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Book Review

Agnes Erich

Valahia University of Targoviste, Romania
e-mail: agnes_erich@yahoo.com

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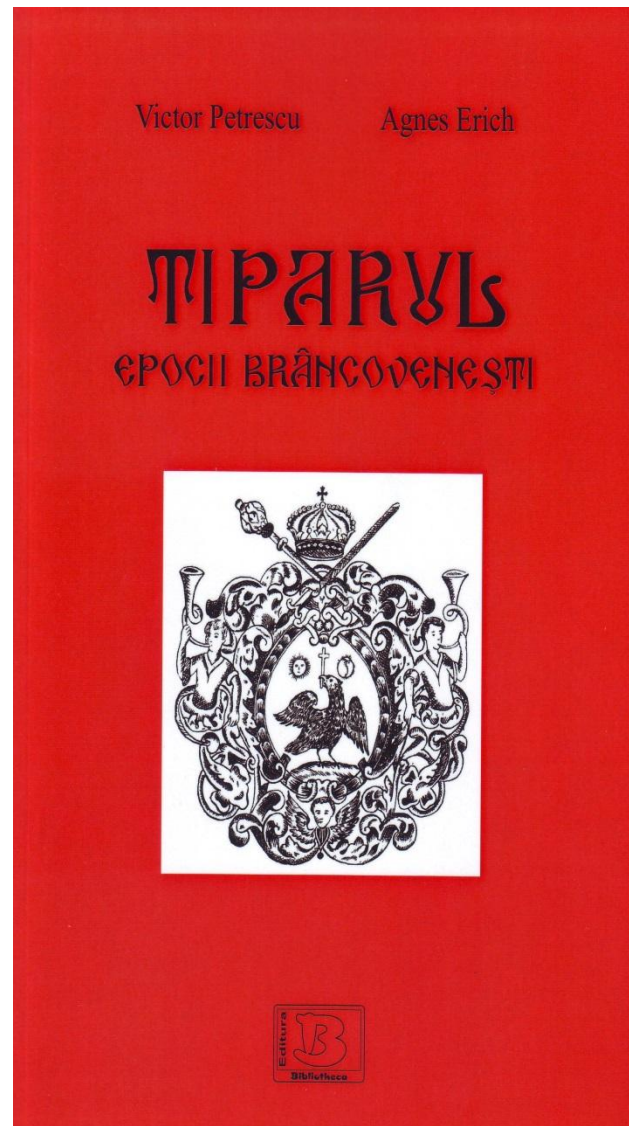
The Printing Press in the Brâncoveanu Epoch
by Victor Petrescu
Targoviste, 2014
ISBN 9789737129093

The Brâncoveanu epoch is part of the Romanians' history, diplomacy, culture and art as one of the most fruitful ones, with special realizations, some of them preserved until this day. The powerful, complex personality of the Romanian ruler, the traditions of the family marked the political, social, economic, cultural life of the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. His tragic end, together with his sons, increased the fame and the prestige of his approach even further.

By the vast and prestigious cultural work undertaken and supported not just morally but first of all materially, Constantin Brâncoveanu managed to transform Wallachia into a true spiritual center of the European South-East and of the Christian Orient. Remarkable were the efforts and the achievements in the domain of education, printing art, religious and civil architecture.

In this context, Victor Petrescu and Agnes Erich have considered that, by the present work, they could bring a pious homage to the personality of the great ruler who tragically disappeared three centuries ago. Out of the multiple aspects, the authors have chosen to present the one related to the destiny of the printing press, of the book in the service of the Orthodoxy on the territories inhabited by the Romanians, but also from other areas, in support of the Orthodox Christians from the Ottoman Empire or the Christian Orient.

For a better understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon, at the beginning the authors have made a short analysis of the socioeconomic and political life, they have shown the diversity of the external European context, craggy and controversial, which, using his special skillfulness, diplomacy and great efforts, the Wallachian ruler managed to go through. In the next chapter was highlighted the creation of a true Brâncoveanu cultural model, pointing out the



institutional framework that made it possible. Special is also the humanist art, conceived in a modern manner, giving up the influences of the Slav-Byzantine culture, in favor of the humanist conception of the Occidental culture, the style created, justly called “brâncovenesc”, with distinct features and characteristics.

In the cultural configuration of the epoch, a major role certainly went to the printing press, which allowed the spreading of the book throughout the Romanian areas. This represented a beneficial effort of increasing the awareness regarding the Romanians’ national and linguistic unity. During the reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu, five printing presses were running: București, Snagov, Buzău, Râmnic and Târgoviște. Their book production was impressive, as about 80 titles appeared in Old Slav, Romanian, and Greek. The ruler supported materially the printing of books issued outside the boundaries of Walachia: Bălgrad (Alba Iulia) in Transylvania; Alep in Syria (the Christian Orient); Tiflis in Georgia.

In the following chapter was realized a repertoire of each printing, relying on the description of the Old Romanian Bibliography, realized by Ioan Bianu and Dan Simonescu, completed with new information from catalogues, bibliographies and studies appeared later on, or we have signaled and described copies found on the Romanian territory (in libraries, monasteries, museums).

At the same time, the authors have distinctly highlighted the graphical appearance of the printings, some of them real masterpieces. The books printed during this period, just as those preceding or following them, have had a special circulation both in Walachia and in Moldova, but especially in Transylvania, a fact proven by the numerous notes written on them, attesting especially the books’ ownership, destiny, or some unusual events that occurred in time. V. Petrescu and A. Erich considered necessary to draft a Glossary explaining the adequate terminology that they have used. At the same time, the bibliography proposed helps one better understand the unique phenomenon achieved during the two-and-a-half-decade reign of Constantin Brâncoveanu. Moreover, in support of our argumentation comes the iconography used.

A founder of culture, of holy places of worship, a protector of the Orthodoxy from everywhere, Constantin Brâncoveanu remained a famous name in the history of our nation, being canonized by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, on June 21, 1992, among the Romanian saints. It is an acknowledgement of his merits in the activity of cultural and artistic renaissance that assured him a well-deserved prestige in the Romanians’ destiny and spirituality.