

**The Time of Writing
– The Manuscripts –**

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Abstract: Starting from the collection *Notes in Manuscripts and Old Books from Moldova Country. A Corpus* edited by I. Caproșu and E. Chiaburu, we try to discover the temporal reference points of copying manuscripts and to establish the relationship between the individual and community. A classification is proposed, and a chronology of these notes.

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The publication of a massive and impressive collection, *Însemnări de pe manuscrise și cărți vechi din Țara Moldovei*, edited by I. Caproșu and E. Chiaburu (*Notes in Manuscripts and Old Books from Moldova Country*)¹ is at least disconcerting for the common reader, and even for a person used to libraries. If the publication of notes from books and manuscripts was so far aleatoric, or, at best, these collections covered a certain collection or a well defined geographical area, the present corpus puts the minute information contained by book and manuscript notes in a new light, the tiny text fragment becoming, by accumulation, an exceptional source of information on the sociology of culture, sometimes supplying new data on different cultural personalities, and being also an important source of historical events.

Being a collection of book notes from Moldova and reviewing the already published entries, the corpus suggests several lines of study. Firstly the phenomena pertaining to cultural sociology can be observed in it, but also issues regarding the history of culture in general, and in the history of language (when the voice of those who made the notes express dialectal aspects) can be investigated in it, being even possible to outline some significant centres of religious or intellectual life, as well as the biography of some scholars based on it.

From among the many possible directions which occur to the reader when looking through this invaluable collection, we shall follow only one, trying to discover *when* a manuscript was written or copied, *when* and *why* a book was bought, *when* and *why* the manuscript or book was read. Identifying the *time of writing* and of reading sometimes the motivation of the act can also be perceived, and in some cases the individual reaction can be interpreted as well. We shall be able to discover some individual or collective relationships with the book, and maybe we can even outline the main cultural vectors in different historical moments.

¹ *Însemnări de pe manuscrise și cărți vechi din Țara Moldovei*, eds. I. Caproșu and E. Chiaburu (Iași: Casa Editorială Demiurg, 2008), vol. I: XXX + 667 p.; vol II: XXX+667 p., vol. III: XXIV + 749 p.; vol. IV: XXIV + 694 p.



Ana-Maria Călinescu, *The-One-Who-Wonders*
Pencil on paper (175 × 220 mm.)

Former studies and projects investigating intellectuality show that during the first stage of their development in the Romanian principalities, as otherwise in all medieval Europe, intellectual activities belonged to the elite, privileged first of all not materially, but rather through its preoccupations. In the Romanian countries, the earliest notes were made by the scribes in monasteries. The earliest preserved note dates back to 1492. It was made by Gavril Uric¹ in the marvellous manuscript of the Four Gospels in Slavonic (it is nowadays preserved in Bodleian Library, British Museum), and it marks the moment the manuscript was finished as the solemn inaugural moment of a cultural act: "With the goodwill of the Father and the teaching of the Son and the fulfilment of the Holy Ghost this *Gospels* was made in the days of the pious Prince, lover of Christ, Io Alexandru Voevod, Prince of the whole land of Moldovlahia, and of his pious Princess Marina, who burning with desire, being a worshipper of the love of Christ's words, gave with zeal, and this was written in the year 6937² (=1429), and was finished in the month of March in 13 days, by the hand of the monk Gavril, son of Uric, who wrote it in the monastery of Neamtu."³ The text is similar to the Slavonic inscriptions carved on the stones marking the founding of churches in that age. Mentally no difference was made between the inauguration of a place of worship and the completion of a manuscript; each one opened and contained in itself a universe. "[N. N.] Gave [=order] to be written", "gave and it was written", or simply "it was written" are the formula which show the importance given to the manuscript by the person who commissioned the copying, this deed being identical for him with a founding act.

