

**DIPLOMACY AND EPISTOLARY EXCHANGES:  
CONSTANTIN BRÂNCOVEANU  
AND TRANSYLVANIA (1699-1714)<sup>3</sup>**

**Abstract:** The authors of the study aim to capture the role that diplomacy and the exchanges of letters and emissaries played in maintaining good neighbourly relations between Wallachia and Transylvania in the period of Constantin Brâncoveanu's reign. Although this was an era of military confrontations and evident tendencies to reconfigure the European political map, diplomacy demonstrated its full efficacy. This effort included the correspondence between the Romanian voivode and Comes Ladislau Bethlen, the friendship relations between the two representing one of the manifold links established between the two neighbouring countries.

**Keywords:** epistolary exchange, diplomacy, politics of the European balance of power, Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu, Comes Ladislau Bethlen.

\*

Under the Peace Treaty of Karlowitz (1699), Habsburg domination in Transylvania was consecrated from the vantage point of international law. Constantin Brâncoveanu's long reign (1688-1714) covered a decade and a half of this new period in history of the principality, the Wallachian voivode aiming, in addition to defending the integrity and the legal status of his country, to solve certain older family and personal interests in Transylvania. These envisaged the recognition, by the emperor in Vienna, of the estates he had acquired by purchase and pledge north of the mountains, with the right of refuge and shelter there in case of his relegation by the Turks. In addition, to the aforementioned issues there were added new ones, generated by the religious Union of the Transylvanian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, an act whereby the Romanians' unity of faith was broken and the Wallachian Metropolitanate was deprived of the jurisdiction it had exercised on the bishops of Alba Iulia since time of yore.

All these problems became extremely pressing after Karlowitz, since the peace treaty that the Christian powers had concluded with the Ottoman Empire did not offer any guarantees that the legal status of Wallachia would remain unchanged. As for

---

<sup>1</sup> PhD Susana Andea, scientific researcher I, "George Barițiu" Institute of History, Cluj-Napoca, specialist in Romania's medieval and early modern history, e-mail: eandea@yahoo.co.uk

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Avram Andea, PhD, "Babeș-Bolyai" University, Faculty of History and Philosophy, specialist in Romania's medieval and early modern history, e-mail: andeaavram@yahoo.co.uk

<sup>3</sup> This study has been achieved as part of the project funded by the Ministry of National Education, CNCS-UEFISCDI, no. PN II-ID-PCE-2012-4-0579; project title: Between the public and the private. Practices of writing in Transylvania (the 13th-17th centuries), project director: Susana Andea.

Transylvania, a country of religious pluralism, the principle of tolerance had been entirely abandoned. Henceforth, both the sultan and the Christian emperor could intervene at will in political or confessional matters, promoting a discretionary policy of force that would serve their own interests. In the case of Constantin Brâncoveanu, any foreign policy initiative without prior approval from the Porte could entail extremely serious consequences, culminating in his relegation or, *in extremis*, in the transformation of the country into a sanjak. In matters of religious policy, considered, by now, a strictly internal matter for each country, Emperor Leopold I would not tolerate any foreign diplomatic interference, all the more so from a Protestant state like England or Holland, as he regarded this as an intrusion in the rapports between the emperor and his subjects.

Given the new equation of international legal regulations and the clashes of interests between the Romanian ruler and the great neighbouring powers, his diplomacy had to be prudent and realistic, as well as to promote the European balance of power principle, which prevailed, at the time, and was admirably formulated by the princely secretary Anton-Maria Del Chiaro: "Wallachia is located between two empires. They form a balance: he who is a prince will have to channel his entire policy towards maintaining this balance in a perfect poise."<sup>4</sup> Indeed, looking at the diplomatic initiatives and practices of Constantin Brâncoveanu, we can say that the Wallachian ruler wholly subscribed to the balance of power principle.<sup>5</sup> In a context of military confrontations, when alliances were made and broken as the interests of the states went, when no one knew on whose side the balance of victory would tip, he preferred to maintain an attitude of expectation until the situation was clarified. For the interests of the country and for a diplomacy that was deployed without military support, this was the only wise policy, imposed by the realities and not by the voivode's whims.

The foreign policy promoted by Brâncoveanu compelled him to be well informed about the situation of the neighbouring countries and the rivalries in the area, to continuously watch the developments and changes affecting the system of alliances and the balance of forces so as to orient himself correctly and make the appropriate decisions, according to the course of events. Accurate and fast information, serving as political and military auxiliary means, was necessary to any power; hence, the pressing demands and the services rendered to various countries, primarily to suzerain Turkey and the neighbouring Habsburgs. For this, he maintained an extensive and expensive network of emissaries and secret agents, deploying various couriers and boasting a postal system of great efficiency and rapidity. The transmission of information was ensured by highly trustworthy and skilful individuals,

<sup>4</sup> *Istoria delle moderne rivoluzioni della Valachia*, Venice, 1718, N. Iorga edition, București, 1914, p.....

