

# ‘A very good and dear friend’: is Panagiotis Nikousios the author of the ‘Mournful story concerning the unjust death of the Grand Postelnic Constantine Cantacuzenus’?<sup>1</sup>

Octavian-Adrian Negoită

University of Bucharest

[negoita.octavian@yahoo.com](mailto:negoita.octavian@yahoo.com)

*This article discusses the authorship of the ‘Short mournful story concerning the unjust death of the most honorable Constantine Cantacuzenus’, a poem that describes the execution of the grand postelnic on the orders of Gregory Ghika, the Prince of Wallachia. On the basis of a marginal comment in a manuscript authored by Nicholas Karatzas (Princeton gr. 112), this article argues that the questionable authorship of the poem may be attributed to the Ottoman grand dragoman Panagiotis Nikousios, who may have written the original Greek version published in Venice in 1666.*

**Keywords:** Constantine Cantacuzenus; Nicholas Karatzas; Panagiotis Nikousios; *Saracenic*; Radu Greceanu

On 20 December 1663, the grand postelnic of Wallachia,<sup>2</sup> Constantine Cantacuzenus (1593–1663), was assassinated in the refectory of Snagov Monastery on the orders of

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2 The postelnic was one of the highest officials at the courts of the Danubian Principalities. It can be considered the counterpart of the chamberlain in the West. All the attributions of the postelnic were in close relation with the Prince; he took care of the Prince’s chambers, and advised him on state affairs and personal matters. Moreover, he arranged all the audiences at court and was in charge of introducing the foreign embassies (because of this he had to be fluent in foreign languages, especially in Greek). The term postelnic is of Slavic origin (постелникъ), and it can be found also in Russian, Serbian and Czech with the same meaning as ‘chamberlain’. In Byzantium, an equivalent of the postelnic might be the παρακοιμώμενος, though the hypothesis of the Byzantine origin for Wallachian office is still under scrutiny. Beside an important degree of authority at court, the office was bestowed with many benefits and revenues. On this

the Wallachian Prince Gregory I Ghika (r. 1660–64 and 1672–3). The entire plot that led to this tragic event was orchestrated by a distant nephew of the postelnic, the vistier Dumitrașco (1620–86), and the boyar Stroe Leurdeanul (†1679), a member of the rival clan of the Băleni family, who allegedly forged documents that incriminated Constantine Cantacuzenus in the eyes of the Prince, presenting him as an agitator against the established rule.<sup>3</sup> While the history of the incident goes beyond the 'hagiographical veil' created by some narrative sources that took the grand postelnic's side on this matter, the death of Constantine had a profound impact on Wallachian society,<sup>4</sup> whilst its echoes reverberated within many of the literary productions of the age, such as the 'History of the reign of Constantine Brâncoveanu' by the logofăt Radu Greceanu († ante 1725), the official chronicler of the Wallachian ruler, or the anonymous 'Chronicle of the Cantacuzins'.<sup>5</sup>

Constantine Cantacuzenus was a member of one of the most – if not the most – illustrious families of Wallachia, which, at least according to the seventeenth-century eulogists, had its ancestry deeply rooted within the history of Byzantium.<sup>6</sup> Some claim that he was born in Wallachia in 1593, the son of Andronikos Cantacuzenus (1553–1601), grand treasurer under many Wallachian rulers, who in his turn was the son of

office see L. Bréhier, *Le monde byzantin*, Vol. 2: *Les institutions de l'Empire byzantin* (Paris 1949) 128–9; N. Stoicescu, *Sfatul domnesc și marii dregători din Țara românească și Moldova (sec. XIV–XVII)* (Bucharest 1968) especially 263–71; V. Georgescu, *Bizanțul și instituțiile românești pînă la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea* (Bucharest 1980) especially 145–50.

3 In 1669, under the rule of Prince Antonie of Popești (1669–72), Constantine's widow and her sons sought to restore the name of the grand postelnic and brought the boyar Stroe Leurdeanul to the court for justice. As evidence, three letters were presented that had allegedly been forged by the boyar in order to incriminate Constantine. Stroe confessed to his guilt and was sentenced to death. Eventually, due to the entreaties of Constantine's widow, instead of capital punishment, Stroe was allowed to take the monastic tonsure, becoming a monk at Snagov monastery by the name of Silvestru. The innocence of the grand postelnic was officially recognized when the Prince Antonie ratified it by an official document. On Stroe Leurdeanu see S. Cristoceă, *Din trecutul marii boierimi muntene: marele-vornic Stroe Leurdeanu* (Brăila 2011). On Constantine's rehabilitation see Georgescu, *Bizanțul și instituțiile românești*, 139 and 238.

4 See N. Bălcescu, 'Postelnicu Constandin Cantacuzino', in *Opere*, I, ed. A. Rusu (Chișinău 2018) 122–39.

5 For these two chronicles see C. Grecescu and D. Simonescu (ed.), *Istoria Țării Românești, 1290–1690: Letopisețul Cantacuzinesc* (Bucharest 1960) and A. Ilieș (ed.), *Radu logofăt Greceanu: Istoria domniei lui Constantin Basarab Brâncoveanu voievod (1688–1714)* (Bucharest 1979).

