

## TURKISH DOCUMENTS REGARDING DIMITRIE CANTEMIR'S PALACE AT ORTAKÖY – ISTANBUL

TASIN GEMIL

According to a still widespread opinion in Romanian historiography, Dimitrie Cantemir left in Istanbul, in addition to many other goods, a large palace, when, in late 1710, he was appointed by the Ottoman sultan prince in Moldavia. It was believed that the palace was owned by the Romanian scholar prince<sup>1</sup>.

As it happened in the spring of 1971, when I had the opportunity to conduct a research in the Archive of Topkapı Imperial Palace in Istanbul, I found an unknown document on the issue of Cantemir's palace in Istanbul. In fact, it was a basic document called *temessük* (an agreement, a guarantee document) and six marginal documents of the same character, certificates, and a note on the back, which together constitute a true record of the problem. The documents were published on the occasion of the bicentennial for Cantemir, in 1973<sup>2</sup>, and partly in the volume of Turkish documents that I published in 1984 within the works of the National Archives of Romania<sup>3</sup>. However, the documents have not lost significance at all, especially since there is still a lot of debate about this so-called Palace of Dimitrie Cantemir in Istanbul.

These documents clearly attest that Cantemir owned a villa on the shore (*yalı*), together with a park, a garden and the annex building, located in Ortakoy, today a luxury neighbourhood of Istanbul, on the European shore of the Bosphorus. The villa mentioned was not owned by the Romanian prince because it belonged to an Islamic religious foundation, called *vakîf*. According to Islamic law, the ownership of the property of a *vakîf* cannot be alienated by sale, gift or inheritance. The *vakîfs* were under the protection and control of the state, which appointed, for this purpose, supervisors, usually from among the governors. The administration of a *vakîf* was entrusted to a trustee (*mütevelli*), appointed by an act of donation or by a judge (*kadi*). Nobody, not even the sultan could change the provisions of a *vakîf*, i.e. of donation. The key document states that the villa and the park had been rented by Dimitrie Cantemir from the trustee of the *vakîf*, Ibrahim Pasha, ex-defterdar, i.e. the finance minister of the Ottoman Empire. Only the main document refers to the

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<sup>1</sup> This belief was so rooted that, in one of the conversations we had, in 1971, with the Romanian Ambassador to Ankara of that period, the scholar and Professor Grigore Geamănu told me his intention to ask the Turkish authorities to formally handover the palace of D. Cantemir.

<sup>2</sup> Taşin Gemil, „Ştiri noi din arhivele turceşti privitoare la Dimitrie Cantemir”, *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie „A.D.Xenopol” din Iași*, tome 10 (1973), p. 435–444.

<sup>3</sup> Taşin Gemil, *Relațiile Țărilor Române cu Poarta Otomană în Documente Turcești. 1601–1712*, Direcția Generală a Arhivelor Statului, București, 1984, doc.236, p. 500–502.

Romanian prince, the other marginal ones representing legal developments related to this property of the vakîf between 1712 and 1751.

The key document is the oldest in the file, being dated to the first day of the Muslim month, Cemaziulevvel, in 1124, corresponding to 6 June 1712. It is signed by the *mütevelli* (the trustee) el-Hadj Mehmed and refers to the seizure by the Ottoman financial administration of the “movable and immovable property of the Christian called Kantemiroglu Dumitraşko, son of Kantemir, who had fled before him, when he was prince of Moldova”. Among the assets of Dimitrie Cantemir, seized by the Ottoman financial administration, the document only mentions the beachfront villa, namely on the shore of the Bosphorus (*yali*), “located in Ortaköy, and the known border, located in the same place, with everything in it, rented by the aforementioned Christian, for a prepaid rent of 17 akce per day”. In fact, this document is not intended primarily for the seizure of Cantemir’s possession, for this action had been completed before. The document we have in mind here is a guarantee document presented to Suleyman aga, military commander, to whom the villa had been offered after the auction organized by the Prime defterdar (*şikk-i evvel*) of that time, el-Hadj Mehmed Efendi.