<sup>5</sup> For the principles of such a foreign policy, taken over and promoted by Brâncoveanu, see Virgil Zaborovschi, *Istoria politicii externe a celor trei principate Țara Românească, Transilvania și Moldova de la asediul Vienei (1683) până la moartea lui Șerban Cantacuzino și suirea pe tron a lui Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688)*, București, 1925; Virgile Căndea, "Diplomația românească sub Constantin Brâncoveanu," in *Pagini din trecutul diplomației românești*, București, 1966, pp. 168-185; Paul Cernovodeanu, *În vâltoarea primejdiilor. Politica externă și diplomația promovate de Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714)*, București, 1997.

many of them recruited from among the acquaintances and, sometimes, from the close advisers the ruler. The letters could also be carried by merchants, monks, foreign emissaries passing through the country, etc. Since the connections were not safe enough, one had to take into account the uncertainty of communications, the possible attacks of brigands, other unforeseen events on the road, the interception and seizure of letters, or the opening of the correspondence. Encryption was used to maintain its secrecy, as an extra measure, letters being replaced with numbers or Greek characters, the cipher being repeatedly changed in the case of the Romanian ruler.<sup>6</sup>

Out of Constantin Brâncoveanu's external correspondence, totalling over 300 known letters,<sup>7</sup> most concern his relations with the neighbouring powers, including the pro-Habsburg nobility in Transylvania and the Kuruc leaders, after the outbreak of their movement (1703). The frequency and intensity of the epistolary exchange reveals the attention and interest with which the Romanian ruler followed the evolution of events in the vicinity of his country, including the diplomatic actions in which the decisions that were discussed or the actions that were taken could also have consequences for his realm. Realising what the power rapports in the area were and being aware of the Habsburgs' annexationist ambitions, he preferred to fight for preserving the status quo, welcoming and supporting all those diplomatic and military actions that corresponded to his desires and aspirations. For Constantin Brâncoveanu, the key requirement of such a policy resided in the preservation of Turkey's neutrality both towards the imperial armies and the Kuruc and towards the Nordic war between the Swedes and the Russians. Hence, his opposition to the dangerous game of French politics, which aimed to pit the Ottoman Empire against the Habsburgs in a war, even if this took the form of a military intervention to help the Kuruc insurgents. By contrast, he welcomed the English and Dutch diplomatic efforts to prevent the Turks from interfering in European conflicts.

Turkey's engagement in a war could entail, at any time, the involvement of Wallachia as a vassal state, with everything that an effective military participation would entail and with all the costs this would incur. Now, after Karlowitz, Brâncoveanu knew that the Porte no longer had the solid military forces of yore and sufficient financial resources to enable to assume the role it aspired to in European politics. That is why, in case of war, the country could become an operational theatre for the belligerents at any time, a dangerous situation that could generate possible complications either through the ruler's fall from grace and relegation, or through the foreign occupation *manu militari* and the application, at the peace negotiations, of the principle of *uti possidetis*. The outcome could lead to the disappearance of the state as an institution; hence, the voivode's cautious policy and his reliance on practical

---

<sup>6</sup> On the use of ciphered writing, see Radu Pava, "Criptogramele din însemnările de taină ale lui Constantin-Vodă Brâncoveanu," in *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie*, IV(1960), pp. 507-517; Al. Mareș, "Din istoria criptografiei românești: cifrul cancelariei brâncovenești pentru corespondența în limba polonă," in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie "A. D. Xenopol"*, XXV/1(1987), pp. 335-341.

<sup>7</sup> Ștefan Ionescu, *Epoca brâncovenească. Dimensiuni politice. Finalitate culturală*, Cluj-Napoca, 1981, p. 110.

wisdom, in his attempt to maintain his loyalty to the suzerain Turks and good neighbourly relations with the Christian imperial forces.

This double game was extremely complicated and dangerous for the prince, as it could easily be discovered by the suzerain state that, under such circumstances, resorted, as a rule, to the relegation of the one who had succumbed to infidelity. For Brâncoveanu, saving his life and his family could be ensured only by fleeing abroad, to a protecting Christian state. Hence, the stake of his dominions north of the Carpathian Mountains, in Transylvania, which was ruled by the Habsburgs. He wished to have his ownership of these estates periodically renewed and accompanied by an imperial letter patent that would offer him the guarantee of protection in case of a refuge. Some of these estates had been acquired by his predecessors, including the title of Transylvanian indigenate for some of the Cantacuzinos,<sup>8</sup> while others had been personal purchases, procured through his agents and secretaries, as was the special case of Teodor Ladislau Dindar.<sup>9</sup>