6 On the genealogy of the Cantacuzinus family see D. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus) ca. 1100–1460: A Genealogical and Prosopographical Study* (Washington, DC 1968) [with additional information in Nicol, 'The Byzantine family of Kantakouzenos: some addenda and corrigenda', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 27 (1973) 309–15]; V. Laurent, 'Le Vaticanus latinus 4789: histoire et alliances des Cantacuzènes aux XIV<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles', *Revue des études byzantines* 9 (1951) 47–105. For continuity debates see P. Năsturel, 'De la Cantacuzinii Bizanțului la Cantacuzinii Turcocației și ai Țărilor Române', *Arhiva Genealogică* 1/1–2 (1994) 170–5; J. Cantacuzène, *Mille ans dans les Balkans: Chronique des Cantacuzène dans la tourmente des siècles* (Paris 1992); C. Razachievi, 'Contribuție la istoria Cantacuzinilor: Testamentul inedit al postelnicului Constantin Cantacuzino', *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* 15 (1997) 119–34.

Michael Şeitanoğlu Cantacuzenus (1515–78), one of the most influential and wealthy Greek archons of the Ottoman court.<sup>7</sup> However, Constantine himself became a very influential boyar and held important offices at the courts of the Wallachian and Moldavian rulers. He was held in high esteem by the voivode Matthew Basarab (r. 1632–54), during whose reign he became grand postelnic and personal counsellor to the Prince. Even so, his life and diplomatic career were not without political struggle. Because of his divergent views regarding the anti-Ottoman foreign strategies of Mihnea III (r. 1658–9), Constantine was forced to take refuge in Transylvania in August 1658, and afterwards in Moldavia. Denounced by Mihnea III at the Porte, Constantine was summoned by the Ottomans to answer the charges and was tried for *cunning* (*hiclenie*) – this was the official accusation forwarded by the Wallachian Prince.<sup>8</sup> He managed to secure his freedom with help from Panagiotis Nikousios (1613/21–73), the grand dragoman of the Ottoman Porte, and later became grand postelnic under Prince Gregory I Ghika, whose appointment to the Wallachian throne he was able to secure with the assistance of the same Nikousios and the grand vizier Köprülü Mehmed Pasha (c. 1656–61). With Prince Ghika, Constantine had a fruitful relationship until the plot against his life started to take shape.<sup>9</sup> The aftermath of his death led to open confrontations between the Cantacuzenus and Leurdeni clans. Nevertheless, the legacy of the grand postelnic survived through his children, especially Şerban Cantacuzenus (r. 1678–88), the future voivode of Wallachia, and Constantine Cantacuzenus (1639–1716), a humanist and official of the court, who left their mark on the intellectual life of Wallachia. Last but not least, Constantine's fame as a passionate bibliophile was renowned. He possessed the largest library in

7 On Cantacuzenus see I. Tanoviceanu, 'Începuturile Cantacuzineştilor în Țerile Româneşti și înrudirea lor cu Vasile Lupu', *Archiva: Organul societății științifice și literare din Iași* 3/1 (1892) 14–43 [rep. in M. Sturdza (ed.), *Familiele boierești din Moldova și Țara Românească: Enciclopedie istorică, genealogică și biografică* (Bucharest 2014) 356–60]; N. Stoicescu, *Dicționar al marilor dregători din Țara Românească și Moldova, sec. XIV–XVII* (Bucharest 1971) 135; M. Cazacu, 'Stratégies matrimoniales et politiques des Cantacuzène de la Turcocratie (XV<sup>e</sup>–XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles)', *Revue des études roumaines* 19–20 (1995–6) 157–81 [rep. in Cazacu, *Au carrefour des empires et des mers: Études d'histoire médiévale et moderne*, ed. L. Cotovanu and E. Antoche (Brăila 2015) 443–66]; Razachievici, 'Contribuție la istoria Cantacuzinilor', 119–54.

8 *Hiclenie* (literally 'cunning') was a serious accusation in both the Danubian Principalities and the Ottoman world, being equivalent to betrayal or 'lack of loyalty'. It was variously but severely punished by the authorities, either by confiscation of one's property or even by death. In many cases, due to the political relations between the Danubian Principalities and the Porte, this accusation was brought to the attention of the Ottomans, who acted as judges in the case. See A. Sacerdoțeanu, 'Cea dintâi pedeapsă de *hiclenie* în Țara Românească', *Revista istorică* 22/10–12 (1936) 294–7; A.-M. Popescu, 'Hiclenia: explicații terminologice', *Cercetări istorice* SN 32 (2013) 165–76. On the role played by this accusation in the case of Mihnea III and Constantine Cantacuzenus see Bălcescu, 'Postelnicu Constandin Cantacuzino', 122–9; Razachievici, 'Contribuție la istoria Cantacuzinilor', 136.

9 For a description of the dynamics of this political event see Razachievici, 'Fenomene de criză social-politică în Țara Românească în veacul al XVII-lea. Partea a II-a: A doua jumătate a secolului al XVII-lea', *Studii și materiale de istorie medie* 14 (1996) 85–117.

seventeenth-century Wallachia and early modern South-East Europe, which captivated the attention of many erudite individuals from both the Danubian Principalities and Constantinople.<sup>10</sup>

