

VASILE BANCILA – A TEACHER’S CALLING (1st of January 1897, Braila – 10th of June 1979, Bucharest)

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*“The historical immortality of the teacher or educator
is pathetic and is a privilege!”*

(Vasile Bancila)

Key words: Vasile Bancila, professor, pedagogy book, education.

Vasile Bancila: philosopher, metaphysician, school founder, Christian Orthodox scholar, interpreter of Blaga and Radulescu-Motru, man of letters and writer, preoccupied by problems of logic, ethics, esthetics, the sociology of cultural philosophy ... But above all, teacher by calling.

A brief review of his teaching and educational activity is enlightening:

- since 1923 he is a teacher of philosophy and pedagogy at the Normal School for Boys „St. O. Iosif” in Braila, founded in 1919; in 1931 the school is closing
- in September 1931 he becomes teacher of philosophy, psychology and pedagogy at the ”Mihai Viteazul” High School, in Bucharest
- between 20th of September 1931 and the 31st of May 1932 he is school inspector for the counties Braila, Covurlui, Tecuci, Bacau
- in 1935 he is a member in the Commission for education
- 1936 - January 1937, he is assigned to the School of Trades in Braila
- February-March 1937 and during the entire school year of 1938 he is assigned at the Class of the Great Voivod Mihai
- in 20th of September 1940 he is named director of Secondary Education, proof of his technocratic skills
- in 28th January 1941 he quits and starts teaching again
- since October 1948 he is politically removed from the educations system; he never returns.

During all this time, Bancila acts with devotion and ardour, and publishes important texts in the publications of his era (*Thinking, European Idea, The Word, Review of Philosophy, The Archives for Science and Social Reform* and many others), writing, planning wide works of philosophy, psychology, anthropology, philosophy of religion, pedagogy. He can’t finish and publish these grand projects and his work becomes what we call, after 1989, „closeted”.

But what was published in volume (the interpreting study of *Lucian Blaga – Romanian Energy*, Romanian Thought Collection, Cluj, 1938, the monographical study *The Doctrine of the Energetic Personalism of Radulescu-Motru*, Romanian Culture, Bucharest, 1927, or the historico-philosophical study *The Significance of Ardeal*, „Thought and Fact”, Bucharest, 1944, and, during the communist years, only *Portraits and Significance*, - in 1987!) and especially in the specialised magazines, has placed him among the most prolific of the inter-war period and established him as an original writer, as authentic as Blaga. N. Bagdasar has found the most appropriate definition for Vasile Bancila: „The most fecund writer of his generation”.

We still don’t have a definition wide enough for **professor Bancila**, who was a teacher and educator of teachers, of high-school and trade schools, practising at the University Pedagogic Seminary, and teacher of the Voivod Mihai (he even wrote a study, „The Education of King Mihai”). His calling for paideia – the education of human spirit through philosophy and science, in ancient Greece -, **although obvious, is too little mentioned by those who reported on his destiny.** Thus, *the confidence, almost idealistic, in the bettering of the man through education and philosophy,*

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approaches what Bancila saw in Spiru Haret: "In Haret's opinion, the school is an interpreter of the actual social needs but more than this. It also has two more purposes, active and idealistic. That of producing and of preventing, to produce virtues and values that the social environment doesn't have, correcting, when needed, the vices the society has instead of virtues; to prevent the natural and positive evolution of the social corps, making it more easy and more noble."¹

This was the method and these were the ideals of professor Bancila, as proved by the thoughts of his pupils or former pupils: "We want the time to pass faster, although we know we'll be sorry, to reach where we intend to. To make flourish the knowledge we received, to make others inspire from it, as we have when we were learning with great interest. In your memory, as a saint duty, we'll try to clean of weeds the young shoots, giving them all that's needed to bloom in time.