According to a document from 13 August 1709, whereby Constantin Brâncoveanu divided his estates “in villages and places from Transylvania” among his four sons, the voivode owned, by gift or purchase, the Făgăraș villages Sâmbăta de Sus, Sâmbăta de Jos and Poiana Mărului; by pledge, lands of the villagers from Cincu Mic and Șomărtin; the village Tămășasa (*Tamas Pataca*) pledged by George Banfi; several houses purchased in Șcheii Brașovului and in old Brașov.<sup>10</sup> To secure the goodwill of the Austrians in connection with his ownership of these estates and, in addition, to obtain the receipt and periodical renewal of the much coveted letters patent, the Romanian prince had to take quite a few risks and perform a range of services in exchange. These included the facilitation and mediation of Austrian secret correspondence across Wallachia, the referral to the Court of Vienna of tidings about the Turks and their allies, potential enemies, the granting of financial loans, the provision of supplies necessary to the Imperial Army, such as grains and other “naturals,” etc. These obligations, undertaken in an era of military confrontations, were not unimportant, nor were they easy to comply with, if we take into account the excessive duties to the suzerain power, so much so that the voivode, compelled to make himself useful to both parties, came to be both a steward for the Porte and a treasurer for the Habsburgs.

The fulfilment of the obligations imposed by the Christian emperor as the price for maintaining good neighbourly relations was extremely dangerous for Wallachia and it was bound to have a sinuous evolution, generating mistrust and suspicion. The good faith of the prince and his secretary, Dindar, who was also an imperial agent,

<sup>8</sup> Susana Andea, Avram Andea, “Despre acordarea statutului de indigenat în Transilvania princiară (sec. XVI-XVII),” in *Studia Varia in honorem professoris Ștefan Ștefănescu octogenarii*, București-Braïla, 2009, p. 498.

<sup>9</sup> On the role this princely “resident” in Sibiu played for over a quarter of a century, see Susana Andea, “Viața și activitatea diplomatică a lui Theodor Ladislau Dindar,” in *Studii de istorie medievală și modernă. Omagiu profesorului Nicolae Edroiu, membru corespondent al Academiei Române*, Cluj-Napoca, 2003, pp. 413-429.

<sup>10</sup> Partition deed preserved in a certified copy from 1777 and published by N. Iorga, *Documente privitoare la Constantin-vodă Brâncoveanu la domnia și sfârșitul lui*, București, 1901, pp. 165-166.

had often appeared suspicious. The two were suspected of complicity with the Kuruc of Emeric Thököly, then with those of Francis Rákóczi II, with the German defectors from the imperial army who had sought refuge in Wallachia. They also allegedly caused some disturbances and malfunctions in the delivery of the correspondence between Sibiu and Vienna. To these were added the plottings against Brâncoveanu, orchestrated by his opponents from the princely courts of Târgoviște and Bucharest or in the world of the embassies from Istanbul and other European capitals.

Amid this rather tense situation, devoid of full confidence, the Romanian voivode's diplomatic efforts with the Austrian officials could hardly materialise in a personal protection document and in the right to purchase estates in Transylvania. Older, insistent interventions in this regard came to fruition only in 1701, when Emperor Leopold granted "his German prince" Constantin Brâncoveanu<sup>11</sup> the letter patent requested,<sup>12</sup> which was reinforced in 1706 by Joseph I, the successor to the imperial throne.<sup>13</sup> The ensuing political and military events, especially the Russian-Turkish War of 1711, prompted the Romanian voivode and some of the Cantacuzino family members (Steward Constantin Cantacuzino and Sword-Bearer Mihai Cantacuzino) to intervene earnestly with the emperor, through the intercession of secretaries Teodor Ladislau Dindar and Peter Grienner, for obtaining new letters patent, required in case of a refuge to Transylvania. These were granted in August 1711<sup>14</sup> and reconfirmed by the new emperor Charles VI in March 1712, on condition that the beneficiaries should leave Transylvania in case of war against the Turks.<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the right to buy estates in Transylvania, the issue dragged on for years, even though the Romanian voivode had received from the emperor the title of Prince of the Holy Roman-German Empire (1695), a quality in which he could *de jure* acquire by purchase and pledge, houses, villages and parts of villages in the neighbouring country. However, the War Council and the Aulic Chamber in Vienna mightily opposed such practices, reluctantly acknowledging the older princely purchases and constantly preventing the acquisition of new ones. Moreover, several transactions were cancelled, as was the case of the purchase, in 1708, of the four villages (*vier Dörfer*) of the noble Kuruc Stephen Gyulai, pledged for a long time on account of financial debt to Brâncoveanu. The voivode failed to obtain from the Viennese military and legal officials the enactment of his ownership over the estate, the reason invoked being the status of fiscal goods derived by seizure from a refugee

---

<sup>11</sup> For this title, obtained on 30 January 1695, see Virg. Drăghiceanu, "Constantin Brâncoveanu conte al Regatului ungar și principe al Sacrului Imperiu Roman. Seme și portret," in *Convorbiri Literare*, XLIX(1915), No. 9, pp. 928-935; N. Iorga, "Les diplômes impériaux de Constantin Brâncoveanu, prince de Valachie," in *Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen*, XIV(1937), No. 7-9, pp. 177-181; Ileana Căzan-Neagu, "Armeriile, stema și sigiliul lui Constantin Brâncoveanu," in *Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu*, Craiova, 2004, pp. 156-159.