*Poveste de jale și pre scurt asupra nedreptei morți a prea cinstitului Costandin Cantacuzino, marelui postelnic al Țării Rumânești* (‘Short mournful story concerning the unjust death of the most honorable Constantine Cantacuzenus, Grand Postelnic of Wallachia’) tells the story of the demise of this official, and provides a first-hand account of his execution.<sup>11</sup> The original text was composed in Greek in decapentasyllables by a ‘very good and dear friend’ of Cantacuzenus (*prea-bun și scumpu priiatnic al său*), who claimed to be an eyewitness to the bloody event: ‘In this book I wrote as it all happened, | For, when they murdered him, I was there’ [v. 29–30].<sup>12</sup> Constantine Kaisarios Dapontes (1713–84), the Greek scholar and prolific chronicler, informs us that the text of the poem was published in Venice.<sup>13</sup> The logofăt Radu Greceanu, the official chronicler of the Wallachian Prince Constantine Brâncoveanu (1654–1714), produced a translation into Romanian of the entire work and printed it at Snagov some time between 1696 and 1699.<sup>14</sup> He informs us that the original Greek text was printed at the expense of its author, while his translation into Romanian was dedicated to Stanca Cantacuzenus Brâncoveanu (1637–99), the daughter of the grand postelnic and the mother of the Wallachian ruler, Constantine Brâncoveanu:

With small and unworthy effort, as a sign of reverent and humble service,  
I dedicate [this work] to her, the most worthy lady Stanca Cantacuzenus,

10 His library was inherited by his son the stolnic Constantine Cantacuzenus. On this library and its catalogue see C. Dima-Drăgan, *Biblioteca unui umanist român, Constantin Cantacuzino, stolnicul* (Bucharest 1967); G. Mihăescu and E. Fruchter, ‘Sediul primei biblioteci a Cantacuzinilor munteni’, *Scripta Valachica* 4 (1973) 362–6.

11 On this see E. Vărtosu, *O povestire inedită în versuri despre sfârșitul postelnicului Constantin Cantacuzino* († 1663) (Bucharest 1940); A. Piru, *Literatura română veche*, 2nd edn (Bucharest 1962) 253–54; D. Simonescu (ed.), *Cronici și povestiri românești versificate (sec. XVII–XVIII)* (Bucharest 1967) 37–48 (standard edition of the incomplete Romanian translation).

12 Simonescu, *Cronici și povestiri*, 38: *În cartea ceasta eu li-am scris, precum s-au întâmplat, | Că, când l-au omorât pre el, de față m-am aflat.*

13 See K. Dapontes, ‘Κατάλογος ιστορικός ἀξιόλογος τῶν καθ’ ἡμᾶς χρηματισάντων ἐπισήμων Ῥωμαίων’, in K. Sathas (ed.), *Μεσαιωνική βιβλιοθήκη*, III (Venice 1872) 154: ‘His father [of Șerban Vodă of Wallachia] was that grand postelnic Constantine, who was murdered by the voivode Gregory I Ghika; about his death a brochure in verse was produced, and it was printed in Venice’. On Dapontes see C. Rapp, ‘Kaisarios Dapontes (1713–1784): Orthodoxy and education between Mount Athos and the Danubian Principalities’, *Analele Putnei* 14/1 (2018) 61–80.

14 Simonescu, *Cronici și povestiri*, 37. The poem was not Greceanu’s only translation of a Greek work. With his brother Șerban Greceanu, Radu printed at Buzău in 1691 the Romanian translation of the *Ὁμολογία τῆς ὀρθοδόξου πίστεως τῆς καθολικῆς καὶ ἀποστολικῆς ἐκκλησίας* by Peter Mogila of Kiev (1596–1647) (Amsterdam 1666). See P. Moghila, *Pravoslavnică Mărturisire* (Buzău 1691). On this edition see I. Bianu et al. (ed.), *Bibliografia românească veche*, I (Bucharest 1903) 321–4.

beloved daughter of the same late C[onstantine] C[antacuzenus], being also mother of our most wise and most Christian lord, John Constantine B[asarab] B[râncoveanu] voivode, lord and ruler of all Wallachia.<sup>15</sup>

At present, no printed edition of the text has been located. The only version of the text that survives is preserved in an incomplete manuscript copy of the Romanian translation (BAR – Cluj, Ms. Fond Blaj 216, ff. 104<sup>r</sup>–113<sup>v</sup>), produced on 4 February 1735 [7243] by the logofăt Dumitru according to the printed edition by Greceanu;<sup>16</sup> this copy contains almost 485 verses.

Regarding the author of this text, Simonescu, the editor of the Romanian translation, considers that he is a certain contemporary individual, close to the party supporting the Cantacuzins, very well informed about the intricacies of the Wallachian politics of the age, especially on the development of the conflict that emerged against the Cantacuzins during the second half of the seventeenth century. Moreover, he states that because of the hatred that the author displays towards the Greek boyars of Wallachia, it is clear that ‘he was Romanian’ [read Wallachian].<sup>17</sup> Still, Simonescu was unable to identify the author by name.<sup>18</sup>

The poem itself can be regarded as a description of a secular martyrdom, since the author is very explicit in portraying Cantacuzenus as the wise, God-loving, and just official, who has been caught in the webs of a conspiracy orchestrated by his opponents. According to the poem, Cantacuzenus’ adversaries are evil plotters, driven by their own avaricious agendas. Besides the information already mentioned regarding the authorship of the poem, nothing else is known to historiography. Still, new data extracted from a manuscript recently acquired by the Princeton University Library, Special Collections Department (Princeton gr. 112), may shed more light on the author of the original Greek version of the poem.

At some time between 1750 and 1780, Nicholas Karatzas (c. 1705–87),<sup>19</sup> a famous Phanariot scholar and official of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, passionate

15 Simonescu, *Cronici și povestiri*, 37.

16 On this manuscript see Ș. Manciuța, *Biblioteca Centrală din Blaj* (Blaj 1939) 57; N. Comșa, *Manuscrisele românești din Biblioteca Centrală de la Blaj* (Blaj 1944) 166–7; I. Crăciun and A. Ilieș (eds.), *Repertoriul manuscriselor de cronici interne privind istoria României, sec. XV–XVIII* (Bucharest 1963) 161–2.

