

The Child Abandonment in Bucharest in Early 19th Century (1830-1840)

Nicoleta Roman

The modern times were marked by changes emerging even at the level of child perception. The concern for the child and what he represents for society becomes more and more clear. There were adopted several decisions aimed at preventing child mortality, protecting and raising orphans so as to be further reintegrated within society and geared in activities meant to enable them make ends meet. We are not going to approach the subject of the children whose future was secured by the family, but of those whose destiny was left to the hands of the unknown. Abandoned, renegade, undesired, they were struggling to stay alive so as to find a place among their kin. The *Cutie milei* [= Charity box] was created by Prince Alexandru Ipsilanti in the 18th century (1775) in this purpose. The mutual assistance fund concerned only those who were living an “amputated life”¹. In fact, the main concerns of the Princely Court were to ensure physical survival, to preserve parental inheritance, and last but no least to educate these orphans. The orphans had been monitored by this capacitated organisation since 1780 under the *Pravnilceasca condică* [= the Register of Laws], and later on under the *Codul Callimah* [= Callimah Code] and *Legiuirea Caragea* [= Caragea Act]². The *Regulamentul Organic* [Organic Regulation] required a new directorate destined to cover the *Institutul Sărmanilor, al Cerșetorilor și Casele Ajutătoare* [= Institute of the Poor and Beggars and the Aid Funds]. In January 1832 the structure of the new organisation was settled and named the *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine* [= Ephorate of the Charities]. Apart from the three ephors (*biv vel serdar* [= cavalry commander] Gr. Obedeanu, *biv vel comis* [= equeery] Gr. Cantacuzino and *aga* [= police prefect] Constantin Bălăceanu³) there were a director, a cashier, a registering clerk and two *logofeți* [= chancellors], all

¹ Ligia Livadă Cadeschi, *De la milă la filantropie: instituții de asistare a săracilor în Țara Românească și Moldova în sec. XVIII*, Bucharest, 2001. The expression is used in the chapter “Copii săraci. Copii orfani. Instrucția școlară gratuită, tutela și orfanotrografia”. There are similar mentions related to this subject in Constanța Ghițulescu, *Forme juridice și practice de transmitere a patrimoniului. Femeia și zestrea sa în Țara Românească în secolul XVIII*, “Revista Istorică”, XIV, 5-6, 2003, p. 208-209.

² *Pravnilceasca condică (1780)*, Bucharest, 1957, p. 105; *Codul Callimach*, Bucharest, 1958, p. 141 and 143.

³ In May 1832, a few months after its foundation, *aga* Bălăceanu was appointed together with *serdarul* Obedeanu and *comisul* Cantacuzino to “*completui numărul a trei efori / complete the number of ephors*”, which leads us to believe that the first ephor Șt. Moshu was no longer a leader of the organisation. D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 1/1832, p. 13.

having a well-established salary. Although from the very beginning the Ephorate wished to be an independent organisation, it was not able to gain this privilege, being subordinated to the *Logofeția Pricinilor Bisericești* [= Chancellery of Ecclesiastic Affairs], which was an agent between the Prince and those who suffered:

“îngrijirea asupra tuturor așezămintelor caselor făcătoare de bine și folos<ului> obștească fiind asupra Logofeției Pricinilor Bisericești, carele este mijlocitor și organul trebuințelor acestor așezămături către domn / all charities and public welfare bodies being under the supervision of the Chancellery of Ecclesiastic Affairs, which is the agent and the organ of the needs of these establishments before the Prince”⁴

Hence, the Church and the Prince remain the main charity agents. Despite the wish to take control over this segment that gained the appreciation of the Prince by the population, the State was in a permanent competition with the Church. The Prince becomes closer to his subjects, more visible and more tangible on the occasion of different holidays – religious or of a different nature – making gestures meant to engrave him in the collective memory and to create traditions.

The Ephorate of the Charities to which the Institute of the Poor was subordinated, and which had become the main social assistance organisation since 1832, defined orphans as follows:

“sunt numire de copii sărmani să înțelege copiii aceia care să leapădă pă la biserici, pă la porțile caselor și pă la drumuri în mila creștinilor. Sau aceia ce să vor dovedi că au rămas fără părinți în desăvârșită sărăcie / orphans are those children who are abandoned to churches, house gates, on roads to the mercy of Christians. Or those who will be proved to have been left without parents in complete poverty”⁵.

The orphans were seen as a structural category of the poor, besides the aged people and the disabled, towards whom the society showed an empathic attitude which evolved in time – as shown by Ligia Livadă-Cadeschi – from compassion to philanthropy⁶. A second category is that of people who become poor due to political, economical and other circumstances. The number of the poor increases after plague and cholera epidemics, after natural calamities such as earthquakes and floods, after fires that devastate cities and towns. They become more numerous beginning with

⁴ D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 1/1832, p. 8.

⁵ D.A.N.I.C., *Logofeția Pricinilor Bisericești*, file 127/1832, p. 22. In the correspondance carried by the Ephorate of the Charities with the Chancellery of Ecclesiastic Affairs, Article 22 of the Internal Regulations is recurrent.