<sup>12</sup> Const. Giurescu, N. Dobrescu, *Documente și regeste privitoare la Constantin Brâncoveanu*, București, 1907, pp. 196-197 and 294-295.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 197.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 207-210.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 217-223.

abroad.<sup>16</sup> Basically, the prince obtained the definitive approval of his right to purchase immovable goods in Transylvania, at the insistence of the same Dindar, under the imperial decree of 24 May 1713.<sup>17</sup> This order was accompanied by a number of restrictive instructions in the subsidiary, some caused by the opposition of the Saxons and nobles, such as the authorities' concealment thereof in "due silence." Furthermore, the transactions that preceded the contracts were to be reported individually in Vienna for approval, and the Gubernium of Transylvania had to be informed about them prior to their conclusion.<sup>18</sup> Although this long-lasting, patient effort of Constantin Brâncoveanu was eventually resolved, its delay and postponement prove, together with the precautions taken by the officials and the Estates, that the princely purchases were regarded and accepted if not with hostility, then at least with reluctance.

In these circumstances, when the armed confrontations between the imperial forces or the Labanc and the Kuruc in Transylvania did not offer reassuring prospects at all, the Romanian voivode had to ensure the peace of the country and good neighbourliness, to maintain full neutrality and show a favourable attitude towards the military officials, to the War Council in Vienna and to its representatives, the general-commanders from Sibiu. This meant, among other things, not only facilitating the correspondence of Generals Rabutin, Kriechbaum or Stainville with Vienna, but also secretly transmitting news about the deeds of the Kuruc and their leaders, about the plundering of the country and the frame of mind of the population, about the combatants' intentions and the movement of troops, about the resources available to them and the result of the military confrontations they participated in. According to a letter Constantin Brâncoveanu addressed, in October 1706, to Baron Christoph Ignaz von Quarient, Vienna's extraordinary envoy to Istanbul, the news about the Kuruc were supplemented by information about the Tatars, the Turks, etc.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the Romanian voivode was able to honour such requests, even when coming from the Turks, as he took advantage of the wealth of information that converged towards his country, situated at a crossroads, in the proximity of the Tatars, the Cossacks, the Poles, the Russians, the pashas by the Danube and the rebellious Kuruc.

To fulfil effectively this multiple role of credible informant for the imperial forces, the Turks and the Kuruc, Constantin Brâncoveanu needed not only a well-organised network of secret agents and emissaries, but also a certain approval and

---

<sup>16</sup> Const. Giurescu, N. Dobrescu, *Documente și regeste privitoare la Constantin Brâncoveanu*, București, 1907, pp. 173-175 and 229. The ruler retrieved the money given to the seller, according to his secret notes, only on 15 October 1712: "They brought from Dindar the money Ghiulai owed us, which General Staemvil <Stainville> gave them, and they took the estate that was placed as pledge for this money..... tl. 900," apud Ion-Radu Mircea, *Jurnalul catastrofi 1709-1714*, Slatina, 2014, p.102.

<sup>17</sup> Hungarian National Archives, B 16, db. 45684; a copy of the document, preserved in the Romanian National Archives, Sibiu County Service, Brukenenthal Collection, was published by I. Lupaș, *Documente istorice privitoare la moșiile brâncovenesti din Transilvania și Oltenia 1654-1823*, Cluj, 1933, pp. 36-37.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 30-39.

<sup>19</sup> Eudoxiu Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, VI (1700-1750), București, 1878, pp. 58-59; Paul Cernovodeanu, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-113.

freedom of action from those concerned. Only with their knowledge and consent, of Turkey, the suzerain power, above all, were there possible, within certain limits, the good relations and the rich exchange of letters with the warring parties (the imperial armies and the Kuruc) or potentially rival parties (the imperial and the Turkish armies). In practice, it was known that nothing could be obtained without giving something in return, including as regards the news about the rivalries and the evolution of military conflicts in Transylvania.

Against the background of permanently providing mutual information to the conflicting parties, the Romanian voivode was able to show his usefulness, without, however, assuming any military obligations and commitments, limiting himself to maintaining a benevolent neutrality. Within its frameworks and under the pressure of the ongoing events, he endeavoured, in his capacity as ruler of a neighbouring country with prestige at the time, to respond to the requests for help coming from either the imperial officials and the nobility supporting them, or from the Kuruc camp. Hence, the regularity and intensity of his epistolary exchange with the German military commanders in Sibiu and Braşov, with some of their noble associates, such as Ladislau Bethlen, or, conversely, with Francis Rákóczi II and his collaborators, above all, with Lawrence Pekri and Michael Mikes.<sup>20</sup> To solve more important issues and, generally, to strengthen good neighbourly or friendship relations, he also resorted to sending messengers and emissaries, as was the case of the Kuruc envoys Iacob Grabarics (1707)<sup>21</sup> and Pápai János (1708).<sup>22</sup>

