

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

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Abstract: *Our research we use information from published documents, most of them found uses in 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 Brasov.*

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 Iași*, published in the recent years by Ioan Caproșu. Sources used are most of them deeds that contain information about merchants, residents of Iași, 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.

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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 comerțului românesc în a doua jumătate a secolului al XVII-lea*, in "Revista de Istorie" (= RdI), 41, 1988, nr. 5, p. 514-524; Alexandru I. Gonța, *Legăturile economice dintre Moldova și Transilvania în secolele XIII–XVII* (forward; Gonța, *Legăturile economice*), Edition, preface, bibliography and index by I. Caproșu, București, 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 period in Wallachia where, in 1758, is mentioned a former captain from Lipsca. At

direction of the outer-carpathian economy, of the stronger ties with the Central-European area³, is the growing number of merchants specialized in trading goods brought from the Transylvanian towns or even further, from Vienna and Leipzig⁴, and the difference between these branches in the great guild of merchants from Iași⁵. So, without being considered a conclusion, the increasing information relating to these traders, from the mid 17th century and especially in the 18th 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's⁶ work was added that of Alexandru I. Gonța⁷, and that of Constantin A. Stoide and Ioan Caproșu⁸. In their index have been noted fluctuating trends of trade ties between the regions located on both sides of the Carpathians. If until the 16th 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 17th 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 18th 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 15th century based on some customs settlements and laws

the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the next one we encounter a company of merchants from Lipsca (Gheorghe Lazăr, *Les marchands en Valachie*, p. 154).

³ This trend is also reflected in increasing trade links with Transylvania (Alexandru I. Gonța, *Legăturile economice*; Constantin A. Stoide, Ioan Caproșu, *Relațiile economice ale Brașovului cu Moldova. De la începutul secolului al XVIII-lea până la 1850*, Chișinău, Ed. Universitas, 1992).

⁴ In the documents on the history of Iași "goods from Lipsca" are mentioned first in 1740 in a register of things from a booth Ioan Caproșu, *Documente privitoare la istoria orașului Iași*, IV, *Acte interne (1726–1740)*, Iași, 2001, p. 305–308, nr. 415 (forward: Ioan Caproșu, *Documente Iași*). 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 18th century (Idem, *Documente privitoare la istoria orașului Iași*, III, *Acte interne (1691–1725)*, Iași, 2000, p. 409–410, nr. 462; *ibidem*, Doc. Iași, IV, p. 94, nr. 129; *ibidem*, p. 173–174, nr. 242).

⁵ For the place of these merchants in the trade relations of Moldova and the Romanian Country see: Gheron Netta, *Negustorii orientali la Lipsca. Contribuțiuni la istoria comerțului românesc*, București, 1916; N. Iorga, *Comerțul și meșteșugurile în trecutul românesc*, în *Opere economice*, edition supervised by Georgeta Penelea, București, Ed. Științifică, 1982, p. 93–96; Gheorghe Lazăr, *Les marchands en Valachie (XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles)*, București, Institutul Cultural Român, 2006, p. 153–157.

⁶ Radu Manolescu, *Comerțul Țării Românești și Moldovei cu Brașovul (secolele XIV–XVI)*, București, Ed. Științifică, 1965.

⁷ Alexandru I. Gonța, *Legăturile economice*.

⁸ Constantin A. Stoide, Ioan Caproșu, *Relațiile economice ale Brașovului*, 1992.

meant to ensure mutual protection of the merchants⁹. 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 Lupu¹⁰, 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 Iași, which was their status, which were the products subject of their trade, where they settled in Iași, 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 Brașov occupied on the economical map of Iași 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 Iași that mentioned a merchant specialized in trading goods brought to Transylvania from Brașov dates back to 1649 and is a deed which states the selling of a house on the "Ulița Strâmbă" of Iași. According to custom, in the sale took part the neighbors (in Romanian "*megieșii*"), among whom there was a Vasile *brașoveanul*¹¹. During the middle of the 17th century Vasile *brașoveanul* 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 town¹². 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 latter¹³. 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

⁹ I. Bogdan, *Documente moldovenești din sec. XV și XVI în arhivul Brașovului*, in „Literary talks”, XXXIX, București, 1905.

¹⁰ N. Iorga, *Acte românești din Ardeal, privitoare în cea mai mare parte la legăturile secuilor cu Moldova*, in „Buletinul Comisiei Istorice a Românelor”, II, 1916, p. 179–272.