⁶ Ligia Livadă-Cadeschi, *op. cit.* A vast study on this subject but referring however to modern Russia is signed by Daniel D. Kaiser, *The poor and disabled in early XVIII century Russian towns*, “Journal of Social History”, 32, 1, 1998, p. 124 -136.

the second half of the 18th century⁷, when the streets of Bucharest were packing with poor people towards whom the society and State did not know how to react. One step taken into this direction was the Charity box, many wealthy people being urged to donate money there.

The abandonment reasons were varied: poverty, the sickness/death of parents, changes of the social status and most often illegitimate relationships. There was a custom related to the latter one of rearing the illegitimate children of the master on his own estate, near the manor, and with his wife's consent. This practice was accounted in the writings of Gheorghe Sion and his contemporaries, who informed of the relationships between the boyars and their gypsy bondmaids, such as the chancellor Dumitrache Canta-Paşcanu. Although he loved and appreciated his wife, he had a gypsy bondmaid named Maria. They had an offspring of this affair named Dincă. Profira, the wife of the grand boyar Paşcanu, was aware of this affair and also of Dincă. One step taken immediately was to have Maria married to one of her kin. Right before her death, Maria is pardoned through a *carte de iertăciune* [forgiveness book] and freed. Since he had no heirs, Dumitrache Paşcanu owns Dincă as his son. Dincă's attempts to be pardoned by the widow of the grand *logofăt* fail each time. He eventually commits suicide. Many women would not have granted him this favour due to the frustration related to their inability of giving heirs to the husband. This would have been a means to punish not only the unfaithful husband, but also the woman who had succeeded in a field where they did not: maternity. Nevertheless, Profira has another reason. She overcame the grief caused by her husband's infidelity and started to be affectionate towards Dincă, not quite as a mother but as an aunt. Her only chance of keeping him close to her, educate him and thus fulfilling her wish to become a mother was that of not freeing him⁸. But before anything why did boyar women accept the affairs of their husbands with gypsy bondmaids? One possible answer is given by Profira herself:

"[...] *Astea nu strică casa. E pericol atuncea când bărbatul se încurcă pe afară cu nemfoaicele sau ungueroaicele cari le storc pungele, cu cucoane de ale noastre, cari-i silesc să se despartă, ca să le ia pe ele. Dar nişte biete roabe... Eh! plăceri trecătoare, ca nişte stele sclipitoare!* / [...] They don't break households. It is risky when the husband has affairs with German or Hungarian women deplete their money; with our ladies who force them to separate so that they can take them. But some poor bondmaids... Heh! Transient pleasures like twinkling stars!"⁹

⁷ Plague epidemics are registered in Bucharest in 1735, 1752, 1792, 1818, while earthquakes took place in 1771, 1787, 1789, 1793, 1798, 1829, 1838, according to the information in our possession. The floods affected the Wallachian capital in 1814 and 1837, while the fires constantly destroyed a part of the city (1766, 1804, 1847).

⁸ G. Sion, *Proză. Suvenire contimpurane*, Bucharest, 1956, p. 81 in the chapter "*Emanciparea țiganilor*".

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 81.

Bondmaids did not ask for money and could not claim marriage. For this reason (with some exceptions) women were willing to overlook their husbands' affairs. Gypsy bondmaids and servants were the most convenient mistresses for newly wed boyars, particularly when the wife was a religious woman or had different concerns than conjugal life. They served for the initiation of young boyars into their sexual life, thing that was encouraged by friends and parents. Used to such customs, they would continue regardless of the consequences. They did not fear the idea of having offspring. The commonest proposition made to the future mother was to have her married and dowered. This solution was meant to bring benefits to both parties: the young woman was rendered a home otherwise denied by the loss of her integrity, while he kept his rank intact given the scandal of such an affair. Not keeping the promise entailed the exposure and scorn of the entire society. The woman left alone had three choices: raising her child in the poverty and isolation assumed with the birth, the child abandonment on the stairs of a church, and in the worst case, the infanticide.

Proves of such illicit liaisons are rare. Some were confessed in the notes attached to the babies, others were revealed by the inquiries made by authorities; inquiries were mandatory when babies were found. Ralița was not hazardously abandoned in front of the house of Anica Deșloaica in February 1833, with a note on her neck accusing the master of the boyar family:

“Coco<a>ne Costache,

Etăși copilu, cu tine l-am făcut, ție ț-il leapădu și ce-i ți să faci cu elu. Eu, fată săracă, m-ai înșălatu că o să faci zestră <și> nu mi-ai dat nici o para și m-ai lăsatu dă nu pociu să mă urnescu în lume. Numele <ei> Ralița. Eu, Dumitra / Master Costache, This is your offspring, conceived with you; I leave it to you to do as you please. I am a poor girl and you lied to me that you'd give me a dowry, but you didn't give me a nickel, and you left me that I can't stir in the world. Her name, Ralița. Mine, Dumitra”¹⁰

Ralița is mentioned in the register kept by the Ephorate of the Charities for the children under the care of the Institute of the Poor, a clear sign of her father's rejection, of his refuse to own and adopt her¹¹.

