



Dimitrie Cantemir - Forerunner of Regional Geographical Research

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Abstract. The territory represents the scene of human life, offering the conditions and possibilities that human societies capitalize on differently. Man, since the beginning of his evolution, has modified the space in which he lives, transforming environmental conditions (from the appearance of early agricultural activities to industrialization and deindustrialization or tertiarization and, currently, takes the form of the development of the quaternary sector). In a progressive manner, the study of human activities and the natural factors that influenced these activities was carried out - the study of the evolution of society and its changes in relation to the environment. Until the 19th century, from a geographical point of view, descriptive studies of the various regions by scholars or by travelers who arrived for the first time in those lands dominated. Dimitrie Cantemir was the personality of the 18th century, who through his complex writings provides us with information about life in the boroughs of Moldavia in that period. Moreover, it creates a detailed map of Moldova, as a synthesis of the written text.

Keywords: Dimitrie Cantemir, Descriptio Moldaviae, regional geography

Résumé. Le territoire représente le théâtre de la vie humaine, offrant les conditions et les possibilités que les sociétés humaines exploitent différemment. L'homme, depuis le début de son évolution, a modifié l'espace dans lequel il vit, transformant les conditions environnementales (depuis l'apparition des premières activités agricoles jusqu'à l'industrialisation et la désindustrialisation ou la tertiarisation et, actuellement, prend la forme du développement du secteur quaternaire). De manière progressive, l'étude des activités humaines et des facteurs naturels qui ont influencé ces activités a été réalisée - l'étude de l'évolution de la société et de ses changements par rapport à l'environnement. Jusqu'au XIXe siècle, d'un point de vue géographique, dominaient les études descriptives des différentes régions par des savants ou par des voyageurs arrivant pour la première fois sur ces terres. Dimitrie Cantemir était la personnalité du XVIIIe siècle qui, à travers ses écrits complexes, nous renseigne sur la vie des bourgs moldaves de cette époque. De plus, il réalise une carte détaillée de la Moldavie, en guise de synthèse de ses écrits.

Mots-clés : Dimitrie Cantemir, Descriptio Moldaviae, géographie régionale

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Introduction: About Moldavia and Moldavia's boroughs

Pre-state forms of political-administrative organization (countries and lands) (before 1359) existed on the territory of Moldavia along the main rivers (Prut and Dniester). These were connected by commercial roads that had access to the Black Sea through fortresses that played the role of ports (Cetatea Albă and Chilia).

In the north of Moldavia, there were the Țara Volohovenilor, Țara Sepenițului, Țara Dornelor, Ținutul Câmpulungului, Ținutul Neamțului, Ținutul Cârligăturei. In the center of Moldavia, there were the Lăpuşneni and Codrul Tigheciului. In the south of Moldavia, there were the Vrancei Land, the Horincel Land, the Bessarabian Land, and the Brodnicii. In the period 1359-1538, the Musatini family extended the borders, integrating all the Romanian formations between Ceremuş, Dniester, Eastern Carpathians, Milcov, the Danube and the Black Sea into the new state. Stephen the Great owned fiefs in Transylvania (Cice and Cetatea de Baltă). Numerous trade routes crossed Moldavia from north to south and from east to west, connecting Poland to the Black Sea. Following the campaign against voivode Petru Rareş (1527-1538, 1541-1546), from 1538, Soliman the Magnificent (1520-1566) occupied the southeast of Moldavia (Bugeacul and Bender). Tributary to the Ottoman Empire, suffering from Poland's interference in internal politics, Moldavia also experienced moments of prosperity in the 17th and 18th centuries. But the Greek influence is increasing, causing discontent among the increasingly impoverished population due to the excessive growth of large estates (** 1992a).

Until the twelfth century, there were no favorable conditions for the emergence of urban centers due to the continuous migrations of the Pechenegs, Uzis, Cumans and Mongols who maintained a precarious level of development of the communities in the Carpatho-Nistrian territory.