The new owner had rented the villa and everything that belonged to it, for the same amount of 17 akce per day, paying in advance the amount of 2500 Gurus (thalers), which had been handed to the *vakîf* by the financial administration which organized the auction. If we consider that, at that time, a Gurus (thaler) was the equivalent of 120 akce, we find that the new owner of the villa had paid the rent for more than 48 years (i.e. 48 years and 35 days) in advance. According to the provisions of this act, within the prepayment to the rent were considered all the investments the tenant would have done for the possession. It is admitted that the villa had been rented by Dimitrie Cantemir in the same conditions. Besides, the prince himself acknowledges in his Ottoman History that he would have “bought” the “palace” in Ortakoy, built by the brother of the Grand Vizier Cherkas Mehmed Pasha (1624–1625), for an amount of 25 000 thalers (sic!) from Yusuf Efendi, in the circumstances that caused panic in Istanbul because of the Austrian advance in the Balkans. Then – Dimitrie Cantemir states – “I gave it back again”, after beautifying and enlarging it with many constructions and decoration<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, it was a possession and not a property bought, because otherwise he could not give it back or leave it (in Tindal, “and have left it”), and the amount of 25 000 thalers must have been a slip of the pen, either by the author or the publisher; the correct amount is the one in our document, i.e. 2 500 thalers. As observed in the other documents in this file, on the situation of the property of the *vakîf* over four decades, the transfer of ownership was made according to the desire of the owner at that time. We believe that D. Cantemir gave up the possession of the Ortakoy villa during the second reign of Constantine Duca (1700–1703), when faced with

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<sup>4</sup> Demetrius Cantemir, *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire*, ed. N. Tindal, London, 1734, p.234, n.1.

real material difficulties<sup>5</sup>. But after the reconciliation with Constantin Brancoveanu, in 1704, when – according to Ion Neculce – he benefited from an annual subsidy of 10 bags per year<sup>6</sup>, D. Cantemir was able to regain this right of possession. The stipend of 10 bags received from Constantin Brâncoveanu was worth 5 000 thalers, which means that the amount a year would be enough for Dimitrie Cantemir to rent the villa in Ortakoy for almost a hundred years. But he himself did not make any reference to regaining possession of Ortakoy. Our document certifies that in 1710, when the Romanian prince left Istanbul, he had the right of possession of the villa from Ortakoy. He held this right when leaving the throne of Iasi, in July 1711, when he went to Russia.

It is clear that the note referred to above in the Ottoman History refers to this vakîf, as his indication that “as I hear today / it / is in possession of the king’s daughter, for she is married to the grand vizier Ali Pasha”<sup>7</sup>, is confirmed by the second document, which states that Suleyman bey (meanwhile, he had become bey, in the first document he had the title of aga), the successor of D. Cantemir to the possession of the villa in Ortakoy yielded only after a month the right of possession of the annexes of this villa to the “royal groom, the vizier with enlightened soul, grand Ali Pasha for a rent of seven akce per day”. We mention that Ali Pasha, the son in law of Sultan Ahmed III, held the seal of the great vizier between April 27, 1713 and August 31, 1716, which is a new clue to the date of termination of writing of the Ottoman History by Dimitrie Cantemir in 1716, between August and November, as proposed earlier by P. P. Panaitescu.

Moreover, the exact description of the villa from Ortakoy and its annexes, made in document No. 2 and especially in document No. 4 (11 March 1720), in the same file can be sighted, but with much indulgence and imagination, in the drawing entitled “The Palace of Prince Dimitrie Cantemir”, which accompanied the first edition, in English, of the Ottoman History of D. Cantemir. In the Turkish documents mentioned, it is shown that in front of the “house on the shore”, “across the road” are side by side, its annexes, consisting of a garden with fountains, surface waters, gardeners’ chambers, an old park and an open field. So, these annexes, across the street, had been rented for seven akce per day by the vizier Ali Pasha, on July 6, 1712.

It seems that Ion Neculce knew Cantemir lived in Istanbul in a rented house because talking about the prince’s friendship with the Turk “Smail Efendi”, the Moldavian chronicler states that the latter visited Cantemir “at his host”<sup>8</sup>. The meaning of “host” is more explicit with Grigore Ureche, who telling about the running of the secretary Ureche, shows that “while Ureche finding time and an

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<sup>5</sup> P. P. Panaitescu, *Dimitrie Cantemir. Viața și opera*, Editura Academiei, București, 1964, p.45–46.

<sup>6</sup> Ion Neculce, *Letopiseșul Țării Moldovei și O samă de cuvinte*, ed. Iorgu Iordan, ed.a II-a, 1959, p.175.

<sup>7</sup> Dimitrie Cantemir, *Istoria Imperiului otoman*, I, transl. I. Hodosiu, București, 1876, p. 366, n. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Neculce, 1959, p. 175.

open way ... taught his *host*, about who will ask about him the next day, that they should be told that he went *home* to Carligatura ...”<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, the difference between *host* and *home* is explicit.

