

Education in Moldavia
from the founding of the Vasilian College
to the establishment of the Mihăileană Academy
(summary)

Education is a clear and well-defined indicator of civilization and progress, in a larger paradigm of the comparison with similar societies, but it equally represents the most important vehicle of information transfer about the more recent or more distant past, as regards the becoming of a society. In this line of reasoning, the level of education and its accessibility to people offer, maybe the most faithfully, a panoramic view over a society, regardless of the epoch, geographic region or cultural area. This was the rationale behind the decision to write a synthesis which covers two centuries, our work - *Education in Moldavia from the founding of the Vasilian College to the establishment of the Mihăileană Academy* (1640 - 1835) - representing an attempt to unify and re-evaluate, in an updated, analytical, critical and integrated manner, distinct aspects of the educational process in organised form, in progress between the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Moldavian Modern Era.

As we have approached such a vast subject, our paper is structured in four chapters, in which we have analysed only a part of the initial aspects, focusing on the evolution of education in Moldavia, as it is illustrated in the princely acts and school regulations, and on the main “high schools” founded at the initiative of the prince or of the state, both in Iași and in other towns across the country. Although, initially, our objective was to cover an ampler range of aspects - so that we should highlight the role played by some personalities in the development of education, analyse the evolution of the schools functioning within churches, monasteries and guilds, of the private schools, of the schools founded by ethnic or religious minorities, of the first orphanages and printing houses, as well as of the book circulation - in the end, out of objective necessities related to time and resources, we have opted only for this structure.

Before approaching the theme of the paper, we have considered it extremely useful to present, in a separate chapter, a detailed historiography, as well as the edited and unedited sources. Along the years, the subject of teaching and, implicitly, of education, had been study subjects of some historians, but most works of value were published in the latter half of the XIXth century and in the former half of the next century. Although works of value were issued during the communist period as well, like many other subjects of ideology, a vast majority of those works highlighted the efficiency of the system, in close contrast with the past. Regarding the studies referring to teaching outside the capital, there are

very few, many of them being conducted in order to illustrate the age of an institution and covering especially the latter half of the XIXth century.

In the second chapter, we have tried to present, as broadly as possible, the orders and laws which regarded the system of education, in order to capture the transformations which occurred gradually, both in terms of quantity and in terms of quality, along the two centuries. In the medieval period, the problems referring to the education of the Moldavian youth were regulated through princely acts, the schools owing their existence to such acts of privilege issued by the princes. As the ideas of the Enlightenment were spread in Moldavia as well, it was natural for some Phanariot princes to start issuing germinal school policies, having as purpose the civilising of the society. Some changes in this direction appeared in the latter half of the XVIIIth century, when, although the initiative continued to belong to the prince, the representatives of boyars and of the clergy were the ones who established some of the reports which drew the concrete proposals regarding the financing and the organisation of the system. Starting with the beginning of the next century, the most regulations in this direction were issued as a result of those reports and, after the issuing of the *Organic Regulation* (1832), as a factor of modernity, the emergence of school legislation with communitarian character could be noticed, the system of education became an issue of state.

In order to write this chapter, we encountered numerous difficulties because the school documents are published in various collections, mixed with other acts, and, frequently, those collections do not provide an index or a summary of the acts, facility which would have been very useful to a researcher who approaches such a thematic analysis. Other problems were caused by the fact that some acts had not been dated or had been misdated, published in more versions of transcription or, for certain periods and places, they have not been edited until now. In order to complete the defective picture, we have used more unedited documents from the National Archives of Iași, but, unfortunately, the fact that a modern database does not exist has impeded our research. Another problem was the fact that some documents were deteriorated, which made it difficult to transfer them from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet, for a more accurate understanding.

In the IIIrd chapter, we have analysed the evolution of the main teaching institutions of Iași, founded though princely act or as a result of the initiative of some public authorities, and, although for some of these, various studies or even monographies have been published, we judged that a reconsideration of the issues, based on new documents, was necessary. If we refer to the roots of the local education and the emergence of the educational act in the space inhabited by Romanians, we have to refer first to the town of Iași, the capital of Moldavia and an important cultural and spiritual centre. As in most aspects related to culture, “the town of seven hills” remains, fact proved by the documents of that time, one of the main guiding lights of the education in territories inhabited by Romanians.

