occupied by Sinan Pasha and he immediately ordered urgent measures for its reconstruction. The Court remained untouched, the same as the additional defense works which had been built earlier that year.

The princely Court remained in Targoviste until 1626 (when ruling prince Alexandru Coconul (1623-1627) moved it back to Bucharest) its presence there stimulating the development of the city.¹⁸

Interesting information on the events that took place in Targoviste during Michael the Brave's reign, as well as on the defense works here was offered by travelers Giuseppe Pisculo,¹⁹ Petru Pellerdini²⁰ and Filippo Pigafetta.²¹

To the princely residence in Targoviste, the reign of Matei Basarab (1632-1654) meant an epoch of great economic and cultural flourishing. It was during his reign that a remarkable period started, when he founded various objectives and when previously raised buildings were reconstructed or repaired.

The princely residence was rebuilt and a steam bath was built in the proximity of the precincts towards the meadow of the Ialomita river. Matei Basarab strengthened and enlarged the defense works of the city, which can still be seen nowadays. The works which were ordered by ruling price Matei Basarab are also mentioned in the country's Chronicle (The Cantacuzene Annals) as follows: "*And Prince Matei decided to remake the city of Targoviste, in the year 7153 (1645)*".²²

Foreign travelers describe the princely residence in Targoviste with considerable admiration; among them, we mention Petru Bogdan Bacsic, Marco Bandini, and Paul of Aleppo and Clas Brorrson Ralamb.

Petru Bogdan Bacsic²³ says that Targoviste is *"the city where the ruling prince of Wallachia has his residence"* and he describes the princely Court as follows: *"the houses and the prince's palace are spacious. The princely Court is rather large, it is completely surrounded by walls with iron gates; a high tower stands above the gate and on either side of it the guards are one duty night and day. Near to the palace, upwards, on the river bank, there is the prince's garden..."*

Marco Bandini²⁴ says that Targoviste is *"the capital city of Wallachia"*, while Paul of Aleppo²⁵ noted the grandeur of the Court in Targoviste between 1653 and 1658: *"The Court of the ruling prince of Wallachia is large and a stone wall surrounds it; a river flows at one of its ends and the church, which one reaches after mounting a flight of stairs, is very big; it is placed in the middle of the courtyard. The church is divided into three parts: the outer side includes the arches of the narthex, then through a second door one can reach the second section of the church, with the ruling princes' tombs; through a third door, one can then enter the church naos, an ancient room. High cupolas are above it and it is surrounded by pews"*.

Paul of Aleppo described another monument of the Court, namely the Chindia Tower: *"In the middle of this courtyard there is a big, large tower, the dimensions of which amazed us; it shelters the town clock and is guarded by several guards"*.

The same travel notes also mention *"the Turkish baths, built by the ruling prince on the bank of the lalomita river"*.

According to Paul of Aleppo, Targoviste is *"a city about as large as Aleppo or Damascus"*, which Matei Basarab *"surrounded with a wooden palisade and a moat"*; the fact is also mentioned that *"in this city of Targoviste there are more than eighty churches and monasteries; most of them are «built of» stone"*.

The same traveler left us an interesting description of the church belonging to the Stelea monastery: *"... the Stelea church is large and it is surrounded by stone walls... The mentioned church, which is very large and tall, has two elegant towers «above which rise» many crosses. The temple is of Russian origin. «The church» is very well lit and has three doors"*.

The mentioned notes also provide precious testimonies about the Metropolitan palace, as well as on the Metropolitan Church surrounded by a flower garden and which the author compares with St. Sophia: *"it is rather imposing and in a style similar to that of St. Sophia. It is divided into*

three sections: the first one is the pronaos, very large and with many cupolas; from here, a second door leads to the narthex, which is also spacious and beautiful; then, through a third door; one reaches the very middle of <<the church>> which is very large. The tower is grandiose by its height and opening... The church has three high, big altars. The iconostasis, the crucifixion cross and the small cross are wonderful. There are many windows all around and other small, round windows <<are>> in the towers".

Clas Borson Ralamb²⁶ describes the reception hall in the prince's palace, which *"had the walls covered with Damascus cloth and glass window panes"*: Information on the same period, regarding the princely Court in Targoviste are also provided by a Latin manuscript²⁷ preserved in the collections of the Batthyaneum Library of Alba Iulia, which mentions the fact that the princes' residence lays in the center and that the building is large: *"Very good cellars are under the entire building while on the outside, up a double staircase, one can reach an almost royal balcony, supported by very tall columns, made from one single artistically carved stone... The floor is made of marble... To the North, there is a high tower where there used to be the prisons and a small chapel next to it"*.