The first urban centers appear shortly after the establishment of the Golden Horde, the Mongols seeing the advantages of having a city network. The Cetatea Albă (eng. White Citadel) was the first medieval urban center on the territory of Moldavia, mentioned for the first time in sources in 1290 under the form of Malvocastro, but it probably appeared about two decades earlier. The Genoese had an important role in its transformation into a city, because of its favorable position at the discharge of the Dniester into the Black Sea, facilitating the connection with the lands of Central Europe. This is also the case of the city of Isaccea (Saqci), which for a time became the residence of the entrepreneur Khan Nogai. The "Mongol Peace" that followed the campaign of 1236-1242 facilitated the emergence of commercial centers with agricultural products in the Moldavian area. This is how the towns of Orheiul Vechi on the Răut River and Costeşti on the Botna River appeared in the middle of the 14th century.

In the western, northern and central regions of Moldavia, the emergence of urban centers was linked to the creation of state bodies capable of ensuring stability and protection.

The genesis of the cities in the western and central parts of Moldavia was no longer the result of the essential contribution of allogeneic political, demographic and economic structures, even if the German, Hungarian, Armenian colonists made up a consistent share of the population of the first urban settlements. These colonists mainly came from Transylvania and South-Eastern Poland, being attracted to Moldavia probably by various privileges granted by the government.

The oldest urban centers in the western half of Moldavia appeared in Baia (since the beginning of the 14th century, it was called *Civitas Moldaviae*), Siret and Suceava. They were born through the progressive evolution of some rural settlements, which reached the city stage in the third quarter of the 14th century. It is no coincidence that these three localities are grouped in the area where the initial nucleus of the independent Moldavian state was formed. The course of their development was stimulated by the temporal fixation of the voivodeship residences in the perimeter of the respective cities. A much larger group of cities were born in the last quarter of the 14th century and in the following century: Iași, Cernăuți, Roman, Bârlad, Piatra lui Crăciun, Bacău, Tetina, Târgu Trotuș, Hârlău, Dorohoi, Târgu Neamț, Orheiul Vechi, Botoșani, Vaslui, Lăpușna, Adjud, Ștefănești, Tighina, etc.

In the western half of the Moldavian state, between the Eastern Carpathians and the Prut, the distribution of urban centers was generally uniform; conversely, in its eastern half, between the Prut and the Dniester, their network was sparser and much more irregular. This fact is explained by the lower demographic concentration in the area and by the potential threat represented by the proximity to the turbulent world of the north-Pontic steppes.

The cities in the west and center of Moldavia came into being along the rivers, which corresponded to the routes of the most important roads. In fact, many of these took the name of the water course on which they developed. Some of them evolved from rural settlements, their rural origin being also suggested by the unsystematized street network and often lacking dominant arteries. With the exception of a central area, with public edifices and buildings of the patricians, as well as craft districts, the Moldavian cities had a rural aspect, many houses hardly differing from those in the villages (Spinei, 1985).

Sources of inspiration for the *Descriptio Moldaviae* and the accompanying map

Dimitrie Cantemir had access to different bibliographical sources from Moldavia or abroad, knowing several languages: Latin, Arabic, French, Turkish, modern Greek, Italian, Russian, Persian (Iorga, 1924). He used the works of Moldavian (Grigore

Ureche, Miron Costin) (Moldovanu, 1997) and Wallachian chroniclers. He used the works of Moldavian (Grigore Ureche, Miron Costin) (Moldovanu, 1997) and mountain chroniclers. Historian Nicolae Iorga considered Dimitrie Cantemir's memories of the country, as well as the documentary sources from which he gathers information about rulers and court ceremonial, as one of the main landmarks of the book "*Descriptio Moldaviae*" (Iorga, 1969). The intellectual training obtained by the young prince in Constantinople, at the Academy of the Orthodox Patriarchate played an important role in the drafting of his writings, to which is added the knowledge from the Ottoman scholars and from the personal contact he had with various educated people from the West. P. P. Panaitescu (1958) considered that only Grigore Ureche's chronicle and Miron Costin's work „*De neamul moldovenilor*” were at Cantemir's disposal during his stay in Russia, other writings about Moldavia being cited only from memory. Cantemir knew the Polish Chronicle and Miron Costin's Polish Poems since around 1700 (Holban, 1973; Cunesco, 1973). The scholar also informs us that he disposed of the old chronicles of Moldavia and Wallachia during his stay in Constantinople, but these documents remained there after his departure (Cantemir, 1981).