Women who suffered from cholera, dropsy or typhoid fever were wandering in the streets of the city seeking help for their children and cure for their pain. Being refused out of contamination fear, they would abandon their children in order to give them another chance. The women would go back to their relatives or in isolated places so as to return recovered – in some cases – and claim their parental rights. At the death of her husband, Despa comes to Bucharest as many others being heavy

¹⁰ D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 17/1832, p. 66.

¹¹ The adoption of a child outside marriage was a form of legitimization.

with child, and she falls sick with dropsy after the birth of her child. Weakened, unable to breastfeed and without any money, she appeals to the women on her street and to the midwife of *Comisia Vopselii* [= the Commission of Colours]¹² where she was living – who is also the god-mother of her little boy – so as the new-born can be fed with milk. Although at the beginning they seemed to be willing to help her, when they learned of her health condition they turned their back on her “*zicând că sunt bolnavă de dropică / saying I was suffering from dropsy*”. Creative enough and seeing her child

“*se sfârșea de foame, adeseori îl punea pă la uliță și pă la biserici pentru ca să hrănească cu țâță de către femeile ce nu-l cunoștea / dying of starvation, she often left him in the streets or at the church to be breastfed by the women who didn’t know him.*”¹³

This practice could not continue and Despa was forced to abandon him at the Box. Since her illness became worse, she was taken unconscious to her hamlet – Filipeștii de Târg, Prahova County – where, under the strict care of her mother she recovered. After marrying Adam Săcan, she confesses she had a child abandoned in Popa Soare Street in Bucharest and she wishes to take him back. The man not only that does not object to his wife’s wish, but he covers the expenses related to the home bringing of the child. Following her leads, Despa finds the midwife and learns that her boy had been entrusted by the Ephorate to a nurse in Dealul Spirii Street. Advised to address to that organisation so as to have him back lawfully, the woman manages to demonstrate she was his mother. Safta, the wife of Sandu the tailor, and Ușa the wife of the *dorobanț* [= soldier] Alexe witness that Despa had been *îngreucată* [= impregnated]¹⁴. Further on, other people such as Dumitrana, Ioana *moașa* [= the midwife], and father Ioan confirm that she had given birth months ago in Popa Soare Street and that her son was christened Panait. After examining the certificate and testimonies, the Ephorate was forced to restore the child to his mother on condition she paid 200 lei to cover the care expenses of the organisation (diapers and nurse).

The number of non-christened children was equally high and in such circumstances the Ephorate was assisted by the Church. The christening of new-borns was carried out soon after the inquiries undertaken to find his parents; the god-parents were the midwife from the *Vopsea* or some inhabitant of that street. Not much medical knowledge was needed so as to settle the approximate age of an abandoned child (“*ca de patru luni / of four months or so*”; “*ca la doi ani / of two years old*”). Confronting with cases when the child was old enough so as to be

¹² Bucharest was divided into 5 *vopseli* (colours; here, districts): Red, Green, Yellow, Blue, and Black.

¹³ D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 56/1832, p. 2.

¹⁴ In Romanian “*îngreucată*”, an archaism synonym of “impregnated”.

considered already christened, the ephors had to appeal to the metropolitan to advise them on the implementation of a special procedure. The child found in mid-March 1832 at the gate of St. Anton Church on Curtea Veche Street was almost a year old. The metropolitan gives a prompt response:

“[...] că de a se boteza acum nu să poate până nu să va da mai întâiu în public, prin tobă, de aceasta că adecă cine va fi acela ce au lepădat copilu- < / > să vie în taină și să lipească o hârtie tot la acel loc unde s-au găsit acel copil, prin care să facă dovadă de este botezat sau nu. Și atunci, după aceia, de nu va fi botezat să va boteza. / [...] to christen him now is not possible until it is publicly announced by the drum, that is why whoever abandoned the child should secretly come and leave a paper in the same place that child was found so as to make prove whether he was christened or not. And then if he was not christened, he shall be.”¹⁵

The effect was immediate, since shortly after, a woman came to the Directorate and declared that she had christened the boy by the name of Gheorghe and that it had been announced publicly in Bucharest. The Ephorate, in order to prevent similar situations, requested the settling of procedures for the abandoned children with notes attesting their religion. Regardless of what the certificate/note accounts, the child would be re-christened under the “*legea pravoslavnică a Răsăritului* / Eastern religious law”. This was the decision taken by the Church and bringing new members. In the same year, Ianuș, a Catholic child, was re-christened and entrusted to Zoița to raise him. She was the wife of Pană, the coachman of the boyar Constantin Cantacuzino¹⁶.