Regarding the correspondence Constantin Brâncoveanu carried, at the time, with Transylvania, some clarifications are required. The correspondence the voivode and the high dignitaries of the country received has not been preserved to this day. Presumably, when the prince was deposed and executed, most of the letters, if there were still any left, were destroyed. In addition, unlike in Transylvania, in Wallachia it was not customary to copy some letters of interest and put them into circulation. About the rich correspondence Constantin Brâncoveanu received, we have reliable information from several letters sent to the Transylvanian, central and city officials, to the Kuruc leaders headed by Francis Rákóczi II, to great nobles and merchants, to various clergymen, etc. The letters Latin included in the annexes of the present study actually represent such a correspondence of replies, sent by the voivode to the noble Ladislau Bethlen, in Sibiu and Vienna in the years 1707-1709, under autograph signature in Cyrillic script and with the application of the princely seal, as well as with a legend in Slavic or Latin.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The correspondence in Latin and Hungarian the with leaders of the Kuruc was published by Paul Cernovodeanu, "Din corespondența diplomatică a lui Constantin Brâncoveanu," in *Revista Arhivelor*, LXII(1985), No. 3, pp. 339-343; LXIII(1986), No.1, pp. 56-62; No. 3, pp. 313-315.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, LXIII(1986), No. 1, pp. 57-59.

<sup>22</sup> *Törökországi naplói*, Benda Kálmán ed., Budapest, 1963, pp. 266-269; *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, VIII, București, 1983, pp. 231-233.

<sup>23</sup> The National Archives, Cluj County Branch (SJAN Cluj), Bethlen de Criş Fund, No. 37, leaves 1-8. The princely letters of 31 November 1708 and 10 August 1709 carry the voivode's red wax seal, which is well preserved and has the following legend in Latin: "† CONSTANTINVS BASARABA BRANC.

Although they were more numerous and drafted according to usual protocol, also in Latin, the letters addressed to the Romanian prince by Comes Ladislau Bethlen, the Gubernium representative at the Court of Vienna, have not been preserved. Through their content, Brâncoveanu's answers are part of the effort to preserve and perpetuate, in the spirit of a generation-old traditions, the good relations and the friendship with the leading representatives of the nobility in the principality. In this case the recipient of the princely letters was a pro-Habsburg noble, influential in the Aulic circles in Vienna and the member of a prestigious Transylvanian family, which gave the country a number of politicians, from chancellors to princely and, then, Gubernium councillors. Given the establishment of Habsburg dominion in Transylvania, Ladislau Bethlen (1675-1717) opted, along with Governor George Bánffy, Treasurer Stephen Apor, Aulic Chancellor Samuel Kálnoki and others, to support the strengthening of the new political regime. He tried to benefit from adopting this position, becoming Gubernium councillor and Supreme Comes of Târnava County. He carried out several missions in Vienna at the Gubernium's behest, as its permanent representative, culminating with his membership in the country's Deputation (*Landesdeputation*), established in 1709. During the war of the Kuruc (1703-1711), he was constantly in the pro-imperial camp, being used by the nobles to settle their often tense relations with the Emperor and the Court in Vienna.

In the circumstances of the military confrontation and uncertain roads in Transylvania, the correspondence of the officials in Sibiu with Vienna was conducted across Wallachia; so was the movement of people, including of Adam Zöldi, the servant, for the connections with Vienna, of Ladislau Bethlen and other nobles from the families Bánffy, Wesselényi, Kálnoki, etc. Adam Zöldi's visit and sojourn at the princely courts enabled Constantin Brâncoveanu to learn from him information and news from the imperial capital and from Transylvania concerning the fights of the Kuruc or the results of the Anglo-Dutch mediation efforts. The presence in Vienna of Comes Ladislau Bethlen over the course of several years<sup>24</sup> and the Romanian voivode's good relations with him could bring the latter other important services too, such as the mediation and quicker fulfilment of his requests regarding the renewal of his letters patent and the right to buy estates across the mountains. This would explain the generosity of the voivode who, in the letter he sent from Bucharest on 5 May 1707, reminded Bethlen that in the past he had lent him 4,000 florins but that now, due to his expenditures with the Porte, he could only give his secretary Adam Zöldi 100 leonine thalers for the journey he would undertake to Vienna.<sup>25</sup>

Amid the same financial shortages, in the fall of 1707, more precisely on 27 September and 27 November, Constantin Brâncoveanu received two letters from Ladislau Bethlen in which he was asked to pay the latter's debts to the Magistrate of

---

D. G. ELECTVS VAIVODA ET PRIPS. VALAE" whose integral form is: "† *Constantinus Basaraba Brancovanus Dei gratia electus vaivoda et princeps Valachiae.*"

<sup>24</sup> According to one of Bethlen's statements, at a dinner on 28 October 1708, this sojourn had already lasted 5 years, cf. Wesselényi István, *Sanyarú világ. Napló 1703-1708*, Közzéteszi Demény Lajos, Magyari András, II, București, 1985, p. 702.

