MERCHANTS FROM IĂŞI AND THEIR TRADE WITH TRANSYLVANIA IN DOCUMENTS BETWEEN THE 17TH–18TH CENTURIES*

Marius Chelcu**

Abstract: Our research we use information from published documents, most of them found usesin the series Documents on the history of Iasi, to which were added a few unedited documentary sources from the Archives in Iasi and the Academy Library in Bucharest. Even though our investigation begins in the second half of the 17th century, due to the amount of information available, we focused more on the 18th century. Moreover, the increase in information regarding these 18th century dealers cannot be explained only by the increase of the number of acts written and stored, but also it is a reason upon the balance of Moldova’s trade with Central Europe. In that context, in Iasi, we can find several families of merchants specialised in trading goods brought from Transylvania, especially from Brașov.

Keywords: economic system, merchants, trade routes, documentary sources, genealogy.

Our research is based on information contained in a series of internal documents, most of them gathered in the series Documents regarding the history of Iaşi, published in the recent years by Ioan Caproşu. Sources used are most of them deeds that contain information about merchants, residents of Iaşi, specialized in trade in Transylvania, especially in Brașov.

The period that dates these documents and their contents have forced us to turn our attention to a time when the rhythms of the economic life have changed in a new economical and political context. The changes of the framework began to be noticeable ever since the mid 17th century1, but the serious disorders that affected urban life in Moldavia at the end of that century made the process, recognized as an advance of the European economy at the expense of the Ottoman one, suffer a delay, so its manifestations became more visible in the mid 18th century2. A sign of the changing

* Research funded by the project ”MINERVA - Cooperation for elite career in doctoral and postdoctoral research” Contract Code: POSDRU/159/1.5/S/137832, project co-financed from the European Social Fund by the Operational Program for Human Resources Development 2007-2013.

** Ph.D. “A.D. Xenopol” History Institute, Iaşi; mariuschelcu@yahoo.com

1 As that point context was not favourable, as ties were affected by the political turmoil that marked the end of the century (Bogdan Murgescu, Impactul conjuncturii europene asupra comerţului românesc în a doua jumătate a secolului al XVII-lea, in ”Revista de Istorie” (= RdI), 41, 1988, nr. 5, p. 514-524; Alexandru I. Gonţa, Legăturile economice dintre Moldova şi Transilvania în secolele XIII–XVII (forward; Gonţa, Legăturile economice), Edition, preface, bibliography and index by I. Caproşu, Bucureşti, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989, p. 207–214).

2 This is the time when information about merchants from Lipsca multiplied. A similar process occurs in the same periodin Wallachia where, in 1758, is mentioned a former captain from Lipsca. At

"Anuarul Institutului de Istorie «G.Barițiu». Series Historica”, Supplement 1, 2015, 
"Literacy Experiences concerning Medieval and Early Modern Transylvania”, p. 399-407.
direction of the outer-carpathian economy, of the stronger ties with the Central-
European area\(^3\), is the growing number of merchants specialized in trading goods
brought from the Transylvanian towns or even further, from Vienna and Leipzig\(^3\), and
the difference between these branches in the great guild of merchants from Iaşi\(^5\). So,
without being considered a conclusion, the increasing information relating to these
traders, from the mid 17\(^{th}\) century and especially in the 18\(^{th}\) century, cannot be
explained only by the growing number of kept documents, but it is also a reflection of
the share gained by Moldavia’s trade with Central Europe.

Regarding the economic ties between Moldavia and Transylvania there are
some works to be completed based especially on sources from the Transylvanian
archives. To Radu Manolescu's\(^6\) work was added that of Alexandru I. Gonţa\(^7\), and
that of Constantin A. Stoide and Ioan Caproşu\(^8\). In their index have been noted
fluctuating trends of trade ties between the regions located on both sides of the
Carpathians. If until the 16\(^{th}\) century there is increasing evidence of stronger
commercial links, since the middle of that century they begin to decrease, so that,
after a revival of trade towards the mid 17\(^{th}\) century, the situation is getting worse
again, on the grounds of the unfavorable existing conjuncture at the end of that
century. The settling of the situation in Transylvania in the first decades of the 18\(^{th}\)
century will be, in the end, a foundation for a sustainable and expanding recovery in
the share of trade from Central Europe, from and through Transylvania. From a legal
perspective, trade links between the cities of Transylvania and Moldavia have been
regulated ever since the 15\(^{th}\) century based on some customs settlements and laws