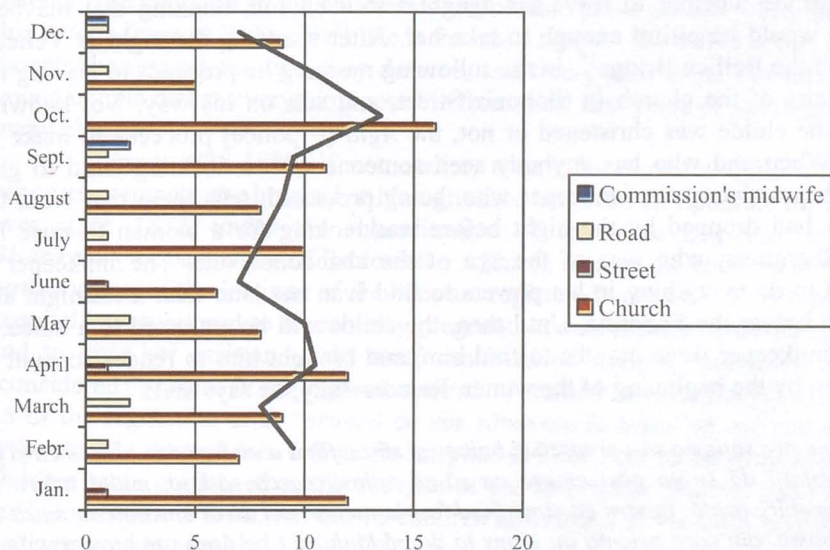
Either they are new-born or over 3-4 years old; either they carry notes with them, christening certificates or they are simply anonymous, all of these children go through a series of identification procedures before they are entrusted to other people who would rear them. The places where they were found (the church, the street, the road, before the Commission) are inscribed within the requirements of the Ephorate’s regulation so as to be considered abandoned or registered in the registers of the Institute of the Poor. From the table above pertaining to the child abandonment in the capital-city of Wallachia for the year 1834, we notice that the majority of children is left in places belonging to the Church (porch, stairs, pulpit, etc), often without any identification item. A similar conclusion is available for the period extending to 1840. The Church could offer double assistance to the new-born, material and spiritual (the christening). The priest is many times registered in the records regarding the infantile abandonment. He is the one to write the note, the baptism certificate of the child who would be later on abandoned; he is the one to give advice. Moreover, he is a guarantor of the respectability, responsibility and honour of the

¹⁵ D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 70/1833, p. 87.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 132.

community he lives in. The certificates issued by the Ephorate were first signed by priests and after by inhabitants. They also warranted for the morality of the family the child would be adopted by. In 1832, the Commission of the Black *Vopsea* requested to the coachman Dumitrache and his wife Stana to bring a certificate attesting they could raise a child. The priests and inhabitants are the ones to sign the certificate, arguing that Dumitrache is “*omu muncitor / hard-working man*” and has the means to raise the child he wished to adopt: owns a two-room house, a crooked kitchen, a wattle barn, horse and wagon. That would suffice for priests to give their approval. Such recommendations are requested and required by the Ephorate when it receives adoption claims from the “*obraze proaste / mischievous*”. On the other hand, the abandonment in public places, such as the church, would warrant the child survival, while his abandonment on a street, a field or ditches demonstrated the desire of his physical elimination, the timing of the abandonment being important (in the morning, at night).

The frequency of the places where the children were abandoned in Bucharest in 1834.



The procedure for the cases when children were found abandoned entailed to bring them before the Commission of *Vopsea*, which would draft a report addressed to the Ephorate including data on the place and context the child was found. The person to have found and brought the new-born before the Commission was obliged to offer all the details and to sign the report. The priest, the *epistat*¹⁷, the midwife or

¹⁷ Police officer.

any other inhabitant would describe most minutely the moment the child was found, and their first impetus. By the beginning of January 1833, while patrolling, the *epistat* in charge of Flămânda Street found “*o copilă lepădată în tinda bisericii, cu un răvășel legat la gât cuprinzător că este botezată și numele ei Sultana / a childe left on the porch of the church with a note on her neck sustaining she had been christened by the name of Sultana*”¹⁸ as he declared himself. Father Stoica confirmed it by a certificate issued to the Directorate. On their own initiative, they gave the childe to Maria to breastfeed her, because she was frail, defenceless and dying. They promised two lei on a daily basis and now they have come to ask for the rights of the woman and childe. The Ephorate takes the responsibility of raising the childe, having her medically examined and entrusting her to a nurse accepted by the organisation.

