

BOGDAN SERAI- MOLDAVIAN REPRESENTATION AT THE SUBLIME PORTE

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Abstract: *Both Moldavia and Wallachia enjoyed a privileged and special status as tributary states of the Ottoman Empire. As such, the representation system of the principalities was unique: Both Moldavia and Wallachia kept permanent envoys titled capukehaie in Istanbul. The envoys resided in Bogdan Serai (Moldavian Palace) and Eflak Serai (Wallachian Palace) in the Fatih and Phanar regions, respectively.*

The present paper shall focus on the residence of the Moldavian envoys, Bogdan Serai, which consisted of a main residence and a funerary chapel. Unfortunately almost nothing remains from the Serai today.

There are quite a number of unanswered questions about the date of construction, architectural history and the residents of the building. The residences of the envoys deserve a comprehensive architectural survey, legal protection and restoration as architectural monuments that are identified with the lives of historical personages and connected with events significant in the cultural, political, and social history of Turkey and Romania.

Keywords: *Bogdan Serai, capukehaie, Moldavian envoys, diplomacy.*

INTRODUCTION

The diplomats and ambassadors of European powers, such as Venice, France, Austria and England played significant roles in the history of the Ottoman Empire. Many of these prominent figures are known through their notes, diaries or political interventions. The Venetians had a resident ambassador in Istanbul as early as 1454, that is one year after the conquest of the city.

Wallachia and Moldavia, however, had a special status: Were they part of the Empire or were they outside the boundaries of the Empire? This question has preoccupied the minds of many historians and researchers.

The principalities acquired their special status through ahd-names, in other words, contracts by which both parties undertook oaths to do or refrain from doing certain things. In general, the obligations of the principalities could be summarized as being “to be a friend to a friend and a foe to a foe”.¹ In return, the Principalities preserved the right to elect their own Christian princes and to maintain the laws and faith of their country². The Principalities in turn, agreed to pay tribute and gifts to the Porte.

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¹ Maxim, M., *Romano-Ottomanica Essays & Documents from the Turkish Archives*, Isis, Istanbul, 2001, p. 12.

² *Ibid*, p. 21.

The Wallachian and Moldavian princes or voivodes were thus allowed semi-autonomy. This brought the question of representation of the states at the Sublime Porte.

The representative was called a *capukechaia*, *capichehaia*, sometimes *chehaia* or *kapikethüdası*. The *kapikethüdası* was an institution peculiar to the Ottoman administrative system³.

Capu (Kapı) is a word of Turkic origin and stands for a gateway, or door, signifying the Sublime Porte, that is the state. The Persian word *ched*, means a house and *huda* stands for a master. Thus *kapikethüdası* refers to the master of a household.

Among the variants of the word is also *chehaia* or *kiaya* (*kahya*), a steward, or warden to whom the task of representing a community to the Porte was delegated. The guilds also had *chehaias*, officeholders.

In the 16th century, the representatives of Wallachia and Moldavia were also called “*adem*” or “*merdüman*” (man or men), the word *kahya* emerging later⁴. Maxim refers to the title “*merdüman*” (men) of the Wallachian and Moldavian principalities in the fiscal year 1573-1574, among the ambassadors (*elçıyan*) of European Powers⁵.

Among influential *capikehaias* of the principalities were Gheorghe Ghica (1600-1664), Prince of Moldavia (1658-1659), Prince of Wallachia (1659-1660), who served as *capukehaia* to the Porte under the reign of Vasile Lupu, after serving as *vornic*; Nicolae Milescu (1636-1708), Moldavian writer, traveller, diplomat, who served as *capukehaia* to the Portebetween 1660-1664, Ienachi Porphyrita, *capukehaia* of Constantin Brancoveanu, who was present at Carlowitz pre-conference meetings and negotiations and Dimitrie Cantemir, who during the reign of his brother Antioch, served as *capukehaia* to the Portebetween 1695-1700.

