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UDRIȘTE NĂSTUREL

Nobleman

Costion Nicolescu

Last name

Năsturel (attested in his first documents), (at times adding „ot Fierești“ or „ot Fierăști“), sometimes Năsturelovici

First name

Udriște

Other names

Uriil, Orest, Iorest (as he would sometimes spell his first name)

Origin

Old family of noblemen, documented as early as the 15th century

The family blazon

(emblazoned on the house of Herăști – 1647): A two-headed eagle is held by two Romans; within the emblem there is a lion sitting on a cannon with a cross between his paws, battling a snake rising against him, and the Latin slogan: *Honor et Patria*. It signifies the idea of crusade. It resembles the one in Udriște Năsturel's translation of *Imitatio Christi*

Date and place of birth

around 1596-1598, Herești (Herăști), at the junction of the Dâmbovița with the Argeș (in today's County Giurgiu); at that time its name was Fierești (Fierăști)

Close relatives

Grandfather Radu Calomfirescu (after his mother)

Father Radu Năsturel, chancellor (he brought a copy of „De imitatione Christi“ from Iași as a war prey)

Mother Despina, from the house of Michael the Brave

Brothers

Șerban

Cazan

Elina (the future wife of Matei

Basarab), regent for a short time (1631), buried at the princely church of Târgoviște († August 1653)

Wives (*the first*) Maria Corbeanu, from the great family of the Corbeni noblemen (from Corbii of Argeș); dies in 1635, two weeks after Mateiaș's birth; buried at Căscioarele (County Giurgiu)

(*the second*) Despa

Children

Mateiaș (from his first marriage, born in 1635)
– adopted by his aunt, Lady Elina and her husband, Matei Basarab, at the age of two weeks, shortly after his mother's death

– he died at the age of 17 (1652), in the arms of his foster parents; previously, on his death bed, he rescinded slavery and due property in all the neighbouring villages under his trusteeship

Radu Toma

– he was tutored by Teodor, a teacher from Kiev

– he spoke Latin

– he founded a Slavonic-Romanian school (the first Romanian one!) (and) for disadvantaged children at Câmpulung (1669)

– he transcribed his father's translation from *Varlaam and Ioasaf*

– he had Catholic orientations; he assisted in the rebuilding of the Franciscan church in Bucharest

– Great ban (1674-1677; 1680-1688)

Măricuța

Brother-in-law Matei Basarab, ruling prince of Wallachia

Studies

He gets trained in the Slavonic culture, possibly in Kiev (there is no evidence in this res-

pect), or monk from Kiev may have tutored him.

He learns Latin from a copy of *Imitatio Christi* which he finds at home (and which he is to translate later on as well) and from the continuous conversations he has with the Latin speakers at the princely court (Catholic missionaries most likely). Some uphold that he even had „higher studies of the Latin language and literature“.

Foreign languages

– Slavonic (a „sacred“ language, rooted in the tradition of the Church; he speaks about the „holy Slavonic dialect“ (*Predoslovia la Molitfelnicul slavon - Preface to The Slavonic Prayer Book*, 1635); he tries to create a literary Slavonic language, a rhetorical, pompous and artificial one, addressing an elite of intellectuals and the Chancellery)

– Russian

– Latin (a language „undoubtedly related to our own“, for which he has a „great and passionate love“ – *Preface to Imitatio Christi*, 1647)

– Hellenistic Greek

Residence

His stable residence was the capital, Târgoviște. The stone house in Herăști seems to have only been his occasional summer-residence.

Functions

He starts out as a scholar of the princely Divan.

Clerk of the princely Chancellery (16250, at first copying documents, subsequently transcribing (in the name of Matei and Elina, of course, but for others as well) prefaces to Slavonic or Romanian books printed after 1635 (*Documente privind istoria României. B. Țara Românească - Documents Regarding the History of Romania. B. Walachia*, the 17th century, vol. IV, Bucharest, 1956, pp. 482-483, nr. 498.)

Head of the princely Chancellery (which issued over 1300 charters at that time, which have been preserved to date),

Second Chancellor (Matei Basarab's reliable advisor) (1632-1658)

High Spatharus (?) (1658-1659)

Diplomatic missions:

– to the king of Poland (1638)

– to the emperor in Vienna (1638)

– in Transylvania, holding talks with the Hungarian prince Gheorghe Rakoczi (1648 or 1649, 1652 or 1655)

Travels abroad (often as an envoy of his brother-in-law)

Moldavia, Transylvania, Austria, Hungary, Poland

Background knowledge

Owner of a fairly large library containing „news books“ (Paul of Alep)

Apparently he read Plato, Aristophanes, Antistenes, Diogenes Laertius, Simonides of Keos, Homer (*The Odyssey*), Theognis of Megara, Strabo (*Geography*), Suetonius (*Lives of the Twelve Caesars*), Plutarch (*Moralia*), Lucian of Samosata (*Saturnalia*), Seneca, Epicurus, Pythagoras, Aristotel.