As much as possible, we'll try to be as you: hard working in the line of duty and modest in life."²

Here is one of the answers of the professor, to the many letters of Braila's pupils:

"Paris, January 1926 My dears, Your attitude for the professor, who tries to remain your professor even after parting with you – has something infinitely emotional. Unwillingly, I thought why is your attitude so moving?

Because the emotion communicated by it, the emotion produces emotion – you are still moved! Of course: but also for two other reasons, which, for me, are the most important:

My ego has no place here. I feel deprived of vanity in front of you. It is something else, which touches and gives me the conscience of responsibility, when I see your behavior towards me: The fact that in your soul have bloomed such high feelings: You have no idea how rare I meet in people such sentiments. I am therefore happy for you and I would like never to trouble the fine and noble products of your souls. Your image in itself tormented by unusual creative ideas and shaped by such idealistic feelings – this engages me. And I would like for you to keep, all your life, the essence of your soul of now. It is difficult, but not impossible.

Secondly, you remind me of that workplace in Braila, which, of all of space's points, is most accessible for me. The representation of the world for me has that place as center – as modest for others as it may be. These must be for you, too, the teachers: all of the practical and moral philosophy of life is reduced to devoting yourself to an environment, close to you, and consider it your reason for being, even if you are completely unknown, totally modest. It doesn't matter that it's apparently small. It's worth is as fragment of the general life and as method of redemption of your soul.

This I am wishing and entrusting, thinking of you. V. Bancila"

I am reproducing in its entirety this letter to underline one of the most important traits of the way of thinking and living of Vasile Bancila: almost any subject in question was approached philosophically, with the purpose of debating or sharing it. The text above, even if only a letter addressed to students, touches upon issues of morals, human feelings as emotion, vanity or happiness, notions of ethnicity and nationalism – categories of anthropology and philosophy close to Vasile Bancila. N. Baltazar brilliantly summarized, in 1940, the way Vasile Bancila thought about ideas and communicated them: "What characterizes Bancila's philosophical activity is he places in a metaphysical plane the problems he researches, and solves them, always taking into account their metaphysical core, no matter the domain they belong to."³

As for the patriotic education, the clearest feeling of love towards the Romanian popular culture, for the traditional wisdom, this is part of the inner workings of his being, which he preaches during teaching and which he conceptualizes. Bancila thinks the excessive nationalism is "something very dangerous", he thinks that the man belonging to this land contributes with the "geographical instinct and the social one, together with the esthetic one" to raising the national culture. These are norms of life, of conscience and soul, which he is instilling in his pupils, with the desire to fill the holes left in Romanian schools by the death of the teachers, heroes of the First

¹ Vasile Băncila, Spiru Haret, in "Portraits and Significance", "Capricorn" Collection, 1987, p. 117

² From the letter of Dumitrescu D. Traian, written in the name of the 6th grade, Normal School of Boys "St.O. Iosif", Braila, dated 13/I/1926; Vasile Bancila was in his first specialization phase at the Romanian School at Fontenay-aux-Roses, Paris

³ *The History of Romanian Philosophy*, Bucharest, 1940, p. 238.

World War, and he carries on the duty to educate and instruct, because, as Bancila says: "...you must take into account that a teaching position in a village is a very high post for who understands this. *The most superior man in the world can be happy as a village teacher*".

To reach this stage of understanding of their mission in villages, as teachers, he recommends: "...to write a diary where to jot down psychological, pedagogical and social facts, and anything else you see in you and around you: in this diary we would see your first impressions and your entire struggle in a village.

Be careful to update it daily. This diary will be mostly interesting (maybe I'll read it!) and, in your lonely times, it will be a pleasant occupation. Write down observations on your own soul and the peasant psychology. Don't forget the village event connected to the calendar; write to me about this also." (Letter from Paris, dated 3rd of June 1926)

These random writings, random because life and work didn't allow him to fully dedicate himself to develop the philosophic projects, have been, for Bancila, the fabric on which he will structure his studies, published in numerous publications and read in conferences.