---


\(^4\) In the documents on the history of Iaşi “goods from Lipsca” are mentioned first in 1740 in a register of things from a booth Ioan Caproşu, *Documente privitoare la istoria oraşului Iaşi*, IV, *Acte interne (1726–1740)*, Iaşi, 2001, p. 305–308, nr. 415 (forward: Ioan Caproşu, *Documente Iaşi*). No doubt, this trade is prior to its certification in documents, an indirect proof of this reality is that the father of Coste Papafil, Fote Niku, and his brothers are very active from the early decades of the 18\(^{th}\) century (Idem, *Documente privitoare la istoria oraşului Iaşi. III, Acte interne (1691–1725)*, Iaşi, 2000, p. 409–410, nr. 462; *ibidem*, Doc. Iaşi, IV, p. 94, nr. 129; *Ibidem*, p. 173–174, nr. 242).


\(^7\) Alexandru I. Gonţa, *Legăturile economice."

meant to ensure mutual protection of the merchants. If in the 15th and 16th centuries existed establishments granted and confirmed by Moldavia’s rulers, and towards the middle of the 17th century we know trends of revitalization of that trade through several regulations set during the reign of Vasile Lupu, in the 18th century the restrictive legal status of Moldavia with the Ottoman Porte and Transylvania’s change of status made economic relations between the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empires to be stipulated in treaties.

We were interested, as far as we could reveal sources, to observe some of the protagonists, of this type of trade, settled in Iaşi, which was their status, which were the products subject of their trade, where they settled in Iaşi, who they were associated with and with whom they established familiar ties. Following these issues based only on internal documents, we sought a way to find not only the place that merchants from Braşov occupied on the economical map of Iaşi at the middle of the 17th century and during the next century, but also a possible unraveling of a controversial toponymy that we will present in conclusion.

The first document on the history of Iaşi that mentioned a merchant specialized in trading goods brought to Transylvania from Braşov dates back to 1649 and is a deed which states the selling of a house on the “Uliţa Strâmbă” of Iaşi. According to custom, in the sale took part the neighbors (in Romanian “megieşii”), among whom there was a Vasile braşoveanul. During the middle of the 17th century Vasile braşoveanul was a prosperous trader, his well-being being indicated by the fact that, along with the place of house and booths occupied by him at the fair, was also owner of parts of the estate and land planted with vines near the town. His presence next to a few large boyars as a witness to some land transactions is an indication of the prestige he enjoyed. Most often we found him along with the powerful nobleman Iordache Cantacuzino, which might suggest that he was a family man and provider to the latter. The prosperous and privileged situation he enjoyed was also due to family ties. A more in-depth genealogical research would lead us, apparently, to an
alliance with Metropolitan Varlaam. A descendant of Vasile from Brașov, Lupu, declared himself in an act of judgment from 1676 as the nephew of Nastasia, “Metropolitan Varlaam’s deceased sister”\textsuperscript{14}.

The next act dates from 1656 and is an exchange deed of booths throughout the Ulița Strâmbă, among the witnesses of the transaction being, this time a Constantin from Brașov. He applied, using the ink for the written document, a round seal whose legend could not be deciphered because of its unclear print\textsuperscript{15}. By the end of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century we find merchant Nicula brașoveanul\textsuperscript{16} in the documents, as a witness at different transactions, so that again in the early years of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century to find a Pascal from Brașov who was buying a house on the Ulița Nouă\textsuperscript{17}, and was also a witness to the sale of other properties\textsuperscript{18}. The inclination towards a certain occupation was transmitted in the family, so later on the same street, we discover merchant Panaite, nephew of Pascal brașoveanul\textsuperscript{19}.

Prior to 1714, the merchant Mierăuță Bedreag had on Bridge Hagioaiei, the new name of the Ulița Nouă, a cellar with tavern booth and three booths of brașovenie (shop that sold merchandise brought from Brașov)\textsuperscript{20}. So the trader had a diversified activity consisting not only of the sale of products brought from Transylvania, but also of sale of beverages. Despite its economic mobility, Mierăuță has not been spared of the difficulties and misfortune that sometimes struck the traders. Following a loan of 1960 lei, which he failed to pay back to Ilie Țifescu, probably due to an uninspired placement, Mierăuță was thrown into prison and was forced to hand over to the nobleman the buildings where he made his trade. The damage was much higher because three booths located in the same place were ceded by Mierăuță Bedreag, also for unpaid debts, to the former tax farmer (Romanian “jĭtnicer”) Ilie Pleșca\textsuperscript{21}.