Cross-cultural connections

Links with scholars from Kiev and with Petru Movilă

Intellectual debates with: seneschal Constantin Cantacuzino, metropolitan bishop Varlaam of Moldavia (about Calvinism), metropolitan bishop Ștefan of Ungrovlachia (Walachia), his sister Lady Elina

Cultural connections with foreigners:

– Greeks: Blasios, Meletie Sirigos, Paisie Ligaridis, Ignatie Petrizis;

– Ruthenians: Arsenie Suhanov (theologian), Grigore the Scholar;

– Serbs: Longhin and Sava Brancovici, Gavril – patriarch of Peci, Mihail, metropolitan bishop of Kratovo;

– Croats: father Rafael Levakovici of the Order of Minorites, the Pope's envoy, printer with the De Propaganda Fide Congregation (correspondence on religious matters: about the Symbol of faith);

– Macarie, patriarch of Antioch, and Paul of Alep, his son.

Cultural accomplishments

Founder of „Schola Graeca et Latina“ in Târgoviște (the capital at the time), with teachers from Kiev, and where:

- classical languages were taught;
- it was upheld that Romanian was related to Latin;
- notions of metrical structure were taught.

Teacher of Slavonic studies at the „Slavonic School“ in Târgoviște (around 1640).

He advocates the idea of the Romanians' national unity, linking „the Romanian nation“ to the notion of „the Romanian language“.

He believes that through education one can actively campaign for Orthodoxy against foreign religious influences („due to the scarcity and shortage of such books, many, if not all of us, both at home and in other countries praying fervently, I've felt duty bound to have this book in print“ Preface to *Pravila de la Govora (Law of Govora)*, 1640).

He searched – by order of Matei Basarab – the monasteries in Walachia to discover the old books that needed transcribing in order to be preserved.

He built the house in Herăști (1642) with his brother Cazan, on the family estate in Renaissance style, like his house in Transylvania. It is a sumptuous residence, situated in a picturesque setting. Paul of Alep noted „there is no similar palace in the world, except, perhaps, for the land of the Franks.“

Founder of the Church in Herăști (1635 – the tombstone laid by Lady Elina for her mother or 1644 – the church's patron saint plaque placed by Udriște Năsturel), along with his brothers, Cazan and Lady Elina.

Founder of the Borough Church in Târgoviște (1653)

Builder of „Sfânta Vineri („St. Friday“) Church, close to his houses in Bucharest.

Literary activity

Editor par excellence of prefaces to books printed during Matei Basarab's rule; he never signed his works.

Publisher of some of the books released at the time.

He supervised printing at that time. He worked with Matei Basarab for the setting up of three printing houses, at Govora, Câmpulung and Dealu.

Writings**Prefaces to:**

– *Antologhionul slavon (The Slavonic Anthology)*, Câmpulung, 1643

– *Evanghelia învățătoare (The Learning Gospel)*, Govora, 1642; Dealu, 1644 (anti-Calvinistic propaganda)

– *Pravila (Law)*, Govora, 1640

– *Nomocanonul (The Nomocanon)*, Kiev, 1629

– *Molitvenicul slav (The Slavonic Prayer Book)*, Câmpulung, 1635

– *Carte despre imitarea lui Hristos (On Imitating Christ)*, Dealu, 1647

– *Triod-Penticostarul (Triodion-Pentecostarion)*, Târgoviște, 1649 (in Slavonic)

– this preface is actually a small treatise *On Generosity* addressing the monks at the Serb Hillandar Monastery on Mount Athos

Encomiastic verse

In Slavonic:

La prealuminata stemă a milostivilor domni Basarabi (To the All-glorious Blazon of the Merciful Basarab Princes) in *Molitfelnicul (The Prayer Book)* of 1635, reprinted at Govora in 1640.

In Romanian:

La prealuminata stemă a prealuminatei case a mărilor lor, domnilor Basarabi (To the All-glorious Blazon of the All-glorious House of Their Highness, the Basarab Princes), in the *Antologhionul (Anthology)* published at Câmpulung in 1643.

La prealuminata stemă a milostivilor domni Basarabi (To the All-glorious Blazon of the Merciful Basarab Princes) in *Evanghelia învățătoare (The Learning Gospel)* at Dealu in 1644.

The Epitaph engraved on the tombstone of his son, Mateiaș.