If Gavril Uric's *Tetraevangelium*, considered nowadays one of the most beautiful Slavonic manuscripts on account of both its marvellous miniatures, the use of golden ink and its calligraphy, had to "be inaugurated" by such a note, other manuscripts copied by Gavril Uric, which did not unite all these exceptional graphic characteristics,⁴ are accompanied by shorter and less solemn notes: "These *Gospels* of the monastery of Neamtu were written by the hand of the monk Gavril, son of Uric in the days of Father Hegumen Siluan. It was begun on the 6th day of the month of April, and it was finished next year, on the 3rd day of February in the year 6944 [=1436]."⁵ The time necessary to copy the manuscript, almost one year, had to be, however, marked by pointing out the temporal limits of the effort. This differed from the brief notes in other manuscripts by the same scribe: "Gavril wrote this *Collection* in the year 6949 [=1441]",⁶ "In the year 6947 [=1439], in the month September, on the 23rd, Gavril finished this *Collection*",⁷ "Gavril wrote this book in the year 6993 [=1445]".⁸ In such notes the exceptional scribe

¹ The texts written originally in Slavonic, Romanian or in other language will be given only in English translation, since we are interested in the content of the notes. Between square brackets [=] we put the dates according to modern chronology.

² Year after the creation of the world.

³ *Însemnări de pe manuscrise și cărți vechi...*, I, 1. Translation from Emil Turdeanu, "The Oldest Illuminated Moldavian Ms.", in Emil Turdeanu, *Études de littérature roumaine et d'écrits slaves et grecs des Principautés Roumaines*, (Leiden: Brill, 1985) 100.

⁴ Nevertheless, another manuscript copied by him is an exhibit of the Museum of Fine Arts in Bucharest due to its beauty.

⁵ Ibid., I, 2.

⁶ Ibid., I, 3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

appears similar to a craftsman who puts his trademark on his “serial” product (even this being admirable from the point of calligraphy), arriving to the simple statement “Gavril Uric’s”,¹ where the “production date” no longer seems to be important.

Once again, the writing of a manuscript became a memorable event during the reign of Stephen the Great (1457–1504), when commissioning manuscripts overlapped the Prince’s activity of founding churches and monasteries, this being one of the actions by which he tried to build the state institutions of Moldova: “In the year 6975 [=1467] by the gift and order of our pious and Christ loving, crowned by God Prince Ioan Ștefan Voivode, Prince of the whole land of Moldova this *Menaion for January* was written for the monastery of Putna. And it was written in the monastery of Neamț by the hand of the great sinner scribe, the hieromonk Ioanichie, being then prelate in the land of Moldova His Eminence the Metropolitan Teoctist, the hegumen of Putna being Ioasaf”.² The copying of the manuscript was not wholly unrelated to the construction of Putna Monastery (1466–1468) as it prefigured the furnishing of this by the founder Prince with everything necessary to religious life. That this was the state of things and that a coherent series of actions took place is confirmed by a note made by another scribe in a *Menaion for December*: “In the year 6975 [=1467], by the order of our pious Prince, Ioan Ștefan Voivode, son of Bogdan Voivode, this *Menaion* was written for his monastery in Putna in the days of Archimandrite Ioasaf by the hand of the great sinner deacon Nicodim.”³

The manuscripts donated to different monasteries, even if they were not newly founded by Stephen the Great, mark the moment in a similarly solemn way: “The pious and Christ loving Prince, Ioan Ștefan Voivode, Prince of the land of Moldovlahia gave order to be written this *Tetraevangelium* by the hand of the hieromonk Nicodim and he presented it to the monastery situated in Homor as alms for his soul and his parents’ and children’s souls. At that time the priest Ghenadie was the Hegumen. It was finished in the month of June, on the 17th, in the year 6981 [=1473].”⁴

To copy a manuscript required a rather long time and a matching intellectual effort, mainly during the copying of biblical texts, since it was under an express interdiction to add or omit words to and from the text of the Bible (*Apocalypse 22,19*).