<sup>25</sup> SJAN Cluj, Bethlen de Criș Fund, No. 37, leaf 1.



the town of Sibiu. In the reply he sent from Bucharest on 5 February 1708, the prince stated that “because of the times,” he could not meet this request for now, but that out of respect for the old friendship with him and his predecessors, he would strive to do so. He also said he had been informed by his man in Sibiu, probably Teodor Ladislau Dindar, whom he had ordered on three occasions to intervene with the town magistrate regarding his debt, but that the institution from Sibiu would not give him a reply in writing. He would learn further, more extensive details from Adam Zöldi.<sup>26</sup>

The following letter, sent by the prince from Potlogi on 17 July 1708, was one of courtesy rather, occasioned by the return of Secretary Adam Zöldi to Brâncoveanu’s court. On this occasion, Ladislau Bethlen was reassured, once again, of his usual friendship and good will, the carrier of the letter being ready to confirm that the voivode was ready and willing to offer his services. The letter included a question about Comes Nicholas Bethlen,<sup>27</sup> former Chancellor of Transylvania, charged with treason and sent under escort from custody in Sibiu into prison in Vienna, where he would actually pass away.<sup>28</sup>

As it was customary with many prominent nobles of Transylvania, as well as with some of the senior officers of the Saxon towns, Ladislau Bethlen requested from Cerneț, in a letter dated 1 November 1708, that the Romanian voivode should grant him some favours, presumably by exempting him from customs duty on imported wines or taxes for the livestock raised in the Wallachia. In his reply from 7 November 1708, Constantin Brâncoveanu promised, after greetings and good wishes, his approval of those requested within the limit of possibility. He was to give commands to his captains in this regard. He concluded by reiterating the greetings and with the assurance that he would remain the same friend of old.<sup>29</sup>

Since in Transylvania there were endless military confrontations between the imperial forces and the Kuruc, from mid-1707 on the latter embarking on a path of defeat, many of the vanquished were forced to go into exile, seeking refuge across the Carpathians. Despite the authorities’ efforts, both in Moldova and in Wallachia, roads and journeys became highly unsafe. Various fugitives and defectors from the army, political outcasts and prison escapees were constrained by shortages and deprived of food, regrouping themselves as highwaymen and robbing travellers. The insecurity of movements mainly affected various couriers and envoys, including those in the service of Comes Ladislau Bethlen. Hence, his intervention with the Romanian voivode that under such special circumstances, he should be offered support and protection while travelling through the country. The awaited answer was positive, Brâncoveanu promising him, in the letter dated 31 November 1708, the same support he had been offered on other similar occasions.<sup>30</sup>

In the winter of 1708-1709, the situation appears to have worsened considerably and the measures taken by the voivode had proved insufficient, further

<sup>26</sup> SJAN Cluj, Bethlen de Criș Fund, No. 37, leaf 2.

<sup>27</sup> SJAN Cluj, Bethlen de Criș Fund, No. 37, leaf 3.

<sup>28</sup> Nicolae Bethlen, *Descrierea vieții sale de către el însuși*, trans. Francisc Pap, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 304.

<sup>29</sup> SJAN Cluj, Bethlen de Criș Fund, No. 37, leaves 4 and 7.

<sup>30</sup> SJAN Cluj, Bethlen de Criș Fund, No. 37, leaf 5.

attacks and robberies of travellers being registered. It was in such an incident one of that Ladislau Bethlen's men was killed, and this was brought to the attention of the voivode through a special envoy of the Transylvanian nobleman. In the letter he sent Bethlen from Târgoviște, on 10 August 1709, Constantin Brâncoveanu was sad to confess that he had learned about the murder, that the perpetrators had been caught and would be prosecuted and punished accordingly, in keeping with the principle of an "eye for an eye, a finger for a finger" (*oculum pro oculo, digitum pro digito*). He concluded with the usual greetings and good wishes, saying he was ready to be of service to him.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to conveying the concrete nature of various events, the language of the letters remains marked by caution, designed to avoid revealing the secrets hidden behind the skilfully worded texts. In fact, the succinct written message was almost always accompanied by a thorough verbal one, transmitted, in this case, through Secretary Adam Zöldi, the customary bearer of these letters. The Latin text of these epistles encapsulates hidden meanings and connotations, offering only implied hints, specific, in a way, to language diplomatic. Princely scribes knew to use concealment in order to eschew stating certain things directly, which, if known to third parties, could have done harm. The letters proved to be a model of adroitness. The importance of the message resides less in its direct information as in the ideas suggested by cunning words, the text remaining formulated in general terms.