In the same years at the beginning of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century we found information about another merchant of goods from Brașov, namely Ianachis Sauli. If the south of the Danube origin of some of the merchants mentioned so far could only be suspected, in this case, the greek form of the name and signature on documents he took part in, leave no room for doubt. In 1731, Ianachi, with his wife, Maria, was

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{14} Ibidem, p. 71.
  \item\textsuperscript{15} Caproșu, Zahariuc, Documente Iași, I, p. 483, nr. 423. Among the witnesses of the same trade we find, as in the previous document, a few merchants, among them Alexandru Dimuță.
  \item\textsuperscript{16} He signs a sale by the daughter of a former șoltuz of a place located in Iasi, Rediul of Tătar, to Enache sulger and his brother Costantin Cihodar (Caproșu, Documente Iași, II, p. 233-234, nr. 263.\textsuperscript{17}
  \item\textsuperscript{17} Caproșu, Documente Iași, III, p. 157-158, nr. 189.
  \item\textsuperscript{18} Ibidem, p. 308-309, nr. 344.
  \item\textsuperscript{19} Ibidem, p. 474-475, nr. 544.
  \item\textsuperscript{20} Caproșu, Documente Iași, II, p. 418-419, nr. 472.
  \item\textsuperscript{21} Idem, Documente Iași, III, p. 250-251, nr. 281.
\end{itemize}
sitting a house with stone cellar, located near the church Curelari from Iași\textsuperscript{22}. The mention of the cellar is not accidental, because, as we saw in the case of Mierăuță Bedreag, Ianachi from Brașov did not restrict to trade with transylvanian goods, but also increased his income by selling drinks. In order for this trade to bring more money he had rented a land near the town belonging to the monastery Dancu. There he made great efforts, because he had taken a land with a deserted vineyard and had to clean it up, to renew the vine, to graft trees and even to plough part of the place on which, due to abandonment, forest stretched\textsuperscript{23}.

Towards the middle of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century we find in Iași an Ivan from Brașov. He received, in 1740, from Grigore Ghica an exemption rule book for all taxes and duties. Exemptions were motivated by an interest in this foreign man to settle down in this capital city\textsuperscript{24}. He is, probably, the same as Ion from Brașov who had his home on Trăpeznenească Alley, where he appears as a witness to various property transactions during the mid 18\textsuperscript{th} century\textsuperscript{25}, and his son, Sandul, who inherited not only wealth but also the practice from his father, was selling in 1782, a booth on the Old Bridge, that was gift from an aunt, Aspra\textsuperscript{26}.

In the second half of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century the number of merchants from Brașov that we find in documents regarding the history of the city of Iași increases considerably, which is explained, as I said, not only by the increase of the number of kept documents, but also by the existence of more favorable economical conditions for merchants who had opened trade links with Transylvania and Central Europe. We will not mention now these merchants, only keeping in mind that some of them are descendants of merchants from Brașov from the first half of this century.

So, we saw that the merchants of Brașov, from the first records dating from the mid 17\textsuperscript{th} century, formed a distinct branch within the merchant guild of Iași, alongside those of groceries, cazacliilor (name of shops were merchants sold wine, furs etc.) and șarhorodenilor (merchants from the ukrainian town Șarhorod). Some have a clear origin south of the Danube, others were related to small landowners or hierarchs as Vasile from Brașov and Metropolitan Varlaam. They were also suppliers for large mansions, thereby gaining prestige and wealth. Others, like Ivan, became privileged by reign, by supplying the court and, therefore, worthy to be supported in order to conduct commerce without restrictions. Some we find in unpleasant situations, thrown into prison after no longer being able to pay their debts to noblemen after some unsuccessful investments. But in general, as any wise

\textsuperscript{22} Idem, Documente Iași, IV, p. 36-37, nr. 50; p. 96-97, nr. 134. These houses next to the church Curelari will appear mentioned late until the second half of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century in various acts of sale or judgment (see Caproșu, Documente Iași, Internal Acts (1756-1770) VI, p. 28-30, nr. 34, 35).

\textsuperscript{23} Idem, Documente Iași, IV, p. 239-241, nr. 334.

\textsuperscript{24} Ibidem, p. 303, nr. 410.

\textsuperscript{25} Idem, Documente Iași, VI, p. 165-166, nr. 191; p. 166-167, nr. 192; p. 175-176, nr. 203.