In the Russian libraries, D. Cantemir had the opportunity to consult a lot of sources (such as the *Synopsis of Russian Histories*, 1674, edited in Kiev), which he could not have had at his disposal in Moldavia or Constantinople. D. Cantemir also quotes ancient Greek and Roman authors (Strabo, Eutropius, Marcellus), Byzantine (Nicetas Honiates, C. Curopalt), Polish and Hungarian (Jan Długosz, St. Sarnicki, S. Orzechowski, I. Bielski, Martin Kromer, Antonio Bonfini) (Iorga, 1969) and Western Europeans (M. Cruzius, M. Pretorius and F. Cluvis).

It is possible that even during his stay in Constantinople, Dimitrie Cantemir knew the „*Description of the Low Countries*” by Luigi Guicciardini from 1567 - a descriptive geographical work, spread throughout Europe - because he used the same structure in his work (the natural setting, the economy, the population, the geographical position of the country, the form of government, as well as the administrative division of Moldavia). Among Cantemir's teachers from Constantinople (from the Academy of the Orthodox Patriarchate) was Metropolitan Meletie de Arta, a distinguished geographer of the time (in 1701 he wrote a universal geography in Greek, entitled „*Old and New Geography*”, published in Venice, 1728). Dimitrie Cantemir maintained ties with another great Greek geographer of that period, Chrisant Notaras, who, a little later (1716), published in Paris a work with the title „*Introduction to Geography*”; this included firstly the physical description and human geography, which includes, in particular, political organization (Panaitescu, 1958). Cantemir takes as a model for the map of Moldavia, appended to the “*Descriptio Moldaviae*” a map of the Wallachia that Constantin Stolnicul Cantacuzino (see Figure 1) (his wife's uncle) had published in Venice around 1700 and which he certainly knew (Esanu, 1996).

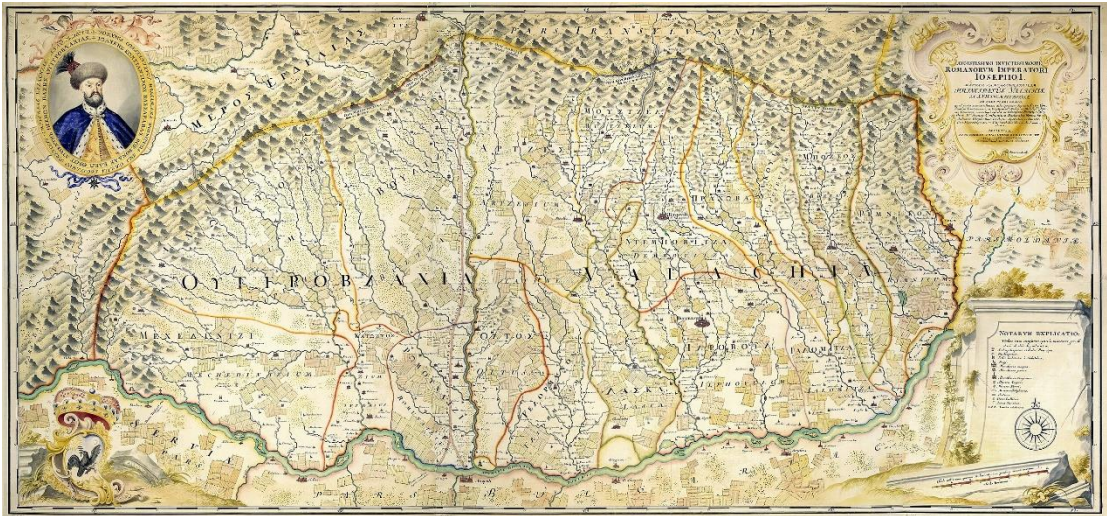


Figure 1. Principality of Wallachia, Austrian copy, 1707, Stolnicul Constantin Cantacuzino

Source: https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fi%C8%99ier:Cantacuzino_1707.jpg

A special influence on D. Cantemir's training was also the Polish school of geography, established in the 16th century, whose most important representatives were Sz. Sarnicki (author of the „Description of Old and New Poland”, edited in Cracow in 1585), M. Kromer (his writing in two parts „Sive de situ, populis, moribus, magistratibus et respublica regni Poloniae”, first published in Frankfurt am Main in 1575). D. Cantemir deepened his conception of geography as a science, used especially in the „Descriptio Moldaviae”. As P. P. Panaitescu observes, in „Descriptio Moldaviae” the chapters have approximately the same content as in Kromer, but with some structural differences. At Cantemir, the third part of the book is dedicated to culture, while at Kromer, these aspects are included in the first part (Esanu, 1996).