I. THE SYSTEM OF REPRESENTATION AT THE PORTE

The Moldo-Wallachian representation system was unique according to Karman:

„The vast majority of issues were taken care of by the resident envoys (sing. *capuchehaia*), of whom there were at least two, but sometimes even four at the same time at the Sublime Porte - a method unknown in Transylvania.”⁶

Diplomatic legations could be temporary or permanent. Permanent legations have been regarded as a symbol of sovereignty.⁷

³ Düşünmez, D., *Tanzimat Devrinde Kapı Kethüdalığı Müessesesi Hakkında Temel Bilgiler*, Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi, (28), 2010, 375-401.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 379.

⁵ Maxim, M., *L'Empire ottoman au nord du Danube et l'autonomie des Principautés roumaines au XVIe siècle, Études et documents*, Isis, Istanbul, 1999, p. 132.

⁶ Karman, G., *Sovereignty and Representation: Tributary States in the Seventeenth-century Diplomatic System of the Ottoman Empire*, in *The European Tributary States of the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, eds. Gábor Kármán and Lovro Kunčević, BRILL, 2013, p. 162.

⁷ Mattingly, G., *The First Resident Embassies: Medieval Italian Origins of Modern Diplomacy*, *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*, Vol. XII, Oct., 1937, No. 4, p. 423.

„The latter example points to a functional divide between the two roles: kapı kehayası/kethüdası would mean a resident envoy or ambassador, whereas an elçi would be an ad hoc delegate who returned to his ruler after having accomplished his specific mission. The fact that during the seventeenth century, the Transylvanian chief envoys—in contrast to the resident orators—were called elçi in Turkish documents also supports this conclusion.”⁸

According to Ion Matei, permanent ambassadors of Wallachia and Moldavia appeared in the first half of the 16th century.⁹ Because of the privileged status of Wallachia and Moldavia the capukehaia could be appointed by the Prince as opposed to other tributaries such as Egypt and Tunis, whose capukehaias were officials appointed by the Porte.

According to the Ottoman diplomatic tradition, the ambassadors were subsidized by the Porte. The permanent ambassadors were paid for the first six months of their residence, this tradition being abandoned after 1794.¹⁰ Maxim refers to the budget for the fiscal year 1609-1610 containing payments of 17.700 akches once every three months¹¹. Moreover, there must have been one başkethüda or başcapukehaia in addition to 5-6 six kethüdas¹².

II. THE RESIDENCE OF THE MOLDAVIAN ENVOYS

But where did the envoys live? The Wallachian residence was called Eflak Sarayı (Wallachian Palace) and was located in Phanar. There is evidence of an Erdel Sarayı (Transylvanian Palace), the traces of which were found by the Turcologist Karacson on Macarlar Yokuşu Sokak (the Street of the Hungarians).¹³

There is conflicting and incomplete information about the Moldavian residence in Istanbul. The residence is known as Bogdan Sarayı (Bogdan Saray, Bogdan Serai, Moldavian Palace) and is located in the district of Fatih, on Draman (Dragoman) Street, in the vicinity of Chora and Kefeli Mosque, both former Byzantine churches.

The Moldavian residence was mentioned by the Venetian bailo (ambassador) as early as 1610:

„...casa antica qui dei principi di Moldavia”¹⁴

We have little information about the construction of the building. According to Cantemir, the residence was built by Teutal Longophetes (or Tautul Logofatul),

⁸ Karman, G., *op.cit.*, 1937, p. 166.

⁹ Maxim, M., *op.cit.*, 1999, p. 133, footnote 1.

¹⁰ Düzbakar, Ö., *XV-XVIII. Yüzyıllarda Osmanlı Devleti'nde Elçilik Geleneği ve Elçi İşlerinin Karşılanmasında Bursa'nın Yeri*, Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi, Volume 2/6, Winter 2009, p. 184.

¹¹ Maxim, M., *op.cit.*, 1999, p. 133.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Karman, G., *op.cit.*, p. 168.