17 Simonescu, *Cronici și povestiri*, 36: ‘The blaming [of the Greeks] proves the Romanian origin of the author of the poem, although he wrote it in Greek.’

18 Simonescu, *Cronici și povestiri*, 36.

19 On this Greek intellectual and his prominent library see G. Papazoglou, *Ο λόγιος Φαναριώτης Νικόλαος Καρατζάς και η βιβλιοθήκη των χειρογράφων κωδικών του (1705 ci.–1787)*, 2 vols (Thessaloniki 2016–19) (with extensive bibliography and cataloguing of Karatzas’ manuscripts); M. Paizi-Apostolopoulou, ‘Γνωστά και άγνωστα ιστορικά έργα της Τουρκοκρατίας σε χειρόγραφο κώδικα του Νικολάου Καρατζά’, *Ο Έραμιστής* 28 (2011) 193–210; D. Apostolopoulos, ‘Άρμογή σπαραγμάτων: νεότερα για τη βιβλιοθήκη Νικολάου και Κωνσταντίνου Καρατζά’, *Ο Έραμιστής* 29 (2016) 89–132, and G. Koutzakiotis, ‘Συμπληρωματικά για τον Νικόλαο Καρατζά και τη βιβλιοθήκη του’, *Ο Έραμιστής* 29 (2016) 310–18.

bibliophile and collector of manuscripts, with strong ties to the Wallachian milieu, compiled a Greek codex, which later on was suggestively given the title *Saracenicæ* by a nineteenth century scribal hand.<sup>20</sup> As this title reveals, the codex is a compilation of anti-Islamic polemical texts. The works are thirty in number, both Byzantine and early modern, which are authored, among others, by Euthymios Zigabenos (fl. 12th century), John Kantakouzenos (c. 1292–1383), Joseph Bryennios (1340/50–1431), Matthew Kigalas (1580–1640), Nektarios of Jerusalem (1602–76) and Meletios of Athens (1661–1714).<sup>21</sup> *Saracenicæ* is quite an unusual work for the Greek milieu: no such compendium of anti-Islamic polemical literature had ever been produced before. In the West, scholars such as Theodore Bibliander (c. 1505–64), the Swiss reformer and Orientalist, and Friedrich Sylburg (1536–1596), the German Classicist, had already produced their anti-Islamic compilations in the sixteenth century, incorporating similar Greek polemical works to those later included in Karatzas’ *Saracenicæ*.<sup>22</sup> Although these large compilations are separated by decades, the *Saracenicæ* of Karatzas, with its large array of compiled polemical works, can be considered Bibliander’s counterpart for the Greek milieu, as well as a richer continuation of Sylburg’s endeavour.<sup>23</sup>

Text No. 25 of the *Saracenicæ* (ff. 422<sup>r</sup>–433<sup>r</sup>) is the famous *Dialogue* (Διάλογος) between the grand dragoman of the Ottoman Porte, Panagiotis Nikousios, and the leader of the Ottoman *kadı-zādeli* party, the learned Vani Efendi (d. 1685).<sup>24</sup>

20 The entire codex is available online at <https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/8915468> [last accessed 1 May 2020].

21 For this codex and its preliminary annotated description see O.-A. Negoită, ‘*Summa Saracenicæ*: preliminaries to a novel codex from the library of Nicholas Karatzas (c. 1705–1787)’ [forthcoming].

22 T. Bibliander, *Machumetis Sarracenorum principis vita ac doctrina omnis, quae & Ismahelitarum lex, & Alcoranum dicitur*, 3 vols (Basel 1543); F. Sylburg, *Saracenicæ, sive Moamethicæ* (Hamburg 1595). For discussions see H. Bobzin, *Der Koran im Zeitalter der Reformation: Studien zur Frühgeschichte der Arabistik und Islamkunde in Europa* (Stuttgart 1995) 159–275; A. Rigo, ‘Saracenicæ di Friedrich Sylburg (1595): una raccolta di opere bizantine contro l’Islâm’, in M. Cortesi (ed.), *I padri sotto il torchio: Le edizioni dell’ antichità Cristiana nei secoli XV–XVI* (Florence 2002) 289–310.

23 For a discussion of these comparisons see Negoită, ‘*Summa Saracenicæ*’.

24 Dated between 1662 and 1680, this text is based on a real dialogue that took place in Constantinople in 1662 between Panagiotis Nikousios and Vani Efendi. Composed in vernacular Greek, it discusses topics of Christian-Muslim polemics (the divinity of Christ, the Prophet Muḥammad as *Paraklete*, and the interpretations of the Christian Scriptures through the teachings of Christian Kabbalah). It survives in 11 manuscripts, and it also benefits from a partial French translation produced by M. de la Croix, the secretary of the French embassy of Constantinople. For the available editions of the text see I. Sakellion (ed.), ‘Παναγιώτου Νικουσίου τοῦ γεγονότος διερχομένου τῆς ὀθωμανικῆς αὐλῆς ἢ μετὰ τοῦ σοφοῦ ὀθωμανοῦ Βάνη-Εφέντου’, *Πανδώρα* 18/427 (1868) 361–71 [Edition according to mss. Patmos gr. 371, ff. 221<sup>r</sup>–240<sup>r</sup>, 18th century]; Sakellion (ed.), ‘Παναγιωτάκη τοῦ Μαμουῶ τοῦ χρηματίσαντος μεγάλου ἐρμηνέως, πρώτου χριστιανοῦ, τῆς τῶν Ὄθωμανῶν βασιλείας διαλέξεις μετὰ τινος Βάνη ἐφένδη’, *Δελτίον τῆς Ἱστορικῆς καὶ Ἐθνολογικῆς Ἑταιρίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος* 3 (1889) 235–73 [Edition according to mss. gr. 55, Athens, Museum of the History of Modern Hellenism, ff. 1<sup>r</sup>–19<sup>r</sup>, 18th century]. On the partial French translation of de la Croix see M. de la Croix, *La Turquie chrétienne sous la puissante protection de Louis le Grand, protecteur*