Many materials written by Cantemir have been lost, an example being the answer given to Antioch Cantemir (son of D. Cantemir), sent from Paris, during the time when he was the Russian ambassador in France (nothing is known about those writings) (Esanu, 1996).

Sources of inspiration from Russia, where Cantemir wrote the Descriptio Moldaviae and drew up the map (from the 15th century to the 18th century)

The reign of Ivan III, 1462-1505, witnessed the dramatic growth of the Muscovite Grand Principality, both in territory and administration. Ivan conquered or incorporated enormous territories. During his reign and that of his son Vasili III (1505-1533), Muscovite holdings tripled. By the time of Ivan IV the Terrible (1533-1584) the evidence for Russian interest in maps becomes firmer. Ivan or his administrators collected copies of Western maps and atlases. Several documents from the early years

of his reign indicate the central administration's concern with mapping disputed properties. To administer his newly enlarged estates, he sent his ever-increasing staff of clerks to conduct cadastral surveys of the extent, location, population, and land ownership of the entire territory (Kivelson, 2006).

Cadastral surveys were implemented by centralized monarchies in most of Europe in the 15th to 17th centuries in order to facilitate property taxation and military service obligations. This trend can also be seen in the centralized monarchy of Russia of those times making territories, populations and resources "visible" or "legible" to governing regimes (Kivelson, 2006).

At the end of the 16th century, Boris Godunov (1598-1605) made the first attempts to combine the maps of small territories to create a comprehensive map of the Russian territory. These attempts continued into the 17th century.

After the reconsolidation of the tsarate under the new Romanov dynasty in 1613 the "Great Sketch Map" or Bolshoi Chertezh was completed, which no longer exists but there is evidence that it was drawn up. The original perished in the fire of Moscow in 1626. In 1627, the Chancellery of Military Affairs ordered a replacement, along with a second map showing strategic southern Ukrainian territories and the route to Crimea (Kivelson, 2006). This latter map survives in a few late copies, together with numerous documents relating to map-making (decrees, instructions, and receipts for payment to draftsmen) and a „Book of the Great Sketch Map”, a long list of geographical information (Bagrow, 1950). Muscovite cadastral books recorded the location, boundaries, and size (corrected for quality) of each plot, its owner, and resident peasants (Veselovskii, 1916).

From the period before the Tsardom of Peter the Great (1682-1725), about a thousand maps (of foreign and Russian cartographers) have survived (according to the catalog of V. S. Kusov, 1993), more than half being detailed sketches of small regions (called chertezhi or sketches) or large-scale topographical maps drawn up to settle disputes.

These were executed by local officials, provincial servants and townspeople and depicted the environment, each deciding what to include and what to exclude, how to represent various features of the landscape, what to highlight, what symbols to use in representing the physical world.

Far fewer in number, the small-scale maps of the 17th century encompassed the Muscovite tsarate and its neighbors with an emphasis on the borders of newly conquered and incorporated areas or "awaiting" Muscovite conquest. Siberia received special attention, being in those days a lesser-known region that needed to be explored. These maps were commissioned by branches of the Muscovite state administration, served the strategic interests of the tsarist regime, and included elements such as: military supply routes, fortifications and lines of communication, as well as places of strategic importance, such as wells and routes followed by peoples nomadic. Maps can

transform how viewers understand and experience space, place, and power (Kivelson, 2006).

Few maps were made not only in Russia, but all over Europe and Asia, from England to Japan. The historian Mary Elizabeth Berry suggested that the development of maps in early modern Japan required a change in the mindset of people who were accustomed to descriptions of the territory. Map making was gaining ground in the late 15th century by breaking down old patterns of loyalty and local ways of imagining and replacing them with more abstract, general ways of thinking.

Maps in medieval Europe were schematic representations of regions or symbolic representations of a Christian cosmos. Apart from occasional maps of pilgrimage routes to Jerusalem, rare property plans and portolan maps of coasts and sea routes developed from the 13th century onwards in Italy and Iberia, maps as usable tools remained the exception rather than the rule. It is no coincidence that the rise of European cartography correlates with the rise of centralizing monarchies (Harley and Woodward, 1987; Barber, 1997).