¹¹ And through all the witnesses we find merchants Gheorghe Dimuță, which was a long time guildmaster and his son, Alexandru (Caproșu, Zahariuc, *Doc. Iași*, I, p. 426, nr. 365). Vasile's place on the Fair Alley is mentioned later during the sale of a house with cellar to merchant David, the land being between *clucerul* Stătie and Vasile from Brașov (Caproșu, *Documente Iași*, II, p. 290-291, nr. 313) and the sale, in 1679, of the same place to the sons of merchant David (Caproșu, *Documente Iași*, II, p. 461-462, nr. 518).

¹² Constantin A. Stoide, Ioan Caproșu, *Relațiile economice*, [Economic relations] p. 70. They made references to documents from the years 1646-1649 written by Gh. Ghibănescu in *Ispisoace și zapise*, II, 2, p. 157, 136, 182, 184, 188.

¹³ Constantin A. Stoide, Ioan Caproșu, *Relațiile economice*, [Economic relations] p. 70.

alliance with Metropolitan Varlaam. A descendant of Vasile from Braşov, Lupu, declared himself in an act of judgment from 1676 as the nephew of Nastasia, “Metropolitan Varlaam’s deceased sister”¹⁴.

The next act dates from 1656 and is an exchange deed of booths throughout the Uliţa Strâmbă, among the witnesses of the transaction being, this time a Constantin from Braşov. He applied, using the ink for the written document, a round seal whose legend could not be deciphered because of its unclear print¹⁵. By the end of the 17th century we find merchant Nicula *braşoveanul*¹⁶ in the documents, as a witness at different transactions, so that again in the early years of the 18th century to find a Pascal from Braşov who was buying a house on the *Uliţa Nouă*¹⁷, and was also a witness to the sale of other properties¹⁸. The inclination towards a certain occupation was transmitted in the family, so later on the same street, we discover merchant Panaite, nephew of Pascal *braşoveanul*¹⁹.

Prior to 1714, the merchant Mierăuţă Bedreag had on Bridge Hagioaiei, the new name of the Uliţa Nouă, a cellar with tavern booth and three booths of *braşovenie* (shop that sold merchandise brought from Braşov)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, Mierăuţă 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 Ţifescu, probably due to an uninspired placement, Mierăuţă 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 Mierăuţă Bedreag, also for unpaid debts, to the former tax farmer (Romanian “jîtnicer”) Ilie Pleşca²¹.

In the same years at the beginning of the 18th century we found information about another merchant of goods from Braşov, 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

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 71.

¹⁵ Caproşu, Zahariuc, *Documente Iaşi*, 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 Dimuţă.

¹⁶ He signs a sale by the daughter of a former *şoltuz* of a place located in Iasi, Rediul of Tătar, to Enache *sulger* and his brother Costantin Cihodar (Caproşu, *Documente Iaşi*, II, p. 233-234, nr. 263.

¹⁷ Caproşu, *Documente Iaşi*, III, p. 157-158, nr. 189.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 308-309, nr. 344.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 474-475, nr. 544.

²⁰ Caproşu, *Documente Iaşi*, II, p. 418-419, nr. 472.

²¹ Idem, *Documente Iaşi*, III, p. 250-251, nr. 281.

selling a house with stone cellar, located near the church Curelari from Iași²². 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 stretched²³.

Towards the middle of the 18th 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 city²⁴. He is, probably, the same as Ion from Brașov who had his home on Trăpezenească Alley, where he appears as a witness to various property transactions during the mid 18th century²⁵, 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, Aspra²⁶.

In the second half of the 18th 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 17th century, formed a distinct branch within the merchant guild of Iași, alongside those of groceries, *cazacliilor* (name of shops where 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

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 18th century in various acts of sale or judgment (see Caproșu, *Documente Iași*, Internal Acts (1756-1770) VI, p. 28-30, nr. 34, 35).

²³ Idem, *Documente Iași*, IV, p. 239-241, nr. 334.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 303, nr. 410.

²⁵ Idem, *Documente Iași*, VI, p. 165-166, nr. 191; p. 166-167, nr. 192; p. 175-176, nr. 203.

²⁶ Idem, *Documente Iași*, VIII, p. 108-110, nr. 71, 73.

merchant, those from Braşov did not carry money in one bag, but along the merchants of goods from Braşov, had accustomed themselves to viticulture and tavern trade and put their wealth at shelter also by purchasing parts of the estates. Merchants from Braşov 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 Şcheii Braşovului, 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 boxes²⁷. On the other side we have a customs price list in Iasi where it is noted that for an *oca* (old measure for weights and capacities), for in seeds from Braşov they paid 2 coins, for a *chiperniță* (pepper mill) from Braşov they paid 10 coins, bedside tables from Braşov, 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 Iaşi in the mid 18th century we find numerous other products brought from Transylvania²⁸.