The importance of this text is paramount for the history of Christian-Muslim interaction and religious dialogue during the early modern period, as well as for the emergence of the confessional and ‘proto-national’ identities of the Greek communities from the seventeenth century onwards. Hence, the *Dialogue* benefits from the scholarly attention of Karatzas. The Phanariot scholar is known to historiography not only as a collector and compiler of manuscripts, but also as an editor displaying a form of ‘proto-encyclopedism’ for Greek intellectual life at the dawn of modernity. Beside scribal notes in the margins of the texts he was compiling, Karatzas’ editing style usually involved insertions of lists of works and details regarding the sources he was using, as well as providing explanatory excerpts from other early modern works regarding the author or the contexts of production for the main texts compiled in his codices.<sup>25</sup> In this regard, for the *Dialogue* between Panagiotis Nikousios and Vani Efendi, Karatzas provides his reader with two introductory excerpts concerning the author of the *Dialogue*: the first is from the *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία* of Meletios of Athens (Book 17, Chapter 11), and the second from the *Brevis recensio eruditorum graecorum* of Demetrios Prokopios of Moschopolis (end of 17th–beginning of the 18th centuries). Beneath these brief excerpts there is a scribal note by Karatzas himself (most probably written at a later date) that reads:

[f. 421<sup>r</sup>] Φαίνεται ὅτι, ὁ αὐτὸς συνέγραψε καὶ ἱστορίαν τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ ἀνατροφῆς τοῦ Μωάμεθ, ἐξ ὧν διηγεῖται ἐν αὐτῇ περὶ ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ χρόνου καθ’ ὃν ἤκμαζεν ἡτις φέρεται ἀνάνυμος, ἧς ἡ ἀρχή, κατὰ τὸ ἔτος τῶν Τουρκῶν ʿ: ἶδε ὀπισθεν εἰς τὴν βιογραφίαν τοῦ Μ[ωάμεθ]. Λέγεται ἔτι τοῦ αὐτοῦ ποίημα εἶναι

*unique du cristianisme en Orient, contenant l'état present des nations et des églises grecque, armenienne et maronite, dans l'Empire ottoman* (Paris 1695) 381–401 and M. de la Croix, *État présent des nations et églises grecque, arménienne, et maronite en Turquie* (Paris 1741) 247–60 [for a presentation of this French translation with an excerpt see M. Sariyannis (trans.), ‘L’interprète et le prédicateur: Extrait d’une conversation entre Panayotis Nicoussios *alias* Mamonas et Vani Efendi (1662)’, in E. Borromeo et al. (eds.), *Les Ottomans par eux-mêmes* (Paris 2020) 323–7]. For discussions see G. Koutzakiotis, *Αναμένοντας το τέλος του κόσμου τον 17ο αιώνα: Ο εβραϊός μεσσίας και ο μέγας διερμηνέας* (Athens 2011) [French translation: Koutzakiotis, *Attendre la fin du monde au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle: Le Messie juif et le grand dragoman*, trans. Danielle Morichon (Paris 2014)]; A. Argyriou, ‘Η ελληνική πολεμική και ἀπολογητική γραμματεία ἔναντι τοῦ Ἰσλάμ κατὰ τοὺς χρόνους τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας’, *Θεολογία* 1 (2013) 133–65; E. Kermeli, ‘An example of polemic/apologetic literature in the early modern Ottoman Empire’, *Bilig* 82 (2017) 153–73; G. Koutzakiotis and M. Sariyannis, ‘Panagiotis Nikousios’, in D. Thomas et al. (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History, X: Ottoman and Safavid Empires (1600–1700)* (Leiden 2017) 421–30. G. Tzedopoulos, ‘Χριστιανός, μουσουλμάνος, Ἕλλην, Τούρκος: ταυτότητα και διαμεσολάβηση στη Διάλεξιν του Παναγιωτάκη Νικούσιου με τον Vani Efendi’, in O. Katsiardi-Hering et al. (eds.), *Ἕλλην, Ρομῆς, Γραικός – Συλλογικοί προσδιορισμοὶ και ταυτότητες* (Athens, 2018) 329–43; an extensive study and a critical edition based on all the extant manuscripts are currently being prepared by the present author.

25 On Karatzas’ working style see K. Rozemond, *Cyrille Lucar: Sermons, 1598–1602* (Leiden 1974) 1–17; Papazoglou, *Ο λόγιος Φαναριώτης Νικόλαος Καρατζάς*; O. Olar, *La boutique de Théophile: Les relations du patriarche de Constantinople Kyrillos Loukaris (1570–1638) avec la Réforme* (Paris 2019) 23; Negoită, ‘*Summa Saracenică*’.