If the parents are not found, which rarely happens, they are requested to take responsibility. The widowed men are unable to raise new-born children, and if they do not immediately find a wife to take on motherly duties, they eventually abandon them. After his wife died in child-birth, Ivan desperately tried for 4 months to take care alone of his suckling child, but he has not succeeded. He complains to neighbours, he empties the cup of his sorrows in taverns, but all in vain. He finds it hard to decide whether to leave his daughter to a church, thinking that maybe a Christian would be pitiful enough to take her. After spending the night at Velicu’s inn, round the Beilicu Bridge¹⁹, in the following morning he proceeds to leaving her on the stairs of the church in Slobozia Street, and sets on his way. Not knowing whether the childe was christened or not, the *Agia* [= police] proceeds to make an inquiry. When and who has anybody seen someone with a suckling child to give away? They arrive at the innkeeper who, being pressured, tells them that Ivan, the man who had dropped by the night before was looking for a woman to raise his childe, Gherghina, who was of the age of the abandoned one. The innkeeper is requested to do everything in his powers to find Ivan not later than a fortnight and bring him before the Ephorate. Until then, the childe will be entrusted to a nurse. It took the innkeeper three months to find him, and brought him to render account in November, by the beginning of the winter. Remorsefully, he says that:

*“nu are soție ca să-i crească și bolnav și sărac fiind o au lepădat, zicând că și pă ceilalți dă se va găsi cineva ca să să milostivească să-i ia, multă iubire dă omenire arată. Pentru că cinci fiind fost la număr, cel dă al cincilea au murit dă foame, din care pricină au ajuns la deznădăjduire / he does not have a wife to raise them, and being ill and poor he left her, adding that his other children too, if anyone was merciful to take them, then that person was too kind at heart. With five children, the fifth having died of hunger, he was overwhelmed with despair”*²⁰.

¹⁸ D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 70/1833, p. 1.

¹⁹ The current Calea Șerban Vodă.

²⁰ D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 70/1833, p. 435-435 overleaf.

The man can only receive guidance in finding a nurse, but the child cannot be taken by the Institute of the Poor since she has only one parent. In certain cases, the Ephorate can accept to pay a nurse, but not to give allowance to the child. As we may notice, the abandonment is also favoured by the great number of successive births in the poor families, which caused the death of young mothers. This practice has different finalities. First, ensuring a hereditary line, since in the 19th century medicine was not common everywhere and the principle of survival was governing. There are cases when women delivered over 10 children of whom only a few – four or five – survive. In the most fortunate case. Child mortality is a banal fact especially in an environment where the concern for the living individual is not a priority. Women fall into few categories: mothers, wives, but mostly economic agents. They work the field, in the household and at times take extra jobs (sewing, laundering, nursing, etc.) to give them extra money. All of these do not allow a focus on the child. The growing number of children and the income decrease determine certain families to proceed to abandonment, especially when the mother dies. In the countryside, on the other hand, children start to work from a very early age, thus helping the parents. The youngest of the children is responsible of his parents when they age, and this is a tradition in Wallachia²¹. He is the one to inherit the native home, bidding his parents the respect and care they deserve, and living with them. For this reason the young couple makes everything possible from their first years of marriage to have as many children.

During 1838-1839, if not earlier, a new location for child abandonment becomes common: the hospital. Although there had been an Ephorate for Hospitals²² ever since 1832, under the subordination of the same *Logofeție a Pricinilor Bisericești* [= Chancellery of Ecclesiastic Affairs], data on the children brought to the birth hospital of the Institute of the Poor are registered only from 1839 onwards. This hospital was supposed to receive any pregnant woman regardless of her social status and to give her assistance; the staff consisted of doctors, midwives, and nurses (considered “*școlare în meșteșugul moșitului* / trained in midwifery”). Under article 15 of the regulation draft “*pruncii ce vor rămânea în spital să vor trimite la Casa orfanotrofii* / the children left in the hospital shall be sent to the Orphanage”²³. The children were christened at the expense of the institution, bearing a certificate that tends to become a form. All the 18 children abandoned in the birth hospital in 1839 had a document as such:

²¹ Violeta Barbu, *Privilegiul mezinului: între realitatea juridică și ficțiunea basmului*, “Arhiva genealogică”, III, 1998, p. 49-62.

²² D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 1/1832, p. 8. The three ephors are: *vornic* [minister for Internal Affairs] Mihai Ghica, *logofăt* [chancellor] Mihai Racoviță, and *căminar* [collector of duties on spirits] Alecu Ghica.

²³ D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 264/1839, p. 5.

“Potrivit cu legiuirea întocmită prin art. al 15-lea din proiectul acestui spital să îndreptează către cinstita Eforie un copil, parte bărbătească, născut la 30 ale trecutului octombrie, din una dintre femeile sărmame ce sunt adunate la acest spital în despărțirea de al doilea, botezat fiind la 31 tot ale trecutei luni, cu numele Constantin pentru care să însoțește și biletu<|> botezului drept dovadă și de a căreia primire va binevoi cinstita Eforie a înapoia cinstit răspuns / According to the provision stipulated in article 15 of the draft regulation of this hospital one child of male sex is entrusted to the honourable Ephorate; he was born on the 30th of October by one of the poor women gathered in this hospital in the second department, and christened on the 31st of the past month by the name of Constantin. Enclosed find the certificate attesting his christening, and kindly request the honourable Ephorate to send reply.”²⁴

The number of abandoned children grew from one year to the other as shown in the table below, those found in the streets or churches being added to those in the birth hospital. In 1838, the number of abandoned children in Bucharest was close to 310. A foreign envoy – the Consul of Prussia in Jassy, C. A. Kuch – provided a higher figure for Wallachia, mentioning the charities near monasteries:

“Așezămintele de binefacere întemeiate și întreținute de către mănăstiri se împart în trei categorii, adică un orfelinat, un spital și un azil pentru săraci. În orfelinat sunt crescuți și copiii găsiți al căror număr se ridică de obicei la 400. În acest scop sunt alocați o sută de mii de piaștri anual / The charity establishments built and aided by monasteries fall under three categories, an orphanage, a hospital and an asylum for the poor. The abandoned children are raised in an orphanage and their number usually extends to 400. One thousand piaștri are granted annually for this purpose.”²⁵

The data related to the years 1833, 1835 and 1839 are incomplete, but sufficient to observe that an annual number of over 130 children were abandoned in Bucharest during 1833-1838²⁶, however their number decreased gradually. 131 children were abandoned both in 1833 and 1834. The number reaches the highest peak in 1837, when 151 children are registered, while the following year the number drops to 129. Another interesting aspect is that related to the months when children

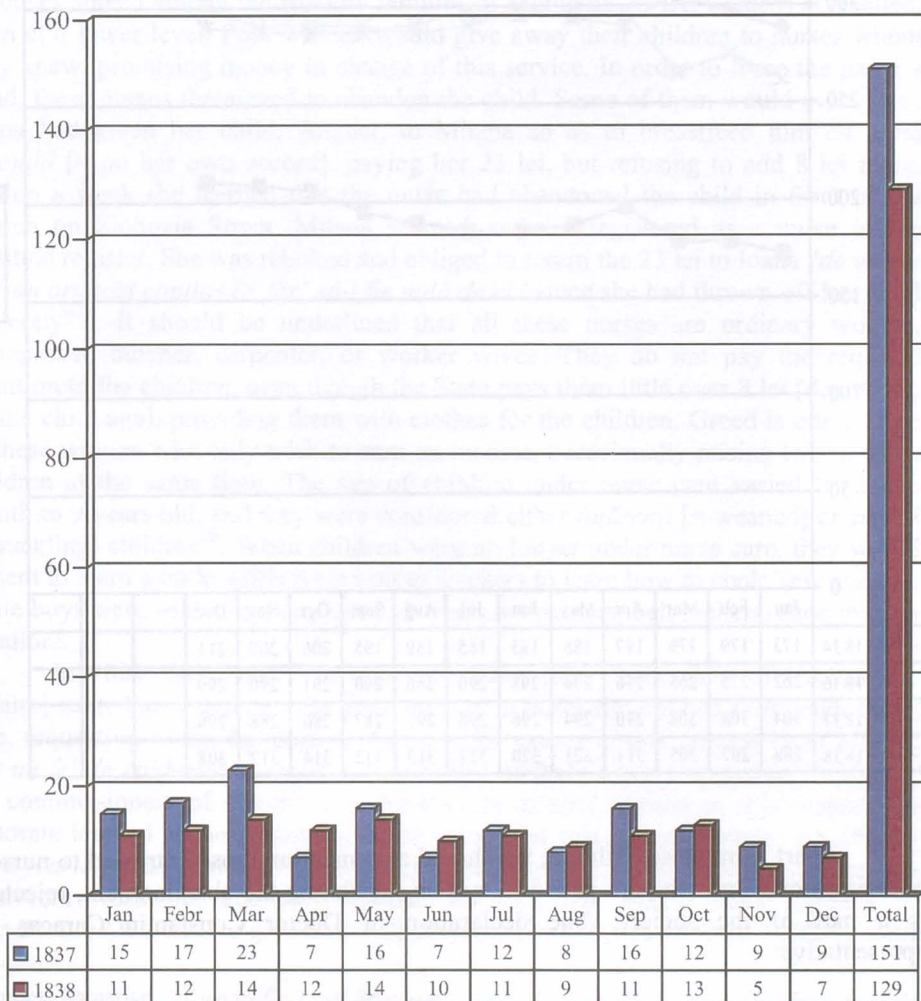
²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 53.

²⁵ C. A. Kuch, *Moldauisch-Walachische Zustände in den Jahren 1828 bis 1843*, Leipzig, 1844, p. 211.