Although modestly constructed, many of them can be, totally or partially, considered true writing jewels, models of an original style and a fountain of ideas.

These are also tracing the portrait of the teacher who lived among books, the feeling of responsibility towards his students and his work, without coveting jobs, prizes and honors.

Also, almost all who wrote about Bancila have noticed his modesty, the lack of any vanity or desire to climb the professional and social ladder. Up to here, we are reminded of the attitude of another great man of culture from Braila, who would rather make perfectly balanced analysis of others' creation and let his own be judged by others. I am, of course, speaking about Perpessicius. So, we believe that Vasile Bancila had the common sense of the cultivated man, who is generously offering his knowledge and doesn't expect or request acknowledgment. This feeling of honor, duty, self-discipline, is easily understandable: as he was assigned various posts which required exercising authority, he gives up easily, returning to teaching and close to his family.

What could be more illustrative for this attitude than his request for a former pupil from Braila, who moved to the "Mihai Viteazul" High School in Bucharest, to compare the quality of his lessons to that of the professors at this famous school, for fear he is "inferior".

Here is the answer: "Not exactly. Mister Hanes is a teacher who, according to me, is not concerned with his pupils. He is also very ruthless. For example, a month ago, in the last day of school, because due to the school's move to Pache Protopopescu street, we've had three weeks vacation, he said that whoever wants can come at 4 o'clock at the new High School, to visit it with him. I didn't think this will benefit me much and I didn't go. Only 3-4 boys went.

You should have seen mister Hanes in the first class after vacation: He screams like a madman. He called us: pigs, beasts, imbecile, he slapped a few, pupils with good grades, which is clearly unfair, he yelled to us all: - "Dare to study with me again!"

Anyway, not even before we could compare his "study" to your classes. I can only imagine what is next! ". (From the letter of the pupil Theodor Zwiebel, Bucharest, 1924)

Years later, Bancila will become professor at this important High School, and the relations he establishes with his pupils are deep, beyond the usual boundaries in education. He was dedicated to his mission as educator, he fulfilled his duty completely and combined the teaching skills with those of the psychologist, fact confirmed by the letters he receives from the pupils at „Mihai Viteazul” after he renounces his post in Bucharest to come back to his native town.

„Bucharest 20/IX 1933,

Esteemed professor,

I had an unpleasant surprise when, at the philosophy class, you didn't show up, and although we knew about your move back to Braila, we had hoped in one of those random print errors...

In our minds, the notion of philosophy teacher had become connected to the notion of friend. Over this regret, deeply felt, there was also a feeling of bitterness...

The philosophy classes are now monotonous and they lack the spirit they once had...

Moisescu Mircea, Teclu V., C. Greulescu ș.a.

As he was highly recommended by his pedagogical skills and his high professionalism, he becomes psychology professor (together with other elite teachers as Constantin C. Giurescu, Nicolae Iorga, Simion Mehedinti, great names of Romanian culture), at the special class of King Mihai, where values such as cultivating traditions, respecting discipline and Christian ethics, friendship, common sense, the pride of being Romanian, virtues not only preached but practiced by Vasile Bancila, were fundamental elements of this special class.

Here is how Vasile Bancila's personality as professor in this class, known as that of Voivod Mihai, was remembered by two of the colleagues of the future King Mihai: "Of the mentioned teachers, Vasile Bancila distinguished himself by having the skills of a "complete teacher", with vast knowledge of philosophy, literary talent and the talent of observer."⁴ (Ioan Jurchescu, lawyer); or: "Psychology was taught by Vasile Bancila, unanimously appreciated by pupils as the most gifted teacher."⁵ (Ion Benone Petrescu, navy captain)

If the moral, spiritual, intellectual profile of professor Bancila can be recreated through the impressions of his pupils, the above mentioned and many others who didn't make it here, his level as theoretician and teacher is proven by the texts he published, many as studies in magazines, or manuscripts such as *Pedagogy of Irony* or *The Religious Education of the Child*, which couldn't be brought in the public eye until our years.