\textsuperscript{26} Idem, Documente Iași, VIII, p. 108-110, nr. 71, 73.
merchant, those from Brașov did not carry money in one bag, but along the merchants of goods from Brașov, had accustomed themselves to viticulture and tavern trade and put their wealth at shelter also by purchasing parts of the estates. Merchants from Brașov would not reach the prosperity of those from Lipsca, for example, because their commodity value was not as high. We can make an idea about their sold goods from a list of the company Dan from Șcheii Brașovului, written in 1773. There, were inventoried brass candlesticks, yellow targets, spoons, large and small yellow bells, metal spoons, metal buttons with flowers, porcelain shirt buttons, tin buttons with stones, coffee and pepper mills, walnut mirrors, needles, afghan pins, chocolate, red carriages, winter leather gloves, deer leather gloves, pewter spoons, beaded necklaces, pens, cigarette boxes, lute strings, table knives, combs, flowered oilcloths, oilcloth hats, harrow, drillings, painted mirrors and boxes. On the other side we have a customs price list in Iași where it is noted that for an oca (old measure for weights and capacities), for in seeds from Brașov they paid 2 coins, for a chiperniță (pepper mill) from Brașov they paid 10 coins, bedside tables from Brașov, the frame 110 coins and inside 5 săcrie (drawer under tabletop); for 80 sieves from Brasov they paid 1 leu, these are listed as goods manufactured in Brasov, but on the long list of products brought to Iași in the mid 18th century we find numerous other products brought from Transylvania.

Turning now to the last part of our research, namely trying to unravel the controversy of urban toponymy, we begin with observing that the growing number of merchants from Brașov and their placement in a certain part of the fair, led to the creation of a specialized shopping area which will soon have a toponymic reflection. On the back page of the first document that mentioned a merchant from Brașov, in the middle of the 17th century, we found a note from the same time stating that haggling and aldămașul (honor offered to someone at a sale or purchase), with the implied ritual, took part in the house of merchants from Brașov. The term is an indication that, at that time, merchants from Brașov in Iași were already well organized and had a house, meaning a trade agency, on Twisted Alley. A royal act from 1665 reveals the existence of an “Ulița Brașovenilor”. Please note that the alley had both the meaning of thoroughfare and that of commercial core. The fact that the alley was not just an access road is proved by the formula “from Brașov” used to describe the same reality in an act from 1671. The toponym, even if it is rarely used in the document will not disappear because we encounter the same name

27 Constantin A. Stoide, Ioan Caproșu, Relațiile economice, p. 112.
28 Caproșu, Documente Iași, VI, p. 335-349, nr. 377.
29 Caproșu, Documente Iași, II, p. 77-78, nr. 80.
31 Caproșu, Documente Iași, II, p. 308-310, nr. 338.
of the alley in the mid 18th century. So, merchants from Brașov continued to populate a part of the so-called Târgul de Sus since the mid-17th century. The area was favorable for trading since there met several thoroughfares, and nearby operated the largest caravanserai (rest house where caravans halt) in the city.

Just in that area in the second half of the 18th century took place a toponymic transformation, the Târgul Făinii, where there were also some merchants from Brașov, was named the Târgul Cucului, resisting until the mid 19th century the transitional formula “Târgul Făinii, now called Târgul Cucului”. The name of Târgul Cucului that was set then and is kept until today for the area within Golia and Bărboi Monasteries challenged the etymological imagination over time, as seen by the linguist toponymist Mircea Ciubotaru in a recent study.

As a result, they gathered all sorts of assumptions, from the imaginative and romantic ones, like the song of the cuckoos through the trees at the edge of the fair, up to the most trusted by reference to historical events, such as that recorded by George Dimachi at the late 19th century, which explains the naming from the fact that Târgul Făinii would be moved, after the fire in 1803, in another place and the new Târgul Cucului would be “named so because they left that market, people saying to him that the cuckoo sang and remained deserted”.

In the end, were added new and more scientifically thorough attempts by Mircea Ciubotaru. The latter, in the contents of a recently published article, believes that can be taken into account two reasonable interpretation of the mysterious association between the fair and the cuckoo: either the toponym Târgul Cucului designated, originally, a seasonal spring fair, then abandoned and forgotten, either a fair with everything, like a flea market, as was the Târgul Cucului of Iași up to 1965, where small and many vendors, mostly Hebrew, could avoid paying taxes, practicing trade to the limit of legality, as the cuckoo customs designated, in smugglers’ slang, in hidden places for crossing the border or in any place where they had to pay customs. The article ends on a note halfway optimistic, keeping proper science reserve that never ends, Mircea Ciubotaru believes this toponym is still “mysterious”.