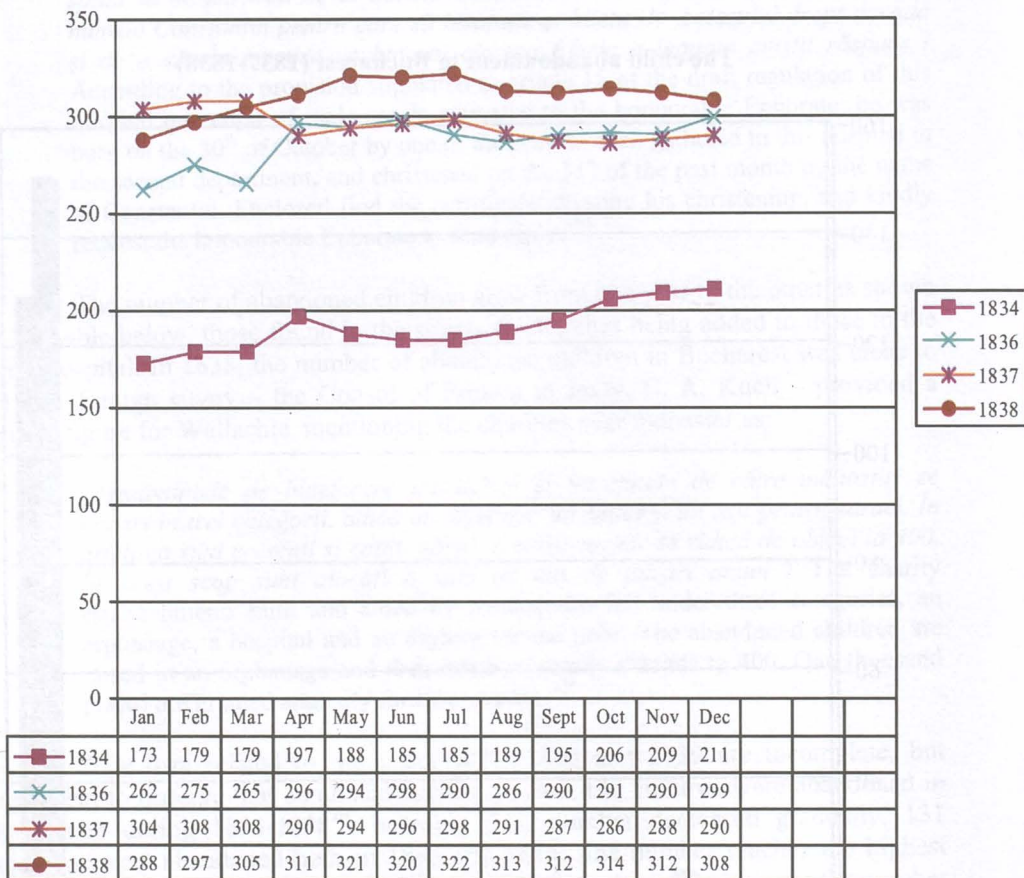
²⁶ We know from documents that at the end of December 1833 there were 173 children in the Institute, 7 being abandoned that month. 1834 was covered for each month with information on the child abandonment. A gap occurs again in 1835. We know due to the 1836 register that by the end of December 1835 there were 262 children at the Institute. These data, even though incomplete, enable us to reconstruct the evolution of child abandonment in Bucharest. You may review year 1834 in the table below because the information related to this year is vast, complete and can be used as a reference point for 1836 – 1838.

were abandoned. One may notice that the most frequent months for child abandonment were mid-winter and spring months.

The child abandonment in Bucharest (1837-1838)



The orphans in the care of the Institute of Poor (1834-1838)



Apart from these children, we should also mention those entrusted to nurses by their parents and who are part of a system legislating the abandonment, rejected by a part of the society. The declaration of Doctor Constantin Caracș is representative:

“Femeile tuturilor boierilor, mai ales ale celor de clasa întâia, cari au o stare materială mai bună, sunt surde la glasul sfânt al naturii [...] și nu aduc copilului lor laptele matern, ci îl dau unor doici necinstite, femei înjosite sau nedemne de a purta numele de mame; acestea înlătură fără conștiință și fără inimă proprii lor prunci, primind pentru o mică leafă pe alții / The boyar women, particularly

the first class ones, who have better living conditions are deaf to the sacred voice of nature [...] and do not feed their child with breast milk, but they give it to some dishonest nurses, vile women or unworthy to bear the name of mother; the latter ones remove their own children unscrupulously and ruthlessly, receiving others in change of a small amount²⁷.

The indifference manifested towards the child and the transfer of duties were practices spread among the wealthy families of Muntenia, as Dr. Caracaș accounted, even at a lower level. Poor women would give away their children to nurses whom they knew, promising money in change of this service. In order to force the payer's hand, these nurses threatened to abandon the child. Some of them would even do it. Ioana had given her child, Anghel, to Mitana so as to breastfeed him *cu bună învoială* [= on her own accord], paying her 23 lei, but refusing to add 8 lei more. Within a week she learned that the nurse had abandoned the child in front of the church on Slobozia Street. Mitana seemed to be unregistered as a nurse in the Institute register. She was rebuked and obliged to return the 23 lei to Ioana "*de vreme ce i-au aruncat copilul < / > fără să-i fie milă de el / since she had thrown off her child pitilessly*"²⁸. It should be underlined that all these nurses are ordinary women, ploughman, butcher, carpenter, or worker wives. They do not pay the required attention to the children, even though the State pays them little over 8 lei (depending on the child age), providing them with clothes for the children. Greed is one feature of these women who only wish to earn an income, occasionally raising two or three children at the same time. The age of children under nurse care varied from one month to 9 years old, and they were considered either *înjărcați* [= weaned] or *sugari* [= suckling] children²⁹. When children were no longer under nurse care, they would be sent to learn a trade. Girls were sent to teachers to learn how to cook, sew and cut, while boys were sent as apprentices to barbers, carpenters, belt makers, shoe makers or tailors.