The vocabulary of the letters, the formulas of address and end, with the strict and proper use of the titles referring to institution and to the positions of individuals, all these involved a long tradition and a thorough practice of epistolary exchanges. Constantin Brâncoveanu's diplomatic correspondence, "written in a Baroque Latin,"<sup>32</sup> is distinguished by the elegance of its style and of the protocol formulas. Some phrases in the letters refer to precepts in the sacred texts, while others occasion reflections on legal philosophy (the law of talion), etc. The lack of firm promises to fulfil various requests, the procrastination of replying to certain letters, the expression of formal regrets accompanied by the usual courtesy and verbal politeness represented customary rhetorical practices in the chancelleries of the time. The use of such writerly practices in Brâncoveanu's chancellery proves, above all, its professionalism, achieved through the use of specialist permanent staff, with a good knowledge of foreign languages and familiarised with the issues of diplomacy.

It can be said that in an era of military confrontations and overt attempts to reconfigure the European political map, diplomacy and the mutual exchange of letters and emissaries between Wallachia and Transylvania showed their full effectiveness towards maintaining good neighbourly relations between the two countries. It was to this epistolary flux that the correspondence between Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu and Comes Ladislau Bethlen also belonged, representing one of the facets of the

<sup>31</sup> SJAN Cluj, Bethlen de Criș Fund, No. 37, leaves 6-8.

<sup>32</sup> Ana-Cristina Halichias, "Despre traducerea documentelor de arhivă scrise în limba latină," in *Revista Arhivelor*, LXIII(1986), No. 1, p. 77.

\* The envelope and seal are missing.

complex ensemble of connections established between the two neighbouring countries.

\*  
\*                      \*

## I

5 May 1707, Bucharest.

Illustrissime Domine Comes amic<e> nobis observandissime.

Quod ob plurimas extraordinarias mandato Portae fiendas expensas, pro petitione Illustritatis Vestrae (quam alias libenter praestitissemus 4/m florenorum mutuo dare, pro nunc non potuerimus, non nobis, sed tempori annuit velit imputari; verum tamen Illustritatis Vestrae secretario, domino Adamo Zoldi (qui nemine Illustritatis Vestrae quo itineris ad eandem Viennam faciendo, a nobis petiit) centum talleros leoninos mutuo dari curavimus, ulteriorem quoque nostrum favorem erga Illustritatem Vestram, pro ratione, ac opportunitate temporis praestandum pollicemur. His de reliquo cuncta quo voto Illustritatis vestrae dum apprecamur prosperas manemus.

Eiusdem Illustritatis Vestrae amici benevoli Kostandin Brankovan (in Cyrillic script)

Datum Bukureszti, die 5 Maji 1707.

The National Archives, Cluj County Branch (SJAN Cluj), *Bethlen de Criş Fund*, No. 37, leaf 1\*.

## II

5 February 1708, Bucharest.

Illustrissime Domine Comes, Domine observandissime.

Tam de vigesima septima Septembris, quam etiam vigesima septima Novembris anni hinc elapsi, exaratas Illustritatis Vestrae non ita quidem accepimus, continentiasque ipsarum audivimus, et licet modernis temporibus cum afflicta tota patria inconsuetis gravaminibus oppressi simus, ut vix sufficere possimus; tamen ob antiquam, quam coluimus cum antecessoribus Illustritatis Vestrae amicitiam, propensi fuisset gratificari in desiderio eiusdem; nisi amplius â nostro Cibinio homine informaremur (cui desuper ordines ter dederamus, ut cum magistrata rem conferat, et reale â se responsum accipiat) Cibiniensem magistratum nolle recognitiales nobis super debito Illustritatis Vestrae extradere, sicut haec ipsa ab aliis, tum â secretario suo, domino Zöldi intelligere fusius poterit Illustritatis Vestra, quam his divinae protectione committimus manentes.

Illustritatis vestrae.

Ad serviend<um> parati Konstandin Brankovan (in Cyrillic script)  
Bukuresti, 5 Februarii 1708.

SJAN Cluj, *Fond Bethlen din Criș*, No. 37, leaf 2\*.

### III

17 July 1708, Potlogi.

Illustrissime Domine, Domine observandissime.

Occasione, quâ pergit ad Illustritatem Vestram suus secretarius, generosus dominus Zöldi praesentibus eandem invisere voluisse illa antiqua cum antecessoribus Illustritatis Vestrae praehabita ac cum eadem continuata amicitia, bonaque cointelligentia desiderans, ut ipsam in optatissimo salutis et prosperitatis statu offendant.

Dicto domino secretario, que in respectu ! Illustritatis Vestrae sunt, tam hic, quam pro viatico praestita, benevolo animo ipse exponere, atque declarare Illustritati Vestrae poterit, qui aequè in aliis promptissimus et paratissimus semper sum; id unum adjungendo annue desiderans, ut quandoque rerum occurrentias, quarum materiam non reor modernis temporibus sterilem, mihi esse sua bonitate, sicut et de honorifica persona illustrissimi domini comitis Nicolai Bethlen, in quo nam statu repetiatur? occasionibus datis significare dignetur, quod dum â sua nobilissima humanitate praestolor, maneo.