In the middle of the 17th century, Russia stretched to the Pacific Ocean. In that era people came to be defined by where they lived by reducing the freedom of movement of peasants (by decrees, in 1649) who became tied to the land they worked (became serfs) (Kliuchevskii, 1987). Not only peasants, but townspeople, clergy, and even the military derived their identity, privileges, and existence from their legal connection to a particular piece of land (Kivelson, 2006).

State administrators recorded in each locality the name, age, sex, and location of each peasant and each owner. In this way it was guaranteed that the taxpayers and military servants stayed put, that no one moved and the labor force for the land was provided. In 1645, the Romanov dynasty consolidated social stability, imposing the permanent binding of peasants to the land in which they were registered. The new law code of 1649 completed the gradual process of enslaving the Russian peasantry (Hellie, 1971; Koretskii, 1975).

The maps used in trade with China made significant contributions to Russian cartography. The geographic information they contained also carried over into Western European cartographic efforts (Bagrow, 1952).

Seventeenth-century maps were beginning to have a degree of standardization of technique and imagery: they use similar symbols to designate villages, forests, roads, rivers, and fields. Russian cartographers paid special attention to communication routes or rivers. Distances were measured in days, by river or overland, and the shortest in versts and sazhen, the preferred units of distance. These were determined by using a measuring chain or rope, carefully divided and placed end to end (Gol'denberg and Postnikov, 1985).

As Postnikov writes: "Russian cartography before the 18th century did not know any of the mathematical and geographical bases practiced in Western Europe to

map vast areas of the earth's surface using coordinates of latitude and longitude, projection and scale." Instead of latitudes and longitudes, Muscovite cartographers anchored their images in topographic details (Postnikov, 2000).

Peter the Great founded the first professional school in Europe dedicated to the training of cartographers or, as he called it, geodesists. Already in 1701 he founded the Moscow School of Mathematics-Navigation in the Sukharevskii Tower of the Kremlin, and in 1715 he founded an institute of geodesy at the Naval Academy in St. Petersburg. Within a generation he trained impressive cadres of Russian surveyors and sent them across the territory to survey and compile comprehensive atlases of the Russian Empire (Postnikov, 2000; Shaw, 1996; Shaw, 1999).

The French astronomer and cartographer Joseph Nicolas Delisle, and the Russian director of cartography and topography projects, Ivan Kirilovichi Kirilov, were tasked with drawing up the first atlas of Russia (Gol'denberg and Postnikov, 1990) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Russian Empire 1745 General Map

Source:

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_Empire_1745_General_Map_\(Latin,_HQ\).jpg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_Empire_1745_General_Map_(Latin,_HQ).jpg)

During the time of Catherine the Great (1762-1796), commissioned surveying officers carried out General Boundary Measurement, attempting to map every square centimeter of land, marking the boundaries between estates in carefully coded colors and lines (Kivelson, 2006).

Leo Bagrow (1950) claims that a decade later, the Russian ambassador to China, Nicolaie Milescu took a map of the Muscovite Tsardom with him on his journey and left it with the Chinese, suffering severe punishment for his act of treason. In the information they contained, the maps served the interests of the state.

Nominally, the tsar's land (pomest'e) could not be sold and would remain with the state if the holder left no male heir to fulfill the service obligations due from the property. The Tsar had the prerogative to confiscate land in cases of treason, default or non-service (Kivelson, 2006).

Description of Moldavia according to Dimitrie Cantemir

As I mentioned above, the models used by Cantemir for the structure of the “*Descriptio Moldaviae*” (1714-1716) were the “*Description of the Low Countries*” by Luigi Guicciardini from 1567, Chrisant Notaras who, in 1716, published in Paris “*Introduction to Geography*”, and M. Kromer’s “*Sive de situ, populis, moribus, magistratibus et republica regni Poloniae*”, published in Frankfurt am Main in 1575. During the period when Cantemir was in Russia (from 1711 until the writing of the “*Descriptio Moldaviae*” – 1716) he attended the cartography school founded by Peter the Great. Thus, he learned the mapping methods used by the Russians at that time. Also, to represent different aspects of the physical environment, he used symbols standardized by Russian cartographers (see Figure 3).