¹⁴ Luca, C., *Le rappresentanze diplomatiche dei Principati Romeni presso la Porta Ottomana nei secoli XVI-XVII*, Mélanges de l'école française de Rome, Année 2007, tome 119, no. 1, 2007, p. 100.

who was sent by Bogdan in embassy to Suleiman the Magnificent with offered terms:

„He built at Constantinople Palace call'd at this day *Bogdan Serai*, the Moldavian Palace, in which is a church dedicated to *St. Nicholas*.”¹⁵

According to Millingen, the Moldavian residence must have been „an attractive house” with a large estate.¹⁶ The house had a magnificent view of the Golden Horne and the city. A chapel was annexed to the main building at the northwestern end. Millingen refers to Gerlach for the origins of the residence. In Gerlach's version, the house belonged to Raoul, who after his emigration to Russia in 1518, sold the house to Michael Cantacuzene for the residence of Moldavian representatives. Michael Cantacuzene was a very wealthy and powerful archon, who controlled the salt and fur trades in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷

Janin identified the Moldavian palace with the House of Raoul visited by Stefan Gerlach, who was in Istanbul between 1573-1578 as a preacher¹⁸.

Another conflicting view is the identification of the church with the English Varangians in Constantinople. According to certain scholars, a group of Anglo-Saxons left England following the Norman Conquest in 1066 with numerous ships and sailed into the Mediterranean. After raiding and plundering, they sailed to Constantinople and entered the service of the Byzantine Emperor. They were invited to the Varangian Guard of the Emperor and took part in naval and land campaigns.¹⁹

The Varangian guard possessed two churches in Constantinople, one of which was close to St. Sophia and the other, the church of St. Nicholas and St. Augustine of Canterbury. It is with the latter that the church of Bogdan Serai is identified. Gravestones of English Varangians found near the church provided the most substantial evidence for the identification. The British Embassy attempted to remove the tombstones to the English Cemetery in Üsküdar (Scutari) in 1865.²⁰

The request was refused by the Turkish government and the tombstones were subsequently used as building materials (in the construction of the Selimiye orphanage according to some sources).²¹ A church at Lower Kingswood in Surrey currently possesses a 13-14th century marble column capital reputedly from the St. Nicholas Church.²²

The copies of the tombstones were burnt during the fire of 1870.²³

¹⁵ Cantemir, D., *The History of the Growth and Decay of the Othman Empire*, Nicholas Tindal, J.J., and P. Knapton, part I, p. 189, annotation 28.

¹⁶ Millingen, A., *Byzantine Churches in Constantinople*, BoD, 2018, p. 294.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Ousterhout, R.G., *The Architecture of the Kariye Camii in Istanbul*, Dumbarton Oaks, 1987, p. 113.

¹⁹ Allen, R.B., Allen, R.A., Chibnall, M., *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies, I*, Boydell & Brewer, 1978, p. 72.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ K.N. Ciggaar, K.N., (1974), *L'émigration anglaise à Byzance après 1066*, *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 32, 1974, pp. 301-342.

²² Buckton, D., *Byzantium: Treasures of Byzantine Art and Culture from British Collections*, British Museum: London Catalogue no. 211, 1994.

²³ Allen, R.B., Allen, R.A., Chibnall, M., *Ibid.*

III. RESIDENTS OF BOGDAN SERAI

According to Condurachi, Moldavia was represented by a capukehaia as early as the sixteenth century. The first envoy was Duca, representative of Petru Șchiopul.²⁴ We do not know whether the first envoy resided in Bogdan Serai as there is insufficient information about the date of the building. Did the Moldavian hostages also reside in the building? This is another question that remains to be answered.

During the sixteenth century, ambassadors of the Habsburg emperor resided temporarily in Elçi Hanı (Ambassadors' Inn) located on Divanyolu, close to Sultanahmet. Envoys from Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania are also known to have been accommodated in the same Han in the same century. Elçi Hanı was a large but it was inappropriate in terms of comfort for the high ranking dignitaries. Nothing remains of the inn today.

After 1606, the Habsburg representatives chose other places, most of them preferring the Phanar area. Other ambassadors, among them Polish and Swedish were housed in Boğdan Sarayı during the seventeenth century.²⁵ Claes Ralamb, who led a Swedish embassy to the Sublime Porte, was first placed in a house in the Balat area upon his arrival in Istanbul. Finding the house uncomfortable, the ambassador was then moved to Bogdan Serai, which he rented at his own expense. The first envoy to Constantinople Paul Strassburg, sent by King Gustaf Adolf II to Murad IV had also stayed here in 1634.²⁶ This stirred a debate among scholars about the ownership of the building. Was the Bogdan Serai confiscated from the Moldavian capuchehaias by the Sublime Porte in the seventeenth century?