Illustritatis Vestrae.

Ad servitia paratissimi

Konstandin Brankovan (in Cyrillic script)

Potloczy, 17 Julii 1708.

SJAN Cluj, *Fond Bethlen din Criș*, No. 37, leaf 3.

### IV

7 November 1708, Târgoviște.

Illustrissime Domine, Domine observandissime.

Quas sub prima praesentis Czerneczio ad me Illustritas Vestra esse sua bonitate exaravit, grato accepi animo, congratulatio ejus foelicem redditum, in incolumitate, pariterque usque terminum prosequi iter feliciter inauguror.

Quod aliquas gratiarum actiones dicere nitetur Illustritas Vestra, non esse quare cum competenter. Amico et vicino occurri nequit, tum propter concussae Patriae vires (quas videre licet) tum propter vias diseo modas; id tamen quae possibilitatis sunt, et capitaneis meis Illustritati Vestrae ad succurrendum ordinavi, bono animo acceptare Illustritas Vestra velit, qui et in aliis, quae pro posse fuerint, sicut hactenus gratificari benevole, tanquam amico antiquitate illustri paratissimo animo sunt, unde ejus

quoque allegatam divertendi huc non potuisse, causam arendes accepto, gratumque adventum promissum praesbolans maneo.

Illustritatis Vestrae.

Ad servitia paratus Konstandin Brankovan (in Cyrillic script)

Tergovisti 7 Novembris 1708.

< *Appendix: the envelope with the address and the red wax seal of the ruler, very well preserved. Legend in the Slavonic language* >

Illustrissimo Domino, Domino Ladislao comiti â Bethlen, Excelsi Regii Transilvaniae Gubernii, ad Augustam Aulam Deputato, Domino Amico Observandissimo.

Cibinii.

SJAN Cluj, *Fond Bethlen din Criș*, No. 37, leaf 4, 7.

## V

31 November 1708, Târgoviște.

Illustrissime Domine, Domine observandissime.

Quod esse sinum datis humanissimis literis, conetur illustritas vestrae aliquas gratiarum actiones pro transitu per hanc provinciam facto pendere, id ipsum in bonitatem Illustritatem Vestrae unde et emanavit, redundat, et â me adscribitur, qui et in aliis occasionibus me promptissimum gratificari cum offeram, defectus comissos fors ob vicissitudines concussae patriae hujus ignoscendos desidero, atque maneo,

Illustritatis vestrae

Servire paratissimus Konstandin Brankovan (in Cyrillic script)

Tergovisti, 31 Novembris 1708.

< *Appendix: the envelope with the address and the red wax seal of the ruler, very well preserved. Legend in the Latin language: “† CONSTANTINVS BASARABA BRANC. D. G. ELECTVS VAIVODA ET PRIPS. VALAE” whose integral form is: “† Constantinvs Basaraba Brancovanvs Dei gratia electvs vaivoda et princeps Valachiae”* >

Illustrissimo Domino, Domino Ladislao, comiti de Bethlen, Excelsi Regni Transilvanie Gubernii ad Augustam Aulam deputatoque, Domino Observandissimo. Viennae.

SJAN Cluj, *Fond Bethlen din Criș*, No. 37, leaf 5.

## VI

10 August 1709, Târgoviște.

Illustrissime Domine, Domine observandissime.

Dolenter casum vel potius fatum occisi hominis Illustritatis Vestrae inteliximus, sed cum sint ordinarie per universum orbem mala mixta bonis; hinc pro bonis parata

merita, pro malis statuta secundum leges etiam humanas pro merita poenae; ipsis nosciis adductis huc hominibus, qui inculpantur de morte defuncti, quomodo iudicium factum, et quali poena condemnati sunt praesens homo expressus Illustritati Vestrae distincte referre poterit; sicut et de aliis requisitis, que habuit: hoc tamen firmum teneat et assecurata sit Illustritas Vestra, quam primum certitudinem de persona habituri sumus, mortem pro merita non effugiet occisor, secundum illud Divinum oculum pro oculo, digitum pro digito. Atque haec pro responso cum candido nostro et pristino amicabile affectu Illustritati Vestrae nota duximus, quam Divinae tutelae comittentes manemus.

Illustritatis vestrae

Servire paratissimi Konstandin Brankovan (in Cyrillic script)

Tergovisti, 10 Augusti 1709.

< Appendix: the envelope with the address and the red wax seal of the ruler, very well preserved. Legend in the Latin language >

Illustrissimo Domino, Domino Ladislao, comiti â Bethlen, Excelsi Regii Transilvaniae Gubernii ad Augustam Aulam deputato etc. Domino Amico Observandissimo.

Cibinii.

SJAN Cluj, *Fond Bethlen din Criș*, No. 37, f.6-8.