As the year 7000, according to traditional chronology starting with the creation of the world, drew nearer, the number of the copied biblical texts increased. Undoubtedly, we encounter a reaction to millenarian crises (which had spread in the western world as well around the year 1000 AD, and in other periods as well): “May the all-seeing and good God be blessed and praised after the beginning and conclusion of the good, unmentioned deeds, his be the kingdom and the reign over everyone and everything. This was written in the month of November, by the gift and order of Ștefan Voivode, Prince of the whole land of Moldova, son of Bogdan Voivode. And it was written so that he and his parents may be mentioned [in prayer] in the church of the Great Saint George, Bringer of Victory, which is in Voroneț. This book named *The Gospel* was written by the monk Pahomie in the days of Gheorghe, Metropolitan of the whole land of Moldova, under the Hegumen Ghenadie and it was finished in the year

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., I, 7.

³ Ibid., 8.

⁴ Ibid., 10.

6999 [=1490]. This was written under Ștefan Voivode.”¹ This gesture was imitated by the Prince’s son, Alexandru: “With the will of the Father, and the aid of the Son, and the fulfilment of the Holy Ghost, Io Alexandru Voivode, voivode from the grace of God, Prince of the land of Moldova, son of the great Ștefan Voivode, wrote and decorated this *Tetraevangelium* for his church, which is in Bacău, under the patronage of our Most Holy Lady, Mother of God and Ever Virgin Mary, by the hand of the great sinner deacon Theodor in the days of the pious and Christ loving Ion Ștefan Voivode, in the 35th year of his rule, in the year 6999 [=1491], in the month April, on the 22nd.”²

The formulations from above bear striking resemblance, sometimes even being identical, with the votive inscriptions on the churches constructed at the same time, in the age of Stephen the Great. The way in which these notes are formulated formally mark the inauguration of a cultural space, since, in this age, the multiplication of a manuscript seemed to be a cultural event, not only from the point of view of their relative rarity, but also because these manuscripts copied in renowned monastic centres were real artistic achievements, being elaborated in the exceptional manner of some famous schools of calligraphy, often accompanied by miniatures, frontispieces or ornamented initials of great beauty. They had the role, alongside other cultic objects (icons, thuribles, canonicals, etc.), to “embellish” the place of worship which they were made for. Moreover, they pointed out the splendour of the religious cult.

The termination of such a manuscript was a significant event for the commissioner of the copy, who carried out a real founding act,³ for the scribe aware of the importance of the work he had completed,⁴ and in most cases for both.⁵

Only as a comparison, we mention that in case of the books printed in Slavonic and Romanian published since the 16th century the content of the notes is completely different: the purchaser records only the event of the purchase or donation. We shall cite only one note, leaving the analysis of the notes which mark the purchase or taking into

¹ Ibid., 15.

² Ibid., 16.

³ “† In the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Trinity of one being and inseparable. I, the servant of my Lord, Jesus Christ, Toader Balaș, Chancellor, approved by my good will and ordered to be written for me this *Tetraevangelium*, which I donated for my health and my parents’ soul to the church under the patronage of the Archangels Saint Michel and Gabriel in the town of Suceava in the days of our pious and Christ loving Prince, Io Petru Voivode, Prince of the land of Moldova, in the days of the Metropolitan Theofan, in the year 7050 [=1542], in the month of August, on the 15th day.” (Ibid., 56.)

⁴ “This *Tetraevangelium* was handwritten by the great sinner priest Gavril Melentiscul in the days of our pious and Christ loving Lord, Io Petru Voivode, by the grace of God Prince of the land of Moldova, in the year 7053 [=1545], in the month of June, on the 30th day.”