During the period 1653-1658 the city of Targoviste was the theatre of events connected with the two uprisings of the pedestrian mercenaries guarding the court, with ruling prince Matei Basarab's death, with the enthroning of prince Constantin Serban (1654-1658), then with the Turkish-Tartar plundering in 1658, when Mihnea the III-rd was enthroned (1658-1659).

The reign of Constantin Brancoveanu (1688-1714) favoured the reconstruction of the city of Targoviste and the relocation here of the princely residence. Constantin Brancoveanu's epoch was the last opportunity for the city of Targoviste to reassert itself as a remarkable cultural and artistic center.

The Court carried on an intensive activity in the domain of building thanks to the efforts of the great boyars and of the merchants, especially as regards civil architecture, this activity being ascertained by written sources and by the existence of the numerous fragments of walls preserved, thanks to their documentary value, inside the area of the mediaeval city.²⁸

The princely Court in Targoviste knew its last period of re-birth during Constantin Brancoveanu's reign; the prince restored the ancient princely residence which had been demolished in 1659 by Gheorghe Ghica, following the orders given by the Ottoman Empire in order to force the ruling princes to establish their residence in Bucharest for good, as the city of Targoviste had become the center of the anti-Ottoman resistance,

according to this country's chronicles: "*The Empire gave orders to Prince Ghica to demolish the city of Targoviste*".²⁹

Radu Greceanu's chronicle³⁰ tells that, during the fourth year of his reign (1692), in summer, on the ruling prince's arrival in Targoviste "*he could no longer leave that ancient home of His Highness's ancestors, deserted as it was... he ordered the cleaning of the princely houses in Targoviste and started repairing them; he raised Great Sword Bearer Michael Cantacuzino to the rank of subprefect with the specific task of rebuilding the houses*".

The rebuilding of the Court buildings was thus achieved during the period 1692-1695 and the two buildings were united. In 1694, the royal bath was remade and redecorated and during the period 1697-1698 a kiosk was built on the shore of the pond existing in the center of the wonderful gardens which were to become a preponderant landscape element. In 1699 "*by the vintage*", the works at the princely Church were completed; this monument was re-painted and received a beautiful iconostasis.

For the financing of these works, the ruling prince instituted a special tax called "*the tax ordered so as to cover the expenses for the princely houses and for the work at the princely vineyards*".³¹

Other buildings were built in 1702: a "*slomn*" - a building for the heralds that took part in the princely processions and another one for the Turkish language secretary of the prince and for his physician, all these buildings being raised within the perimeter of the princely Court, between the precinct of the St. Friday church and that of the princely one.

Besides these works, the entrance tower was repaired which also served as a bell tower, the masonry of the rooms of the guards Corp near the bell tower was also repaired, as well as the chapel, which would be reserved for the princess and her attendants.

To enhance the brilliancy of the princely residence interior carpets and curtains were brought from Constantinople and mirrors and furniture were bought from Venice.

Once rebuilt in the *Brancovan* style, the princely palace was described by archaeologist E. Chishull³² in 1702 as follows: "*The prince's palace is very much like the one in Bucharest as regards both shape and aspect, but it has the advantage of having a much more beautiful adjoining garden and a charming stone kiosk for the summer.*"; La Motraye,³³ who visited it in 1714, praised that sector of the palace which had been renewed by Constantin Brancoveanu as well as the painting of the beautiful Court church.

Soon after ruling prince Constantin Brancoveanu's tragic death, the princely period of Targoviste came to an end. The princely Court, the

Metropolitan church, other churches, as well as numerous houses of the townspeople³⁴ were set on fire during the Turkish-Austrian war in 1737.

Consequent to the final moving of the princely residence from Targoviste, the great boyars, the merchants and craftsmen also moved to Bucharest, while the foreign travelers no longer visited the city that had once been so flourishing.³⁵

The Phanariot ruling princes showed no interest whatever for the former capital city of Targoviste so that in 1813 the Great Magistrate Isaac Ralet obtained the princely Court land area from ruling prince Ion Caragea.³⁶

The princely church was the only monument that continued to be regarded somehow more attentively and this is probably why it was repaired during the period 1735-1737.³⁷

Thanks to its having been a princely residence and the capital city of Wallachia for several centuries, Targoviste offers its visitor the possibility of becoming acquainted with certain important aspects related with the political, economic, social and cultural-artistic life of the Romanian Middle Age society.