Translations

1. Thomas of Kempis, *Imitatio Christi* (from Latin into Slavonic), published at the Dealu monastery in 1647

2. The folk novel *Varlaam și Ioasaf* (*Varlaam and Ioasaf*) (from Slavonic into Romanian), after one of Petru Movilă's Russian printings at the Kutein monastery (1648). The original was lost; 15 copies at B.A., the first one dating from 1671, the second from 1673. The last one is published in Bucharest in 1904 by general P.V. Năsturel with the title *Viețile sfinților Varlaam și Ioasaf, tradusă din limba elenă (!), la anul 1648, de Udriște Năsturel din Fierești, al doilea logofăt* (*The Lives of Saints Varlaam and Ioasaf, Translated in 1648 from Hellenistic Greek (!) by Udriște Năsturel from Fierești, Second Chancellor*)¹.

3. [*Viața Sf. Nifon* (*The Life of St. Nifon*) (from Greek into Romanian)] – doubtful, he might have been more of a moral writer.

4. [*Învățăturile lui Neagoie Basarab către fiul său Theodosie* (*Neagoie Basarab's Teachings to His Son, Theodosie*) (from Slavonic into Romanian)] – doubtful, he might have been more of a moral writer.

[*Viața Sfintei Caterina* (*The Life of Saint Catherine*)] – it is only mentioned by Sextil Pușcariu, p. 98

Date of death

1657 or 1658

About him...

„Happening to roam Walachia, with princely and people's business in Târgoviște, addressing high-ranking and most distinguished dignitaries in a most sensitive way, especially a certain honest and faithful noble, and hard-working with all his competence, knowledge and devotion, Udriște Năsturel, who loves education above all and treasures our true faith...” (*Varlaam, metropoli-*

tan bishop of Moldavia)

„The most learned scholar in Walachia in mid- 17th century“; „the typical case of the Counter-reform scholar“ (**Virgil Cândea**).

„A highlight in the Romanian medieval culture“ (**Victor Predescu**). „A landmark when we look at the upward path of the Romanian medieval culture“ (www.pedagogicalibrary.edinfo.ro). „One of the main figures of the cultural life in Walachia during Matei Basarab's rule“ (**Nicolae Stoicescu**). „The champion of the extensive cultural policy at the time of Matei Basarab“ (**Dan Horia Mazilu**). „He illustrates the last thriving stage of culture in the Slavonic language“ (**P.P. Panaitescu**).

A representative of the Romanian humanism as an extension of our Christian medieval humanism, therefore a „religious humanism“; „Udriște Năsturel's cultural outlook: promoting Romanian humanism in Slavonic“ (**Virgil Cândea; Nicolae Stoicescu**), „a scholarly humanism“ (**Nicolae Stoicescu**). He was „the advocate of a Western type of humanism of an anachronistic Slavic expression“ (**Virgil Cândea**).

„Promoter of the Romanian religious literature in the first half of the 17th century“ (History of Romanian Literature, I, p. 359); „he aspired to introduce the Greek-Latin Classicism into the Romanian culture by means of the scholarly Slavonic at the time (obsolete)“ (**Virgil Cândea**); „The first Wallachian Latinist“ (**Victor Petrescu**); „The first Wallachian ever to pay homage to the Latin language“ (www.muzeedambovitene.ro).

„The first poet și Romanian, that is whose poems spread out by means of the written word“ (**Marcel Crihană**).

„He is among the first ever to advocate the idea of the Romanians' national unity“ (**Romanian Literature Dictionary**).

¹ The exact original title is the following: *Udriște Năsturel, Traiul și viața a preacuvioșilor părinților noștri a lui Varlaam și a lui Ioasaf* (*The Days and the Time of Our Fathers, the Allpious Varlaam and Ioasaf*). One copy of those published in 1904 is enlisted at the library of the Romanian Peasant's Museum, at 3639.

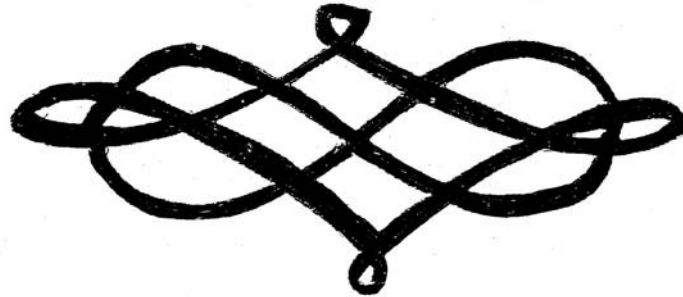
Together with Lady Elina and Lady Bălașa, he was „an enlightened patron of fine and decorative arts“ (Ionescu-Gion).

Descendants (over time)

Constantin Năsturel-Herescu, Chancellor, general, Great Ban, buried at Saint Friday Church

in Bucharest (1796 - † December 31st, 1874) – and with his death „the male branch of the Năsturel family at „Sfânta Vineri“ („Saint Friday’s“) passed away“ (Ionescu-Gion, p. 61)

Năsturel, Petru Vasiliu, general, publishes his novel on *Varlaam and Ioasaf* in Bucharest in 1904.



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