The description of Moldavia includes three parts: the *Geographical Part*, the *Political Part* and *About Church and Education in Moldavia*.

The Geographical Part was divided into seven chapters:

- About the old and current name of Moldavia
- About the settlements of Moldavia, about its old and new borders and about the climate
- About the waters of Moldavia
- About today's lands and fairs in Moldavia
- About the mountains and minerals of Moldavia
- About the plains and forests of Moldavia
- About wild and domestic animals

Moldavia consisted of:

- Basarabia: Bugeac, Cetatea Albă (Akerman), Chilia, Ismail
- Moldova de Jos (eng. Lower Moldaviae): Ținutul Iașilor, Târgul Trumos al Cârlișăului, Ținutul Romanului, Ținutul Vasluiului, Ținutul Tutovei, Ținutul Tecuciului, Ținutul Putnei, Ținutul Covurluiului, Ținutul Fălciului, Ținutul Lăpușnei, Ținutul Orheiului, Ținutul Soroca

- Moldova de Sus (eng. Upper Moldaviae): Ținutul Hotinului, Ținutul Dorohoiului, Ținutul Hârlăului, Ținutul Cernăuților, Ținutul Sucevei, Ținutul Neamțului, Ținutul Bacăului.



Figure 3. The accompanying map of the Principality of Moldova *Descriptio Moldaviae*, 1716, Dimitrie Cantemir

Source:

[https://ro.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fi%C8%99ier:Principatus_Moldaviae_nova_%26_accurata_descriptio_-_Delineante_Principe_Demetrio_Cantemirio_-_btv1b52511045w_\(1_of_2\).jpg](https://ro.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fi%C8%99ier:Principatus_Moldaviae_nova_%26_accurata_descriptio_-_Delineante_Principe_Demetrio_Cantemirio_-_btv1b52511045w_(1_of_2).jpg)

Moldavia equals a path of 237 hours or 711 Italian miles. Before it was occupied by the Turks and Tatars, the extent of Moldavia was 247 hours or 822 Italian milliaria (Cantemir, 1825). Cantemir realized, in his description, a hierarchy of settlements. For example, in the Ținutul Iașilor (eng. Iași Realm), Iași city was described as the seat of the country, moved by Stephen the Great from Suceava to better defend his country from its midst (in reality, it is attributed to Alexandru Lăpușeanu). There were 12,000 houses 50 years ago. The frequent massacres of Tatars and Poles reduced the population of Iași to a third during Cantemir's period. Apart from the royal court, the Metropolitan of Moldavia (of Suceava) was also in Iași. At the same time, smaller towns were given less importance. Târgul Frumos al Cârlișturii is located 8 hours from Iași towards Suceava, and there is nothing there worthy of notice but a princely palace (Cantemir, 1865).

Conclusions - the importance of Dimitrie Cantemir's approach

Dimitrie Cantemir considered that the map and the text complement each other, as the map is the clear location of all the geographical names in the text, and the text is only an admirable commentary on the map. The Prince of Moldavia created for the first time a geographical description of Moldavia, providing details about the natural setting, population and settlements as well as about the political-administrative organization (parties, lands, boroughs). Moreover, we can observe a locational analysis by including the interactions between spatial attributes such as position, location, distance, connectivity, connection, ranking, local distinctions and their spatial relations (eg. Târgul Frumos al Cârligăturii is 8 hours away from Iași towards Suceava). The information provided by the descriptions gives us an image of the level of development of the various component lands of 18th century Moldavia. Based on the map and the text of "Descriptio Moldaviae" we can appreciate the number (under 1 million) and the spatial distribution of the inhabitants of Moldavia in that period (for the period that followed, see Muntele, 1998).

George Vâlsan (1925) declared that Cantemir creates the first geography of a Romanian land and the best geography of Moldavia ever published. After N. Iorga (1924), Cantemir gave the first work in the sense of our era: a real national encyclopedia in the form of a geographical study.

Apart from the map of Moldavia, Cantemir worked on the "Constantinople Plan" (it included the relief, rivers, shores, fields, forests, roads, lighthouses, fortresses, gates, slums, monasteries, gardens, squares, villages and surrounding towns) which was annexed to the English and German editions of the "History of the Ottoman Empire", being engraved in copper by the Russians.

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