Notes:

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2. N. Stoicescu, C. Moisesescu, *Targoviste*, p. 8.
3. During his first trip to Wallachia, Johann Schiltberger a traveller from Bayern (born in 1381 - dead after 1438) visited the towns of Arges (Agrich), Targoviste (Turkoich) and Braila, a fact mentioned in "*Foreign Travellers about the Romanian Principalities*", vol. I, edited by Maria Holban, Edit. Stiintifica (The Scientific Publishing House), Buc., 1968, p. 30.
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7. Stoica Nicolaescu, *Slavonian-Romanian Documents*, Buc., 1905, p. 4.
8. N. Stoicescu, Vlad the Impaler Buc., 1976, p. 113; C. Moisesescu, *Targoviste*, p. 13.
9. "A city or a castle" built in Targoviste by masters of Sibiu, a German Document from the Sibiu Archives, Zimmerman Publishing House, *Der Archiv der Stadt Hermannstadt*, Sibiu, 1901, p. 58.
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13. Pierre Lescalopier (after 1550 - after 1597), *A Trip to the Wallachia and Transylvania*, 16 June - 16 August 1574, *Ditto*, vol. II, Buc., 1970, p. 509.
14. Sebastian Munster (1489 - 1552), *Cosmography*, *Ditto*, vol. I, p. 5
15. Franco Sivori (ab. 1560? - after 1589), *About Leaving for Wallachia, the Moving of the Residence to Targoviste*, in *Ditto*, vol. III, Buc., 1971, p. 12.
16. Jacques Bongars, *Ditto*, vol. III, p. 677.
17. N. Stoicescu, C. Moisesescu, *Targoviste*, p. 22.
18. C. Moisesescu, *Targoviste*, p. 18.
19. Giuseppe Pisculo (? - after 1594), About Sinan Pasha's fortifications, 1595 "The fort in Targoviste, built by Sinan between 30 August and 15 October, has a circumference of one thousand arms on the inside, the measurements having been made from the earth fortifications. It has a not too tall tower with four falconets on top and with its gabions which were not yet filled as they had not finished them, maybe, I think, because of the lack of time and the ditch was poorly excavated in many places", *Foreign Travellers*, vol. III, p. 630-631.
20. Petru Pellerdini (? - after 1596), *About the campaign of Sigismund*, 1595, 1 November, *Ditto*, vol. III, p. 622.
21. Filippo Pigafetta (1533 - 1604), To Belisarie Vinta, the Chancellor of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, 1595, 18 October, Targoviste: "This city shelters the new Sf. Francisc church, where several monks live and the princely palace which remained untouched, as well as the church; all the other buildings were turned to ashes, except the Metropolitan church which is large and rich and where Romanian priests of Orthodox religion perform the service", in *Ditto*, vol. III, p. 551.
22. *The Cantacuzene Chronicle*, ed. C. Grecescu, D. Simionescu, Buc., 1960, p. 106.

23. Petru Bogdan Backsic (ab. 1601 - 1674), *A Trip to Wallachia*, Foreign Travellers, vol. V Buc., 1973, p. 213.
24. Marco Bandini (1593? - 1650), Marco Bandini to Ingoli, the Secretary of the Propaganda Fide Congregation, 1644, 9 November, Iasi, in *Ditto*, vol. V, p. 311.
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26. Clas Brorsson Ralamb (1622-1698). *A trip to Wallachia*, *Ditto*, vol. V, p. 610.
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32. Edmund Chishull (1670 - 1733), *A Trip to Wallachia and Transylvania*, in Foreign Travellers, vol. VIII, Buc., 1983, p. 200.
33. A de la Motraye, *Travels in Europe, Asia and Part of Africa*, II, London, 1723, p. 172.
34. C. Moisescu, *Targoviste*, p. 22, cf. Chesarie Dapontes, *Ephemerides daces*, II, p. 34.
35. *Ditto*.
36. V A. Urechia, *The History of the Romanians*, vol. XA, p. 207-208.
37. The State Archives of the Dambovit County, *the Fund of the City of Targoviste Mayoralty*, file inu: no. 70/1847, f. 13-14.