The last chapter is destined to the “high schools” from outside the capital of Moldavia, although the documentation regarding them was more limited. An analysis in this respect was directly linked to the necessity of capturing a phenomenon, which should not be ignored, as a result of which education - privilege of the capital - was decentralized. In this direction, it has to be mentioned the fact that the development of education was a characteristic of the process of modernization of the Moldavian society, a shift from the isolation and retrogression characteristic to its past. Although we have analyzed, firstly, the evolution of schools existing in the main boroughs - not having the possibility of a larger development of this aspect - we can conclude that the seeds of modern education spread across the whole Moldavia, although, indeed, it was irregular, unequal and partial. The paper is completed with annexes, which contain unedited documents issued by the princely chancellery in the analyzed period, documents found at the National Archives of Iași.

The completion of the paper *Education in Moldavia from the founding of the Vasilian College to the establishment of the Mihăileană Academy (1640 – 1835)* was based on researching some edited and unedited sources, which has determined us to draw a series of useful conclusions, from our point of view, in outlining a perspective, as accurate as possible, on the education in Moldavia, in the period of transition from the Mediaval period to the Modern Era. From this perspective, we consider that our endeavour, without giving final sentences, establishes some necessary landmarks in fundamenting other papers on the educational act for the two centuries we have focused on.

Thus, the reign of Vasile Lupu represented the debut of the development of the system of education in organised and continuous form in Moldavia, the Vasilian College established by him playing an important role in asserting culture in the Principality and in promoting the Orthodoxy, in the context of the spread of Protestantism and Catholicism in the civilizing Romanian area. The act issued on 9th May 1640 set the foundation of the first teaching institution of Moldavia in which the studies were above elementary level and which had a long life, being reformed on many occasions.

In turn, Gheorghe Ștefan, preoccupied with the development of the system of education, reconfirmed, through the act issued on 2nd April 1656, the decisions taken by his predecessor, ensuring the necessary financial support, it is true, in an attempt to avoid a negative interpretation abroad, as his refusal might have been considered as a form of insubordination in rendering the monastery to the community from Mount Athos.

For half a century (1656-1706), no other school-related act was issued, princes Iliăș Alexandru, Antonie Ruset și Constantin Cantemir only restating the decisions taken during the previous periods regarding the capital of the Vasilian College. During his second rule, Antioh Cantemir issued the first act with legislative value of the XVIIIth century, regarding the founding of schools exclusively.

The most important reformer of the system of education in Moldavia in the former half of the XVIIIth century, outstanding promoter of its reorganization, restaurateur of “public school”, was

Prince Grigorie IInd Ghica. Beneficiary of excellent education - received from his grandfather, Alexandru Mavrocordat, and understanding its role in the evolution of a people, he took measures in this respect during all his three ruling periods, leaving a distinct mark on the system. One of his main preoccupations was to impose an efficient system of funding the schools, the measures taken in this direction remaining valid, with minor alterations, until the application of the *Organic Regulation*. During his ruling periods, many other important measures were taken, such as offering support to underprivileged children to attend the courses of the Princely School, the exemption of apprentices and teachers from taxes to the state, the founding of a trusteeship of schools, from which the school inspectorates and the ministry of education would later derive. Assuming that the youth living in remote areas had no access to the courses provided at the “high schools” of Iași, Prince Grigorie IInd Ghica founded teaching institutions with Slavic and Romanian as teaching languages, around the two episcopacies.

Another prince who, in the former half of the XVIIIth century, constantly took measures regarding the development of the system of education and the raising of the level of instruction of the young, through increasing the capital of the schools, printing of books, regulating the legislation regarding the instruction of priests and by giving more responsibilities in education to the head of the Metropolitan Church, was Constantin Nicolae Mavrocordat.

An acceleration of the involvement in the functioning of this domain can be noticed during the rule of Ioan Theodor Calimah, industrious scholar, who considered education as “a burning flame of redeeming lights” which helped the understanding of “the past ones, considering the present and the future ones”. After he x-rayed the system of education, in order to identify the reason why the Princely School was in decline, he personally got involved in improving the educational act provided in schools and in multiplying the centres of culture, by establishing schools with Greek and Romanian as teaching languages in Botoșani, transforming the institution from Putna into Princely School, and by supporting the schools around the episcopacies.

The profound economic, social and political transformations from the latter half of the XVIIIth century, as well as the influence exerted by the Western culture caused an exacerbation of the preoccupations of the political and cultural elites regarding the modernization and expansion of the educational system. The most remarkable exponent of the princes of Moldavia to whom education was a priority was Grigorie Alexandru Ghica. Among the first measures initiated by this prince were to supplement the funds allocated to schools - to the sums collected from priests being added the ones coming from the funds of monasteries, sacred and unsacred, and from the revenue from salt pits - but also from instituting a very strict control of the way in which the money was spent.