⁵ “With the goodwill of the All-Seeing and Good God, and with the aid of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, I, the humble Theodosie, Bishop of Rădăuți, have finished the well done work, and I wished from all my heart, and as a caretaker I gave and I wrote this *Deeds and Letters of the Apostles* with all its power to the beautiful sacred diocese of Rădăuți, where the church of the Holy Hierarch and Wonderworker, Saint Nicholas of Myra stands, in the days of the pious Prince, Io Petru Voivode. In the year 7051 [=1544], on December 6. Its price 200 zloty.” (Ibid., 57.) It must be mentioned that the date of the donation coincided with the feast day of Saint Nicholas, therefore the dedication festival of the church, which gave additional emphasis to the moment. We may presume that the donation was festive, being performed before a numerous public.

possession (as a legacy or in other ways) of the printed book to a subsequent study. In a *Gospel with Teaching (The 2nd Homiliary)* published by Coresi in Braşov in 1580–1581 there is a donation note from 1622: “With the work of the Father, and the aid of the Son, and the fulfilment of the Holy Ghost, I, the servant of God, of Christ, the Lord, God and Saviour, Ilea, clerk and verger of Suceava Castle, by our free will and with humble heart, we thought of the holy monastery where the church of the Prophet Saint Elijah is, and we gave to the holy monastery four books, namely the one named *Explanation or The Meaning of the Holy Gospel* [...]”¹

Once printed books appeared and became circulated in great numbers, the attitude towards the act of copying (or writing) a manuscript changed completely, in most cases it became the result of a personal action, its chronological parameters, if they are mentioned at all, belong to the scribe’s biography.

In our opinion, we have, according to the content of the text, several different situations which must be distinguished. The first, the least interesting from our point of view, is the multiplication of a printed material through copying (as printed texts did not meet the demand for books until the end of the 18th century, multiplication through copying was present). The notes which usually accompany such copies contain first of all the information taken from the title page of the print and only briefly some remark which personalizes the scribe.

If, however, the copy was made from another manuscript, if it is a translation, or, moreover, an original work, we can observe different scribal attitudes towards the copied text according to the content of the text; one attitude characterizing religious texts and a completely different texts having worldly content. In the case of religious texts it was important to respect the integrity of the text and also to mention ecclesiastical (and sometimes laic) authorities, which increased the authorial reference points of the texts, conferring additional solemnity to the scribe’s note: “With the blessing of the Almighty, all operating God, the one in the Holy Trinity glorified and praised, and with the blessing of the hieromonk Superior Dositei this holy book, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* together with other pastoral commandments and teachings was written in the monastery of Putna, at the church of the All-holy Virgin, Mother of God, by me, the undeserving servant of God, the hieromonk Silvestru in the year of the Lord 7134 [=1725], in the month of December, on the 13th day.”² In the case of Ephrem the Syrian’s *Teachings*, of which several copies were made in the same year, 1780, by the same scribe, Ioan (ordained under the name of Ilarion), we find the following note: “The book, namely the *Teachings* of our holy, all-pious and God guided father, Ephrem the Syrian, which are full of humility in order to urge to repentance, which have been written now in the days of the illustrious Prince of Moldova, Constantin Dimitrie Moruz Voivode, all expenses being borne by his holiness Father Neofit from the monastery of Vrancea. 14 Lei was paid for the copy. It was written in the holy monastery of Vrancea in the year 1780 after Christ through the efforts of Ioan the typographer, and now it has been written by me, the hieromonk Ilarion.”³ The scribe apologised for the mistakes

¹ Ibid., 172.

² Ibid., 435.

³ Ibid., II, 314. The notes in the other manuscripts are similar: “The book, namely the *Teachings* of our holy, all-pious and God guided father, Ephrem the Syrian, which are full of humility in order to urge to repentance, which have been written now in the days of the illustrious Prince of Moldova, Constantin Dimitrie Moruz Voivode, all expenses being borne by his holiness Father

which could have been made in the text: “Praised be the God venerated in the Trinity, who has helped me from the beginning to reach the end, and you who will happen to read it, rejoice with a spiritual joy, and any mistake you may find either in the words or in the letters do not be hasty to upbraid, but correct and forgive it, to show yourselves fulfilling the word which says: ‘Forgive and thou shall be forgiven’, so that all of us may find forgiveness at the good God, for we all trespass a lot. Obedient and well wishing to all, Ioan, year 1781. Hieromonk Ilarion.”¹ By the way, it had become a topos for scribes to apologize in their manuscripts not only for the mistakes they made, but also for having written “with rustic hands”, a formulation which we can find only in religious texts.