Ottaviano Bon, Venetian Ambassador in Constantinople, however, did refer to the residences of Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania in 1609:

[...] in Costantinopoli vi è residenza delli ambasciatori
[occidentali] [...] come tengono un agente [...] il Bogdano [Moldavo],
il Valacco et il Transilvano²⁷

The date of confiscation by the Ottoman state was much later according to Eyice. Eyice argues that confiscation took place after 1711 following Dimitrie Cantemir's change to the Russian side in the Russo-Turkish war. In 1760 the building was endowed to the Russian monastery of St. Pantaleon on Mount Athos by John Callimachi²⁸.

IV. ARCHITECTURE

Bogdan Serai consists of two buildings: the main residence and the chapel. A comprehensive survey was undertaken by Millingen when the chapel was relatively

²⁴ Prodan, D., *Preocupări de orientalistică - turcologie în România De la Marea Unire până la instaurarea regimului comunist (1918-1948)*, (*Concerns with a view to Turkish-Orientalism in Romania. From the Great till the Communist Regime*), Acta Moldaviae Septentrionalis, ed. Chiricheș, C., Dorian, G., AXA Publishing House, Botoșani, 2004, p. 109.

²⁵ Karman, G., *op.cit.*, p. 171.

²⁶ Adahl, K., *The Sultan's procession: the Swedish Embassy to Sultan Mehmed IV in 1657-1658 and the Rålamb paintings*, Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, Istanbul :London, 2006, p. 14.

²⁷ Luca, C., *op.cit.*, p. 100.

²⁸ Eyice, S., *Boğdan Sarayı*, TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi, Vol. 6, 1992, pp. 271-272.

intact. The chapel was a two storey building, measuring 8.80 x 3,70 m. During World War I, a German excavation in the lower storey revealed three sarcophagi and an inscription. These findings together with the north south orientation of the chapel (churches in Istanbul were almost invariably oriented in east-west direction) led to the conclusion that Bogdan Sarayı was a funerary chapel.²⁹ A photograph taken before 1912 shows the chapel with two storey's and a dome.³⁰

Millingen and Ousterhout agree that the building could be a Byzantine mansion.³¹ Ousterhout describes the chapel as a single aisled and domed „Paleologan” church serving a private residence.³²

Şentürk and Urfalıoğlu date the building to the Late Byzantine Period, that is the dates between 726-1204. The brickwork consisted of courses of three or four rows of white stones alternating with a row of red bricks, which was typical of the period.³³

What remains of Bogdan saray today is scanty. The main building was burnt down in the great fire of 1784 and the vast estate was converted into vegetable gardens. The barely visible ruins are now under a tyre storage depot.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Official residences of Moldo-Wallachian and Transylvanian envoys are reminders of Istanbul's historic fabric and complexity. The buildings have deep significance for the cultural and political relationships between the Ottoman Empire and Romania. Regretfully Bogdan Serai has been damaged beyond repair. There is no trace of the Transylvanian Palace. The Wallachian Palace is the best preserved one of these valuable monuments.

There are many unanswered questions about the dates, the architectural histories and the usage of the residences of Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania as well as Elçi Han. The buildings merit a comprehensive historical/architectural survey, legal protection and restoration as architectural monuments that are identified with the lives of historical personages and connected with events significant in the cultural, political, and social histories of Turkey and Romania.

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²⁹ Millingen, *op.cit.*

³⁰ Mamboury, E., *Constantinople: Tourists' Guide*, 1st edition, Rizzo and Son, Constantinople, 1925.

³¹ Millingen, *ibid.*; Ousterhout, *ibid.*

³² Ousterhout, p. 113.

³³ Şentürk, H., Urfalıoğlu, N., *İstanbul'da Bulunan Son Dönem Bizans Yapılarında Cephe Bezemeleri*, Omer Halisdemir University Journal of Engineering Sciences, Volume 6, Issue 2, 2017, p. 764.

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