The most important decisions taken by Prince Grigorie Alexandru Ghica was to reorganize from the grounds the Princely School, which was transformed into an Academy “of teachings and

architraves”, and the extension of school network through the founding of such an institution, with Greek as teaching language, within the Mavromolu Monastery in Galați, as well as of 23 schools with Romanian as teaching language in the county seats or in more populated boroughs.

Unfortunately, the followers to the throne of Prince Grigorie Alexandru Ghica did not continue the work begun by him, in 1785 Alexandru Ioan Mavrocordat, who found the Princely Academy in “abandoned in the worst state”, being forced to issue a new princely act, through which he set the funding of education on new bases.

The measures taken in the field of education in the former half of the XIXth century came under the general current of creating a national school, of modernization regarding its structure, content and methods, but also as a consequence of the fact that this problem was approached in the projects of reform issued by the representatives of the native boyars. Furthermore, as a certain impulse came from the Porte, the active involvement of Prince Alexandru Constantin Moruzi and of the head of the Metropolitan Church, Veniamin Costache, in reforming and developing of education translated into the issuing of numerous acts, through which the institutions of Iași and the ones around episcopacies and from counties were reorganized, and the Semainar within the Socola Monastery was founded. In turn, Scarlat Alexandru Calimah paid special attention to the system of education, being mainly preoccupied with increasing the income, aproving the starting of a class of engineering within the Princely Academy and regulating the legislation referring to wealth management and the education of orphan children.

The rebellion from 1821 had direct consequences over the education in Moldavia, being followed by a period of seven years of instability and changes, during which this domain was not among the priorities of the political and social elite. The situation came back to a certain normality only in 1828, when Prince Ioniță Sandu Sturdza approved, through the act of 28th March, the relaunching of funding, and restarted the functioning, with the support and direct involvement of Gheorghe Asachi, the system of education. After the Vasilian College was founded (1828) and until the inauguration of the Mihăileană Academy (1835), the central administration of Moldavia took numerous measures aiming at modernizing the system of education, issuing the necessary legislation, training teaching staff and finding solutions for providing necessary spaces for the county schools to function.

The analysis of the evolution of the main “high schools” founded through princely acts in the Middle Ages and at the beginning of the modern Era in Moldavia represents a real advantage, as it is the case when separate monographies are issued. This approach allowed us to reach a valid conclusion, which is that we cannot speak of more “high schools”, each with its own identity, but of a single institution existing in that period, which has periodically been reformed and reorganised.

Thus, the Vasilian College - founded on 9th May 1640 - was an institution which, beyond its religious dimension, specific for that period, became similar, through theme and structure, to institutions from the West, being, indirectly, an instrument of humanistic ideas in Moldavia. This institution played an important role in the evolution of education in Moldavia, being the foundation of the secondary and tertiary education, as it was an institution which grouped the studies corresponding to the two levels of education valid today. Even if the institution functioned with periods of interruption, we judge that it was never dissolved, as the lack of sources cannot be interpreted as a sign of its dissolution, since more princes were preoccupied with its fate.

Prince Nicolae Mavrocordat did not found a new institution called Princely School in 1714, but he reorganized the Vasilian College, applying in this way a project initiated in 1706 by Antioh Cantemir, which was delayed by the political instability of the country. The Princely School, as well as the Vasilian College, was organised with the support of a high representative of the Orthodox Church and it was an institution with teaching in more languages in which theological and filological studies occupied an important part, without the notions with scientific character to be ignored. It is true that the Princely School had a model in the Academy of Constantinople and it functioned by the curriculum of the latter, but, at the same time, the “new” institution benefited from the fortune given to the Vasilian College, was founded at the initiative of princes like the latter and held its courses in the same building in Ulița Ciubotărească until the fire that occurred there in 1724.

Prince Grigorie Alexandru Ghica, in order to meet the needs of a changing society, reformed the Princely School from the ground, transforming it into an institution in which sciences covered an important part of the curriculum, a genuine “Academy of architraves”. Despite this, in studies regarding this issue, no notice is given to the establishing of a new educational institution in 1766. Moreover, in the two ample monographies regarding the “High School” of Iași, which functioned throughout the XVIIIth century and the next one, until 1821, the name of Princely Academy is unjustifiably used for the period 1714-1821. In no document from period 1714-1766 did we find the name of “academy”, this institution being called “Princely School”, “high school”, “the new Princely Hellenic school”, “double schools”. In this line of reasoning, only after the reforms initiated by Grigorie Alexandru Ghica în 1766 did this institution carry the name of Princely Academy.