In case of manuscripts with a worldly content the scribe’s note marks almost always an individual event. Thus, on the manuscript of Fénelon’s novel, *The Adventures of Telemachus*, the future metropolitan, Vartolomeu Măzăreanu noted as a young scribe: “In the year 1778, September 14, I entered the service of his holiness Father Gherasim, administrator of the holy diocese of Roman, bishop being His Grace Bishop Leon”.² In another copy another scribe noted concisely: “The end of *The Adventures of Telemachus, son of Ulysses*, which was written in the holy diocese of Rădăuți in the year 1780, March, day 23, Isaie Hierodeacon of Rădăuți.”

In a manuscript which contains a collection of Oxenstierna’s works, the scribe turned to the readers themselves: “Finished and praised be God. O, my beloved brothers, readers who will read and dwell upon this historical book, called *Oxentie*, I beseech you, if you find some mistake to correct it, for I, being a man, might have made mistakes as a man, especially as I am in the 60th year of my wretched life. For which I pray to forgive me and be forgiven. I wrote this book in 1779, on July 8. I finished it during the reign of the illustrious Prince Constantin Dimitrie Moruz Voivode. I, the servant of the holy God, Gheorgachi, Lord Stewart.”³ If Oxenstierna’s works, due to the religious character of the author’s meditations, could recall religious works, in the translation of the *Ethiopian Story* usually attributed to Heliodorus of Emesa, a novel with exotic and slightly erotic content, the scribe’s note is dry and refers only to his biography: “This book which is called Heliodorus was written, as it can be seen, by me, Grigori Hudeci, scribe of the Diocese of Roman in the year 1784, August”.⁴ Another popular book, *The History of the Philosopher Sindipa* ends with: “This *Sindipa* was translated from Greek and was written by me, the humble and lowliest of teachers, who shall sign my name

Neofit from the monastery of Vrancea. 14 Lei was paid for the copy. It was written in the holy monastery of Vrancea in the year 1780 after Christ through the efforts of Ioan typographer, and now it has been written by me, hieromonk Ilarion.” (Ibid., 315.)

¹ Ibid., 315.

² Ibid., 294.

³ Ibid., 304. In another copy of Oxenstierna collection we find the following note: “This book which is called *The Second Book of Oxisterna* was written by Gheorghie Vârnav, son of the late Neculai Vârnav, former Great Provisioner, for the amusement or instruction of many who will read it with understanding, in the days of the illustrious Prince, His Highness Constantin Dimitrie Moruz Voivode, first to reign, in the third year of His Highness’ reign, in the year 1780 of the salvational passion, on March 1.”

⁴ Ibid., 394.

below, with all my zeal and diligence in Târgul Neamțului, that in Piatra. 1784, August 14, Alexandru Athanasiu.”¹

In the case of the 1784 translation of Metastasio’s tragedy, *La clemenza di Tito* (text on which the libretto of the famous Mozart opera composed in 1791 was based), the learned boyar, Alexandru Beldiman (the title of the translation is *Milosârdia lui Tit*) noted even more concisely: “This book was written and translated by me, Alexandru Beldiman. 1784, October 5.”²

In the case of religious manuscripts, by invoking the name of church hierarchs and of voivodes, the act of copying is marked as a collective event. Such notes we also encounter in other texts of public interest as well, e.g. chronicles or legal texts. In the majority of the manuscripts with a laic content, however, the particular character of the notes is predominant, mostly referring to the writer’s personal biography.

Translated by Ágnes Korondi

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid., 397.