In the subsequent years, the villa often changed owners. But they were always characters around the Ottoman sultan. Thus, on February 13, 1717, the villa passed into the possession of the master of customs (*gümrük emini*) Ebubekir aga, and on March 11, 1720, the villa and its annexes were rented by the Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha Nevşehirli, for a rent of 17 akce per day. As known, this great vizier loved luxury and comfort. His rule coincides in the Ottoman history with the so-called “age of tulips”, when together with the opulence of the ruling classes, the arts also flourished. We can draw the conclusion that this villa here in Ortakoy met the requirements of grandeur and brilliance displayed by this still controversial figure who was the Grand Vizier Ibrahim Pasha Nevşehirli. However, after five years, on 3 August 1725, the grand vizier yield his right of possession of the villa and its annexes from Ortakoy to his daughter Ayşe Hanım and her husband, the treasurer (*hazinedar*) Mustafa aga. After the death of the latter, who holds the office of superintendent of the imperial deposits of barley from Isaccea, the villa passed into the possession of the mother of Ayshe Hanım, that is the wife of Ibrahim Pasha Nevşehirli. This document is dated 11 July 1751. The last entry in the file, the overleaf, shows that half of the villa and its annexes had passed into the possession of kapugibaş Ahmed Aga, who was the chehaia of Princess Zeynep Sultan. The document is not dated, but it must be from the same period, i.e. mid-eighteenth century.

A question that remains unanswered is: why did Cantemir not give up this possession, when he was appointed in Moldavia? The simplest answer would be that he wanted to have a “hotel” in the Ottoman capital, as was the case with all the great Ottoman officials and not only them. Such a response excludes the deliberate plan of D. Cantemir to side with the Tsar Peter I, as he did, however, on 13 April 1711, in Lutsk, signing the agreement for the Russian suzerainty. Article 15 of the act showed that “the properties and palaces that he (D. Cantemir – TG) had at Constantinople and left there for our great tsar, would be compensated by our great tsar with others alike in Moscow”<sup>10</sup>. Hence, the conclusion that can be drawn that Dimitrie Cantemir may have had other real estate in Istanbul, some even called “palaces”. In our opinion, declaring such property was intended to draw attention of the Tsar on the material sacrifice made by that the Romanian prince in favor of the Tsar, so as to support the former’s political project aimed at founding a hereditary monarchy of the Cantemir family in the Romanian countries. As known, for this purpose, Dimitrie Cantemir drew up a fantastic pedigree which connected him to the famous Timurlenk (Tamerlane) and through him to Genghis Khan. But it was not noticed that in this so-called family tree, Cantemir was not accurate with the

<sup>9</sup> Grigore Ureche, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, publ. by P. P. Panaitescu, second edition, p. 223.

<sup>10</sup> *Istoriceskie svezi narodov SSSR i Rumîinii v XV – naciiale XVIII v.*, red. S. Grosul, A. Oțetea..., t. III, Moskva, 1970, p. 331.

etymology of his name, “who says Cantemir says Can-Temur, which means the blood of Temur” or “people who descend from Temur’s blood”, as he writes in his *Ottoman History*<sup>11</sup>.

In reality, the anthroponym Temir, Temur (Iron) and the compound names Kantemur or Kantemir commonly used especially by the Tartars, means “Iron khan”, i.e. a strong khan. The Romanian prince knew very well that the dynasty of Genghis Khan had a very high prestige in the Eastern world, at least comparable with the one of the Carolingian dynasty in the Western world. But the Romanian scholar ignored that Tamerlane did not belong to the dynasty of Genghis Khan in any way, which led the former never to use the title of khan, but only the more modest one, of emir. In any case, it is admitted that D. Cantemir, being familiar with Turkish, learned in Russia that many families of Russian aristocracy had great Tatar origin. Thus, his royal Tatar origin would make him entitled to aspire to a place among the great Russian aristocracy, as suggested by colleague Stephen Lemny, in his recent book on the Cantemir family<sup>12</sup>.

Dimitrie Cantemir was the first scholar who, using the most appropriate means and forms, revealed to the European world the Ottoman phenomenon regarded from an inner perspective. It was not only a scientific and cultural action, but also a political and military one, useful when the European powers were increasingly concerned with what would be later be called the “Eastern problem”.

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<sup>11</sup> See Ștefan Lemny, *Cantemireștii. Aventura europeană a unei familii princiare din secolul al XVIII-lea*, Polirom, Iași, 2013, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Lemny, 2013, p.40.