After the rebellion of 1821, many of the educational institutions stopped their activity, and the ones with Greek as teaching language, the Princely Academy of Iași being one of them, were dissolved through princely orders. After a period of seven years during which the Moldavian system of education was in decline, and the attempts did not give the expected results, a “high school” with Romanian as teaching language was organised in Moldavia in 1828, under the name of the Vasilian Secondary school. This institution was given birth by reforming the Princely Academy and transforming it from an institution with Greek as teaching language into the first “high school” of general knowledge with

Romanian as teaching language. Due to the fact that the Princely Academy was at the foundation of the Vasilian College, the contemporaries highlighted that the old settlement of Vasile Lupu from within the Trei Ierarhi Monastery was revived in 1828, while, in reality, Colegiul Vasilian / the Vasilian College, under Greek influence since the latter half of the XVIIIth century, continued its activity in the next century, the institution carrying the name of Princely School, and, later, of Princely Academy. In fact, the Vasilian Secondary School descended from the latter institution; the fact that it represents nothing more than a Princely Academy which was reformed repeatedly along the years results very clearly from the events which took place in the second and third decades of the XIXth century.

Regarding the opening of the gates of this institution, we agree with the hypothesis according to which the courses started on 23rd January 1828, but, at that time, only an elementary class (1st grade) was introduced or re-introduced, after Lancaster's method, under the guidance of Gheorghe Săulescu, the primary and secondary classes beginning their activity on 1st February, respectively on 1st March 1828. Consequently, we judge that the institution which carries out the tradition of the Vasilian Secondary School regarding the secondary courses (inferior and superior), namely Colegiul Național (Liceul M. Sadoveanu), wrongly celebrates 23rd January 1828 as its founding date. In this respect, even if it does not have sententious value, we appreciate that this institution of education descends from the Vasilian College, and the founding date is 9th May 1640, when the first founding act of the College of Trei Ierarhi was issued by Prince Vasile Lupu.

Another conclusion that can be clearly drawn is that the most schools of Iași, appointed in the XIXth century, derived from this institution, as a result of the increasing number of beneficiaries of superior education, who could also export education, in turn, to the Moldavian society outside the walls of the capital. One of the relevant examples in support of this aspect is the Seminar of Socola, "the first systematic school of national and religious culture", founded in 1803 (not in 1804), given the fact that, until the beginning of the XIXth century, "there couldn't be set schools with establishment for the education of the ones who were laid priests". In the absence of theological education, the young who wanted to embrace an ecclesiastic career were trained within the Princely Academy, some rulers being constantly preoccupied with forming a trained clergy, as numerous internal acts reveal.

The schools founded in the main boroughs of Moldavia, both the Episcopalian ones and the ones from the towns of Botoșani, Galați, Focșani, Chișinău and Bârlad, represented nothing else but branches or inferior order of the Princely School / Academy, being separated from it. Those centres of education were opened because the youth living in towns which were far away from the capital of Moldavia, for distance and financial reasons, could not attend the "high schools" of Iași and could not take advantage of the "princely generosity". In addition to this, analyzing the evolution of the princely schools outside the walls of the Moldavian capital, namely the Episcopalian ones and the ones from the towns of Botoșani, Galați, Focșani, Chișinău and Bârlad, as well as the one around the Putna

Monastery, we noticed the same continuity conjured up for the “high” schools from the capital. In these centres not many institutions were opened, but the same institution was re-organised successively, in accordance with the political, social and economic realities. A case in point in this respect is the school of Botosani, opened in 1758, re-organised and equipped many times by the end of the XVIII-th century, moved from Church Ospenia to Church Saint Dumitru in the second decade of the XIX-th century and transformed into a school with Romanian as teaching language, following the implementation of the *Organic Regulation*.

The existing schools represent a mirror of the society of that period - from all points of view: political, economic, social, cultural - as they reflect the level of instruction and of support given by the political elite in this field, the role of engine or break that some social categories played regarding the process of modernising the system, the economic problems of the epoch and, last, but not least, the cultural influences exerted in this geographic area. The evolution of schools in this period followed an extremely sinuous line, some rulers and representatives of the nobility being in favour of opening, protecting and modernising schools, while others ignored education completely. The most difficulties these institutions encountered were generated by lack of money, all the decisions in this field reflecting the struggle of some rulers to create an efficient financial and controlling system, without spectacular, yet notable, results, if we analyse the social-economic and political-military realities thoroughly.

Far from exhausting the topic, we consider that our approach can be laid at the foundation of an ampler study, which can include supplementary aspects and can crystallize as a useful instrument for the ones interested in the evolution of education in the Romanian space, in general, and in Iași, in particular. In addition to this, our paper aims at recovering traditions and continuity, topics considered obsolete today by a part of historiography, and which could remind us, centuries later, of Miron Costin’s thoughts: “People are born in Moldavia as well.”