καὶ ἡ θρηνητικὴ διήγησις διὰ στιχῶν πολιτικῶν ἀπλῶν εἰς τὸν θάνατον Κωνσταντίνου Καντακουζηνοῦ, μεγάλου ποστελνίκου, τυπωθεῖσα Ἐνετίησι, 1666.

It seems that he [Nikousios] also composed a work about the birth and upbringing of Muḥammad in which he narrates about himself and the time he flourished; the work is considered anonymous, and it begins [with the words]: *in the Muslim year 900* [sic!], see above for the biography of M[uḥammad].<sup>26</sup> It is claimed that he is also the author of the *Mournful Narration* in simple political verse for the death of the grand postelnic Constantine Cantacuzenus, printed in Venice in 1666.

Given the information that we possessed so far on the author of the poem, these lines by Karatzas are quite illuminating. The Greek scholar informs his readers that the authorship of the poem on the death of the grand postelnic Constantine Cantacuzenus might be assigned to Panagiotis Nikousios, the Greek Ottoman grand dragoman, renowned for his scholarly interests and his influence upon the political affairs of the Ottoman Porte, as well as for the role he played within the political affairs of Wallachia and of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.<sup>27</sup> Although it is quite clear from Karatzas’ note that his information is most probably based on a rumour that may have circulated within contemporary erudite Phanariot circles, his reference to the author of the poem is unique. This being so, can Karatzas’ suggestion be accurate?

A closer look at the Romanian translation reveals that Nikousios is directly mentioned by name in connection with the grand postelnic:

26 Reference to text No. 7 of the *Saracénica*, ff. 29<sup>r</sup>–63<sup>v</sup>, which is an anonymous work, entitled *Ἱστορία τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ ἀνατροφῆς τοῦ Μωάμεθ*, that Karatzas also attributed to Nikousios in this scribal note from f. 421<sup>r</sup>. Beside this copy, this anonymous work is also preserved in Ms. gr. 71 (ff. 53<sup>r</sup>–105<sup>v</sup>) of the Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece, Athens. This copy has been partially edited by A. Delatte (ed.), ‘Ἱστορία τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ ἀνατροφῆς τοῦ Μωάμεθ’, in A. Delatte (ed.), *Anecdota Atheniensia*, I: *Textes grecs inédits relatifs à l’histoire des religions* [= *Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l’Université de Liège* 36 (1927)] (Liège 1927) 333–57. For a description of this text see A. Kariotoglou, *Ἰσλάμ καὶ χριστιανικὴ χρησιμολογία* (Athens 2000) 120–2. In this note, Karatzas gives an incorrect beginning for this anonymous work as, most probably, when he wrote these lines he was quoting it from memory.

27 On Nikousios see S. Zervos, ‘À la recherche des origines du phanariotisme: Panayote Nikoussios, le premier grand drogman grec de la Sublime-Porte’, *Ἐπετηρίς τοῦ Κέντρου Ἐπιστημονικῶν Ἐρευνῶν Κύπρου* 19 (1992) 307–25; G. Hering, ‘Panagiotis Nikousios als Dragoman der kaiserlichen Gesandtschaft in Konstantinopel’, *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 44 (1994) 143–78; D. Janos, ‘Panaiotis Nicousios and Alexander Mavrocordatos: the rise of the Phanariots and the office of Grand Dragoman in the Ottoman administration in the second half of the seventeenth century’, *Archivum Ottomanicum* 23 (2005–6) 177–96; Koutzakiotis, *Αναμένοντας το τέλος του κόσμου* [Koutzakiotis, *Attendre la fin du monde*]; R. Păun, ‘Well-born of the Polis: the Ottoman conquest and the reconstruction of the Greek Orthodox elites under Ottoman rule (15th–17th centuries)’, in R. Born and S. Jagodzinski (eds.), *Türkenkriege und Adelskultur in Ostmitteleuropa vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Ostfildern 2014) 64; Koutzakiotis and Sariyannis, ‘Panagiotis Nikousios’.