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 Braşov 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 Brasov, in the middle of the 17th century, we found a note from the same time stating that haggling and *aldămaşul* (honor offered to someone at a sale or purchase), with the implied ritual, took part in the house of merchants from Braşov. The term is an indication that, at that time, merchants from Braşov in Iaşi 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 “Uliţa Braşovenilor”²⁹. Please note that the alley had both the meaning of thoroughfare and that of commercial core³⁰. The fact that the alley was not just an access road is proved by the formula “from Braşov” used to describe the same reality in an act from 1671³¹. 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 Caproşu, *Relațiile economice*, p. 112.

²⁸ Caproşu, *Documente Iaşi*, VI, p. 335-349, nr. 377.

²⁹ Caproşu, *Documente Iaşi*, II, p. 77-78, nr. 80.

³⁰ Marius Chelcu, *Ulițe și mahalale: sensuri urbanistice (secolele XVII și XVIII)*, [“Ulițe and Mahalale: urban meanings (17th and 18th centuries)] in „The Annuary of the A. D. Xenopol History Institute”, XLIX, 2012, p. 78.

³¹ Caproşu, *Documente Iaşi*, 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 city³².

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 study³³.

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”³⁴.

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 customs³⁵. 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 Iasi (30 October 1783)³⁶, Vasile

³² Caproșu, *Documente Iași*, IV, p. 228, nr. 314.

³³ Mircea Ciubotaru, „Misterele onomastice” ale Iașilor, in „Prutul. Revistă de cultură”, new series, year IV (XIII), nr. 2 (54)/2014, Huși, 2014, p. 23.

³⁴ Gh. Dimachi, in „Ecoul Moldovei”, 13th of octobre 1894.

³⁵ Mircea, Ciubotaru, „Misterele onomastice” ale Iașilor”, p. 30.

³⁶ Caproșu, *Documente Iași*, VIII, p. 240-242, nr. 188.

Cucu's widow, a merchant from Braşov, and Târgul Cucului³⁷. 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 Romaniae Historica* and coauthor of the last synthesis works on the history of Iaşi³⁸, 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 Iaşi where there were mentioned merchants from Braşov and thus to be able to return to the hypothesis launched by Constantin Cihodaru.

In 1757, a Vasile *braşoveanul* in Iaşi bought a house covered with shingle and wood cellar on Uliţa Bărboiu³⁹, and also, near Târgul Fâinii at the crossroads of Uliţa Fânăriei and Uliţa Chervăsăriei, bought another land probably in order to raise some booths there⁴⁰. The same merchant, prosperous in the second half of the 18th century, bought other places on Uliţa Bărboiu in order to expand the place where he had opened shops. Vendors were an Armenian merchant⁴¹ and a gypsy blacksmith⁴², evidence of how mixed the people of Iaşi could be. Vasile from Braşov 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 place⁴³. As in other cases, taverns and cellars were partially stocked from vineyards that he had on the hills around the city⁴⁴. 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 braşoveanul 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 descendants⁴⁵. Even this short sequence of wealth

³⁷ *Istoria oraşului Iaşi*, volume I, authors: C. Cihodaru, V. Cristian, M. Dinu, V. Neamţu, M. Petrescu-Dâmboviţa, Gh. Platon, D. Rusu, M. Timofte. Editors: Constantin Cihodaru, Gheorghe Platon, Iaşi, Ed. Junimea, 1980, p. 399. Recently Ion Popescu-Sireteanu considered that Cuckoo Fair was "the fair place that belonged to an owner named Cucu" theory expressed in *Vechi nume româneşti (Memoria limbii române, IV)*, 2003, p. 172.

³⁸ *Istoria oraşului Iaşi*, I.

³⁹ Caproşu, *Documente Iaşi*, VI, p. 83-84, nr. 95.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, *Documente Iaşi*, VI, nr. 696.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, *Documente Iaşi*, VI, nr. 863.

⁴² *Ibidem*, *Documente Iaşi*, VI, nr. 865.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 752-753, nr. 858.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 768, nr. B.

⁴⁵ Idem, *Documente Iaşi*, VIII, nr. 188.

and the place where Vasile Cucu brașoveanul 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 core⁴⁶. 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 Ulița Hagioaiei is named after a townsman in the late 17th 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 Ulița Pădurii takes its name from a Pădure typographer of the 18th 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 17th and 18th century, in which we tried to capture some of the links between the city of Iași and the Țara Bârsei and sought to recover the hypothesis according to which Vasile Cucu brașoveanul gave the name of the cardinal point in Iași's topography.



⁴⁶ See annexed image National Archive of Iasi, Documents, 234/15.