Returning to the merchants from Brașov that we have presented in this study, we believe that between assumptions set there is one that could unravel the mystery. It’s an old idea of the historian Constantin Cihodaru who saw a link between the presence of an Ilinca Cuculeasa in Iași (30 October 1783), Vasile Caproșu, Documente Iași, IV, p. 228, nr. 314.


Gh. Dimachi, in „Ecoul Moldovei”, 13th of octobre 1894.

Mircea, Ciubotaru, „Misterele onomastice” ale Iașilor”, p. 30.

Caproșu, Documente Iași, VIII, p. 240-242, nr. 188.
Cucu’s widow, a merchant from Brașov, and Târgul Cucului. Mircea Ciubotaru rejects this option because no deal could exist in the old city on a private property, with its owner’s name, but instead only on rulers grounds. But Constantin Cihodaru did not assert that it was merchant Cucu’s fair, but that it could have been named after him. The historian, editor of documents, including of the series Documenta Romanae Historica and coauthor of the last synthesis works on the history of Iași, has not substantiated the idea through a careful analysis of the documents in the second half of the 18th century. This research allowed us to analyze documents from Iași where there were mentioned merchants from Brașov and thus to be able to return to the hypothesis launched by Constantin Cihodaru.

In 1757, a Vasile brașoveanul in Iași bought a house covered with shingle and wood cellar on Ulița Bărboiu, and also, near Târgul Făinii at the crossroads of Ulița Fânăriei and Ulița Chervăsăriei, bought another land probably in order to raise some booths there. The same merchant, prosperous in the second half of the 18th century, bought other places on Ulița Bărboiu in order to expand the place where he had opened shops. Vendors were an Armenian merchant and a gypsy blacksmith, evidence of how mixed the people of Iași could be. Vasile from Brașov did not settle with the business area specialized in merchandised goods brought from Transylvania, because we see him renting from the Saint Friday Monastery a place for booths in the other side of town, another commercial core, namely the Târgul de Jos. There he undertakes the repair of stalls and taverns placed on monastery lands in order to sell his merchandise, from the gain having to pay annual rent for the place. As in other cases, taverns and cellars were partially stocked from vineyards that he had on the hills around the city. He was married to Ilinca and had at least two children, a son and a daughter Ruxandra, married to merchant Anastasie Panul Cernovodeanul. In 1783, Vasile brașoveanul no longer lived, and his wife, Ilinca Cuculeasa, and her son shared with her son in-law, Anastasie Panul Cernovodeanul the fortune remaining from Ruxandra, namely the dowry, because she died without descendants. Even this short sequence of wealth

---


38 Istoria orașului Iași, I.

39 Caproșu, Documente Iași, VI, p. 83-84, nr. 95.

40 Ibidem, Documente Iași, VI, nr. 696.

41 Ibidem, Documente Iași, VI, nr. 863.

42 Ibidem, Documente Iași, VI, nr. 865.

43 Ibidem, p. 752-753, nr. 858.

44 Ibidem, p. 768, nr. B.

45 Idem, Documente Iași, VIII, nr. 188.
and the place where Vasile Cucu braşoveanul was trading, it can provide us a picture of the fact that he had sufficient status and prestige among gossipers and for the nickname Cucu to be perpetuated and, in time, be extended to the whole Târgul Făinii. Moreover, from a sketch of booth places in the same area we can see how a single trader could hold a series of booths on the same street, forming a veritable commercial core.\(^{46}\) Then, regarding the name, it is not the only case in which a person’s name gives the name of a place, and examples are just nearby. Hence, the Uliţa Hagioaiei is named after a townsman in the late 17\(^{th}\) century called Hagioaia, that in no case he paved the streets, as Vasile Cucu did not set up the fair, he just lived there and gained a certain prestige among gossipers. Also, the Uliţa Pădurii takes its name from a Pădure typographer of the 18\(^{th}\) century and not from any wooded area, and such examples can continue.

Here we conclude the incursion on the path opened by the information contained in some internal documents dating from the 17\(^{th}\) and 18\(^{th}\) century, in which we tried to capture some of the links between the city of Iaşi and the Țara Bârsei and sought to recover the hypothesis according to which Vasile Cucu braşoveanul gave the name of the cardinal point in Iaşi’s topography.

\(^{46}\) See annexed image National Archive of Iași, Documents, 234/15.