The initial text of *Pedagogy of Irony*, final work in pedagogical practice at the University Pedagogical Seminar in Bucharest, was repeatedly modified for publication. Well written, the study⁶ comprises four chapters (I. *Introductory words*; II. *First element of irony: laughter*; III. *Second element of irony: pragmatism*; IV. *Irony and Education*). Besides the new subject - "the pedagogy of irony" or "the irony of pedagogy", as Bancila states, whose functions and positive and negative implications in the process of education it formulates, we can tell that Bancila was attracted to this category, easily approached from a moral, psychological, sociological point of view, to analyze it in the process of education, to "revolutionize", as the author states, domains which seem exhausted. This is where the originality of his writings arises, and associated with his writing style, much appreciated by experts; it's a combination which places him among the elite of the inter-war thinkers.

As for the religious education of the child, a complete outlook on Vasile Bancila's view was possible after 1989, when a volume gathered all relevant texts.⁷ What is obvious is the need for a permanent religious education, so that in the soul and conscience of the child is deposited the Christian morals and it is anticipated the negative consequence of human alienation, through the forceful separation of science from religion. Along with the constancy of religious education, Vasile Bancila stresses the importance of the calling of those assigned to teach religion, as the lack of calling produces an irreparable harm to the soul and conscience of the child.

"...the attitude of the educator. This is, without doubt, what we can call "primum movens" in the birth and destiny of the educational process. The soul presence of the educator determines the fate of the education. This is the truth that he must obsessively know! (...) Each man suggests a different atmosphere. There are those who embalm everything around as a rose and those who infect all, as a ferret."⁸

He highly regarded the religious purifying feelings, as the following words are showing: "The rarest intelligence is moral intelligence and the religious intelligence. The first helps people integrate life, the other transcends it".

Vasile Bancila: **professor**. Elite professor highly regarded as educator and theoretician. The moral standing, his enthusiasm, his honesty, the energy he spread around him, turned him into a model for generations of pupils. Education – a mission turned moral duty by the inter-war

⁴ <http://www.banaterra.eu/romana/ioan-jurchescu-fost-singurul-banatean-coleg-clasa-speciala-cu-regele-mihai-i>

⁵ http://www.centrul-cultural-pitesti.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4925:cabinetul-de-stampe&catid=426:cafeneaua-literara-aprilie-2012&Itemid=113

⁶ The manuscript is part of the Memorial Fund Vasile Bancila of the Museum of Braila, category Thesaurus.

⁷ *The Religious Education of the Child*, "Istros" publishing house, Braila, 1994.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p.105-106.

generation of teachers – was, above all, Vasile Bancila's ideal; he followed it with determination, passion, talent, he created a fusion between himself and its profession, so that when you approach his spirit, it is hard to part the man from the professor, the professor from the philosopher ... And if the fulfillment of the personal ideal in one's profession can be illustrated, among the chosen ones will be this name: Vasile Bancila.



1. 1925, June; in front of the Normal School for Boys "St. O. Iosif" in Braila;
Vasile Bancila is on the first row, the first on the left side.



2. „Autumn 1925”. Handwriting on the back.
Vasile Bancila on the second row, in the middle.



3. Alumni of the Normal School for Boys “St. O. Iosif”, Class of 1928;

Vasile Bancila on the first row, first on the left side.

The main role in our preparation as teachers, (...) had professor Vasile Bancila. The word of the teacher-professor Vasile Bancila, not only through its ideas, but also by the way it was said, carved in our souls high characters.

Yes! Because, by themselves, these teaching lessons of our professor were firstly educational and then instructive. (...)

The professor philosopher was our master, our grand master. Each of us still carries a piece of the treasure which characterized our illustrious professor Vasile Bancila. Teaching was not a job for him; teaching was a calling, a need of his human spirituality.