In 1834, *Logofeția Pricinilor Bisericești* [the Chancellery of Ecclesiastic Affairs] started an inquiry on the great number of children who had died under nurse care, requesting to the Ephorate to find out the causes of this process "*mai ales că nici un fel de epidemie n-au fost / especially that there was no epidemic*"³⁰. Urging the commissioners of colours and the doctors to send reports in this matter, the Ephorate learned at the beginning of the same year that many children "*să aduc în stare foarte proastă, slabi, bolnavi și cu răni pă trupurile lor / are brought in bad condition, weak, ill, and with wounds all over the body*". Their mothers or "*născătoare / the ones to give birth*", as they were called, treated them hostilely until

²⁷ Pompei Samaritan, "*Topografia Țarei Românești*": o veche monografie sanitară a Munteniei de Constantin Caracaș, București, 1937, p. 87.

²⁸ D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 70/1838, p. 18.

²⁹ Important in this matter are the lists of children under nurse care in Bucharest. The lists were kept by the Ephorate of the Charities.

³⁰ D.A.N.I.C., *Eforia Caselor Făcătoare de Bine*, file 109/1834, p. 29.

abandonment (“*ii țin ascunși și nehrăniți până găesc îndemnare a-i lepăda / they keep them hidden and unfed until they find a reason to throw them off*”). The rearing conditions provide by the nurses known and examined by the doctors were very bad, and although they were urged to go to the Commission’s doctor at any sign of disease, only few did as requested. They preferred to hide, ignore or treat the child themselves:

“*cei ce sunt mai întremați când se întâmplă de să bolnăvesc nu aleargă doica numaidecât la dohtor să arate [...] ci pentru că este fugă de osteneală sau că pricina bolii o socotește micu lucru, după acele rele obiceiuri întrebuițează buruieni și descânțețe și tocmai când să iuțește boala atunci aleargă la dohtor, când nu poate să-l ajute / those who are in good health, when they happen to fall ill, the nurse doesn’t run to the doctor to show [...] because she runs away from the trouble or she thinks the illness is trifle, and uses those herbs and disenchantments following vile customs, but when the illness becomes worse only then she goes see a doctor, and then it’s too late.*”³¹

Being informed of all these aspects, the Chancellery decided that the Ephorate should keep two nurses, ready to look after the abandoned children. The doctors would accept the women who wish to be registered and paid under the Ephorate as nurses only after “*să va vizitarisi / examination*”, being in good health and financially stable so as to be able to raise a child. A chancellor paid with 150 lei a month coordinated the daily activities performed by the organisation. The increase of staff members and of medical restrictions was meant to limit child mortality.

*La mère cruelle*³² is also a reality in Romania, not only in the Western world, this expression implying not only the idea of abandonment, but equally of abuse or criminal act. We encounter the woman who isolates her child as step mother, who leaves him on the church stairs or at the bosom of a different woman, but also the woman to proceeds to infanticide as a final and definite solution. The illegitimacy recurrence of these phenomena is hard to identify, but it has a decisive role nonetheless. The State gives legitimacy and a stable home to the child through the adoption certificates it issues. The Parish, the Town-hall, or in our case the Commission and hospital are the neutral spaces which facilitate the status change, the one of legitimacy and social recognition³³. Child abandonment is an individual act; in few cases it happens that children are abandoned by the same person. The child age may be an indication in establishing the cause. If it involves a new-born, it is more likely that he was abandoned because of the mother’s shame to have a *copil din flori*

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 40 (overleaf).

³² An expression coined by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *La maison et le nom: Stratégies et rituels dans l’italie de la Renaissance*, Paris, 1990, p. 396.

³³ Giovanna Cappelletto, *Infanzia abbandonata e ruoli de mediazione sociale nella Verona del Settecento*, “Quaderni storici”, XI, 33, 3, 1976, p. 243.

[= love child], illegitimate. Abandonment of children over one year old suggests the financial difficulties faced by the family. However, this is not a rule to apply to all cases. Even the children born in families can be abandoned; the lack of financial means not allowing their upbringing. Although they are found in different parts of Bucharest, they can be also brought from the villages/hamlets nearby. Lacking an identification element (the christening certificate), the abandonment moment cannot be restored. The *Vopsea* Commission attempts through the *Agie* to do this thing appealing to community, making a public announcement of events that happened in such and such street or church of Bucharest, in hope to find the parents or at least a relative that would become a guardian to the child. In early 19th century, despite the steps taken by authorities, the increasing number of abandoned children and death toll cannot be stopped. Chicken pox and smallpox are diseases ending their lives. The negligence of women who believe to be paid insufficiently to nurse them properly is another cause. Poverty and vice are the two driving forces for child abandonment in early 19th century, and they emphasise once more the lack of balance between the social classes, customs and prejudices of those times.

Translated from Romanian by Adina Rățoi