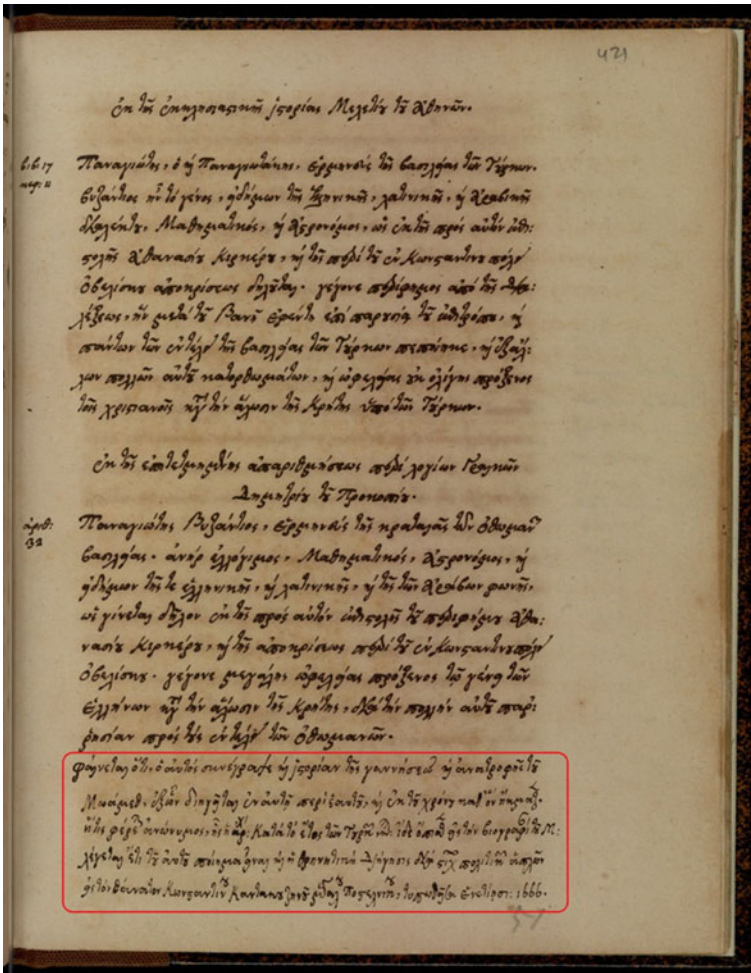


Fig. 1. Nicholas Karatzas, Princeton gr. 112 [Saracenica], f. 421<sup>r</sup>  
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They [Constantine and Dumitrașco] arrived at Constantinople, and later in the night they entered, | To the house of the dragoman they shortly went, | To Panagiotaki, I say, as you may have heard, | As to a good friend, to him they ventured, | Who is always quick to help the Christians. [v. 129–133]<sup>28</sup>

From this passage it seems that Constantine and Nikousios had a close friendship, a fact that might have contributed to Nikousios’ decision to write a poem on the death of his dear friend the grand postelnic of Wallachia. Secondly, as the text informs us, the Ottoman grand dragoman was an advocate before the Porte for the spiritual and

28 Simonescu, *Cronici și povestiri*, 40: *Sosit-au și la Țarigrad, și noaptea au intrat, | La casa dragomanului curând au alergat, | La Panagiotachi, zic, precum ați auzit, | Ca la un priiaten bun, la el au năzuit, | Care ajutoriul creștinilor pururea să arată.*

administrative needs of the Orthodox. Nikousios was very aware of the entangled politics between the Ottomans and Wallachia during the second half of the seventeenth century, and therefore such an event that happened to somebody from his close circle could not have passed without him producing a record about it.<sup>29</sup> Thirdly, Karatzas' mention of this poem between the lines of *Saracenica* can be easily corroborated with the information provided by Dapontes on the Greek text printed in Venice (see above, note 13). These two references are a clear indicator that the Greek text of the poem, in its Venetian edition of 1666, was known within the intellectual circles of the Greek-speaking world during the eighteenth century. The only difference between the two is that Karatzas also provides a name for the author (even if he is not completely sure of it). Most probably, Dapontes omits this information as it may have been either self-evident for the audience of his chronicle or because he actually did not know the author's name. Considering the information that Karatzas offers in his scribal note regarding this poem (he provides the title as well as the place and year of publication), it may be suggested that he had a copy of the Venetian edition in his own library. Moreover, it may be inferred that, most probably, this edition did not bear the name of the author on its title page, which may also explain why Dapontes did not provide the name of the author in his reference and why Radu Greceanu did not indicate the author in his Romanian translation.

At the same time, historians have also emphasized the close relationship between Gregory I Ghika, who ordered Constantine's assassination, and Panagiotis Nikousios. Păun pointed out that the Wallachian ruler was a close friend of the Ottoman dragoman,<sup>30</sup> a relationship validated by the testimony of the French ambassador in Vienna, the Catholic priest Jacques Bretel de Grémonville (1625–86).<sup>31</sup> It appears that Ghika was called by Nikousios 'our Grigorașcu-Vodă' (ὁ ἡμέτερος Γρηγοράσκος-Βόνδας),

29 Nikousios' involvement in the ecclesiastical affairs of the Orthodox in the entire Christian East during the second half of the seventeenth century is unquestionable. He was responsible for the re-establishment of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, and for producing the draft of the *hatt-i şerif* that awarded the Church of the Nativity to the Orthodox communities of Bethlehem, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to those of Jerusalem. Furthermore, Nikousios was involved in the publication of the *Orthodox Confession* of Peter Mogila of Kiev in Amsterdam 1666, as a response to the so-called Calvinist *Confession of Faith* by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril Loukaris (1572–1638), which was translated into Romanian by the same Radu Greceanu (see note 14). See N. Iorga, 'Panaiot Nikusios și românii', *Revista istorică* 19 (1933) 12–13; E. Bayraktar-Tellan, 'The Orthodox Church of Crete, 1645–1735: a case study of the relation between the Sultanate power and Patriarchal will', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 36/2 (2012) 198–214; Păun, 'Well-Born of the Polis', 59–85; H. Çolak, *The Orthodox Church in the Early Modern Middle East: Relations between the Ottoman Central Administration and the Patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria* (Ankara 2015) 103–08; Olar, *La boutique de Théophile*, 303–12.

30 Păun, 'Well-Born of the Polis', 81, n. 61.

31 D. Cantemir, *Vita Constantini Cantemyrii, cognomino Senis, Moldaviae Principis*, ed. A. Pippidi et al. (Bucharest 1996) 224.

which emphasizes even more the close relationship between the two officials.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, it also seems that Nikousios advocated at the Ottoman court in order to assure Ghika's position in Wallachia, after the prince operated against the Ottomans. While in Constantinople, Ghika took shelter in Nikousios' house before he received his pardon from the Ottomans.<sup>33</sup> So how could Nikousios be the author of an encomiastic poem describing the betrayal and death of his friend Constantine Cantacuzenus, and manage to have it published in Venice at his own expense, while he developed a close friendship with Ghika who ordered the assassination? Obviously, the answer to this question cannot be definitive. Nonetheless, I believe that it must begin with the preliminary remarks already mentioned in the beginning of this study and take into close consideration the circumstances of the preserved text and the political agendas of the people involved.