Ioan Petru Negraru, Class of 1928

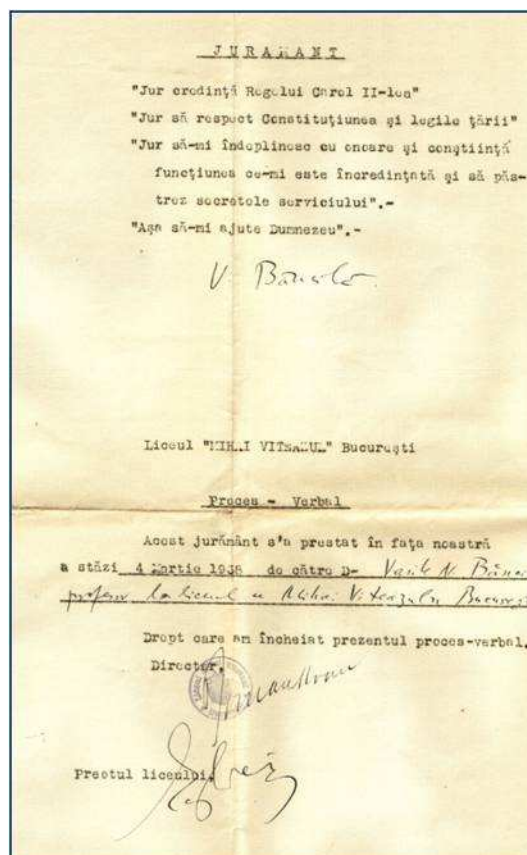


4. Opening the school year, September 1929.

Vasile Bancila on the first row, the third from the right.



5. "June 1929": handwriting on the back; Vasile Bancila, professor at the School of Application, Braila.



6. Vasile Bancila's oath in 4th of March 1938, as teacher at "Mihai Viteazul" High School, Bucharest.

Scumpe Vasile Băncilă,

mi-ai făcut o mare bucurie cu știrea
 că ai devenit profesorul Mareșului Voivod.
 Cine a avut această inspirație genială?
 Pentru un talent pedagogic ca al tău,
 o asemenea sarcină mi se pare otândușă
 dela Dzeu! Noroc și sănătate! Și
 încă profesor de filosofie! Asta tocmai
 în momentul când noi doi punem
 la punct o filosofie românească!
 Și să nu crezi într-o armonie prestabi-
 lită?

Sunt de asemenea foarte încântat că
 ți-a plăcut noua mea carte. După
 această părere, altele ale altora

apropo, că nici nu mă interesează.
 Comandantul dela Cluj, care n-a fi pește
 n-are câteva săptămâni, m'a scos
 iarăși din activitatea mea literară.
 De slăb isprăviri data chestia, că
 m'am plictisit! Actul mimic mon.
 Prințesa Doamnei Doamnei Doamnei
 Stăse toate îngustele
 L. Blaga

7-8. Lucian Blaga's letter of congratulations for the job of professor
 at the Great Voivod Mihai's Class, school year 1937-1938.



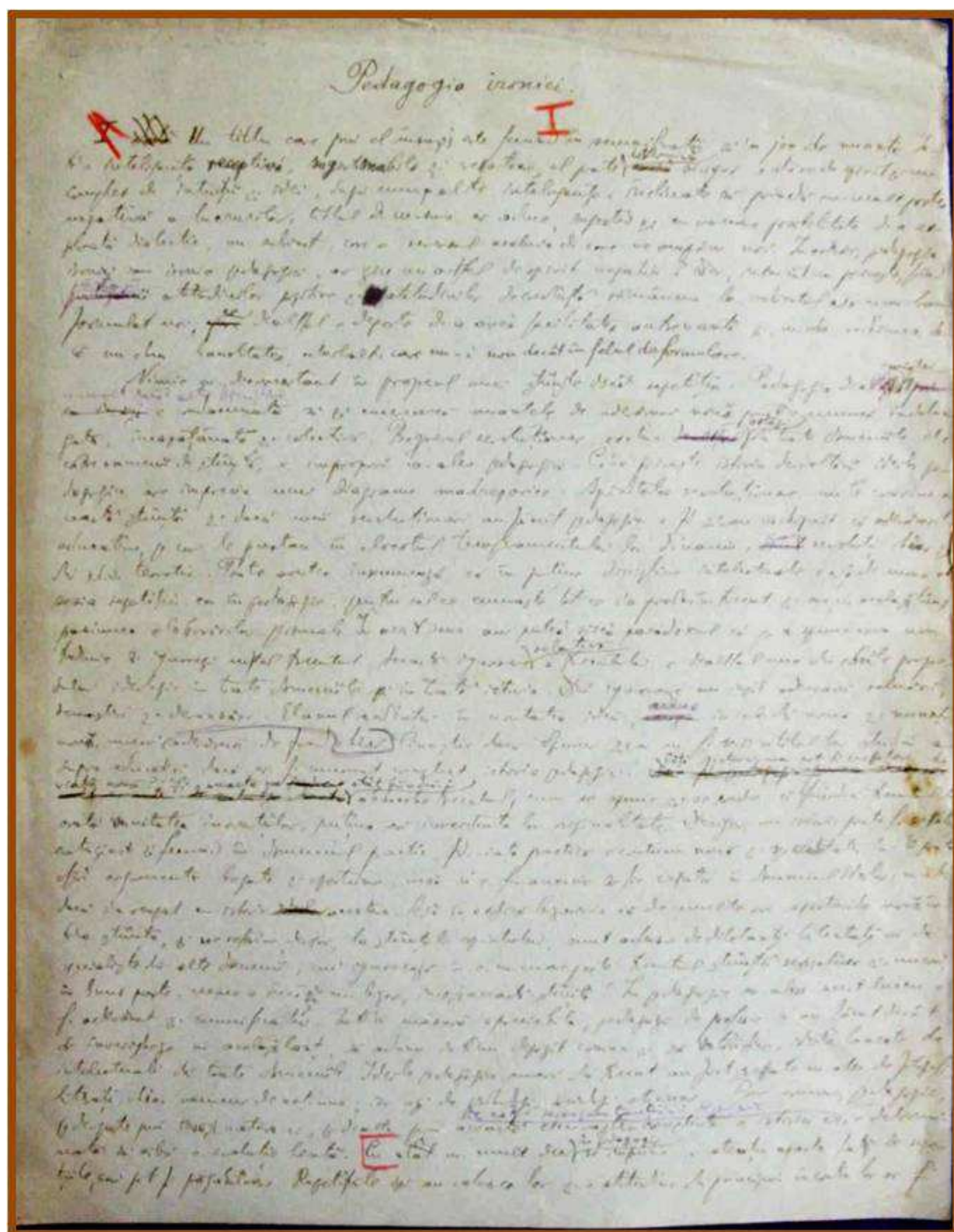
9. Teaching at Great Voivod Mihai's special Class;
 Vasile Băncilă's handwriting on the back: "8th of July 1938".



10-11. Between February - March 1937 and the school year 1938
he is assigned to Great Voivod Mihai's Class; Vasile Bancila, in the back.



12-13. The summer of 1937. Vasile Băncilă, professor , chaperoning "the palatine class"
in the traditional field trip through the country, in which the "practical synthesis lessons" took place.



14. The Pedagogy of Irony, mass., 1921; reviewed in 1925-1926 and 1940

Was in Vasile Bancila's family until July 1998 when it was bought by the Museum of Braila, Memorialist Section; The text was reviewed several times by the author for corrections, additions, rearranging of the basic structure; partially published (p. 30-39) in *Manuscriptum*, year XXIX, no. 3-4 /1998.