Since the original Greek version published in Venice in 1666 is apparently lost, and all that we possess so far is a Romanian translation by Radu Greceanu, which in its turn is preserved in a unique incomplete manuscript copy from Blaj, we cannot know for sure what the Greek text looked like. Furthermore, in the absence of a comparative study between the Greek version and its Romanian translation, we also cannot be sure about the accuracy of Radu Greceanu's translation or if this is a separate work on Cantacuzenus' demise, independent of its Greek archetype. All we know for sure regarding the two editions is that the Romanian translation was 'composed in verse, like the Greek one' (*tot în versuri tocmită, asemene ca și cea grecească*).<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the absence of printed editions poses even more problems, since we have no clue as to the accuracy of the logofăt Dumitru's transcription from the Romanian printed edition by Greceanu. Nevertheless, considering these gaps, we can mention two, or even three, different (completely or partially) variants of the same text: 1) the Greek edition (Venice 1666); 2) the Romanian edition (Snagov 1696/9); and 3) the manuscript copy of the Romanian edition (Blaj 1735). The existence of the Venetian edition would have enabled comparative philological research on Nikousios' texts, which would have definitely helped scholars to make a decision regarding Karatzas' note on the poem.

Considering the information that we have from the text of the poem itself, the so-called translation made by Greceanu is dedicated to Constantine Cantacuzenus' daughter, Stanca Brâncoveanu, the mother of the then Wallachian ruler, Constantine Brâncoveanu. Given the features of this type of literary enterprise, its subject, and the laws of patronage, the author had by default to be very critical regarding Cantacuzenus' enemies, as the grand postelnic was the grandfather of the prince.

32 E. Hurmuzaki (ed.), *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, XIV.1: *Documente grecești, 1320–1716* (Bucharest 1915) 209 (Letter dated 16/26 August 1672 from Nikousios to Dositheos of Jerusalem concerning the siege of Kamenitsa, the demise of Duca-Vodă, the connections with Grigory Ghika and the church that he is building in Wallachia).

33 Păun, 'Well-Born of the Polis', 81, n. 61.

34 Simonescu, *Cronici și povestiri*, 37.

Bearing in mind the position that Greceanu held at Brâncoveanu's court (official chronicler between 1693 and 1714), even if we cannot be sure, it might be suggested that Greceanu might have adapted his translation of the poem from its Greek original in order to match his political agenda. Still, if these considerations are correct, it would mean that the Greek poem published in Venice, and presumably authored by Nikousios, may contain a slightly different text. At the same time, if Nikousios is the real author of the lost Greek text, his friendship with the Wallachian ruler may have been secured under the umbrella of anonymity, if we assume that the Venetian edition did not bear the dragoman's name on its title page. As for the reference to Nikousios himself within the poem, it is possible that either the grand dragoman created an *alter ego* when he speaks about the presence of Constantine Cantacuzenus in his house [v. 129–133] or that this is an insertion by its translator, Radu Greceanu. In the same manner, when the poem states that the author was present at the tragic event [v. 29–30], it might also be contended that the statement is a literary device inserted in order to provide authority for the whole literary enterprise.

With all these arguments in mind, alongside the assertions introduced by 'if's and 'might's, the possibility that Nikousios is the author of the original Greek version of the poem is considerable. His close friendship with the grand postelnic, as well as his erudition, varied scholarly interests, and knowledge of the ecclesiastical and secular politics of Wallachia, make him an excellent candidate for this literary endeavour. Karatzas' mention of this work, which was thought to be anonymous so far, changes the *status quo* of the authorship debate. Besides being a worthy testimony concerning the circulation of the Venetian edition within erudite Greek-speaking circles, Karatzas' paragraph contributes significantly to this scholarly discussion by mentioning Nikousios as the author of the poem. If the authorship of the poem may be attributed to Nikousios on the basis of Karatzas' testimony, the historiographical panorama of the topic will become more complete, filling a large gap that existed for decades. Moreover, an awareness of the author's identity will enable scholars to undertake new interpretations of the text from the perspective of intellectual history and the relations between Wallachia and Ottoman Constantinople. Last but not least, one can only hope that the edition(s) of the text might be discovered somewhere within the libraries of Eastern and Western Europe. Indeed, such a discovery will have a decisive impact on the historiography of the problem and enable complete modern editions of the Greek original and the Romanian translation to be produced. Only then will we have a clearer idea regarding the relationship between the Greek text and its Romanian counterpart. As such, the 'mournful story of the death of Constantine Cantacuzenus' will occupy its rightful place within the intellectual history of South-East Europe.

*Octavian-Adrian Negoită is a doctoral candidate at the University of Bucharest, researching a thesis on 'The anti-Islamic discourse as reflected in the Early Modern Greek apologetic and polemical literature (16th-18th centuries)'. He earned two MA*

*degrees from the University of Bucharest (Medieval History in 2015) and the Central European University (Comparative History in 2017). He also holds two BA degrees (Theology in 2013 and Classical Philology in 2015), both awarded by the University of Bucharest. His research interests are anchored in the field of Christian-Muslim relations, with a special emphasis on the cultural and religious interactions in the medieval and early modern Mediterranean.*