

**AN OUTSTANDING RECENTLY EXAMPLE
OF “WOMEN'S HISTORY” IN MOLDAVIA¹**

“Women's History” is a new trend in European and world social history, which has asserted itself a quarter of a century ago. The call of the British writer Virginia Woolf to write a story, seen by the female eyes, recorded by the female pen, read by women researchers, is finally heard on almost all continents and certainly in all European countries. Moldavia is no exception. Thanks to the books and articles of experts in the field of gender studies in history, the European reader will now be able to read something about the life of ordinary and exceptional women in different life circumstances, in the city and in the countryside, in different national states. The main character of the book under review is Princess Maria Cantemir (28.04.1700, Jassy – 09.09.1757, Moscow), the eldest daughter of a Moldavian noblewoman Cassandra Cantacuzino and Dmitry Cantemir, Moldavian and Russian statesman and scientist, the ruler of the Principality of Moldavia, the prince of Russia and the Holy Roman Empire, the Russian senator and secret adviser.

How little had we known about the children of this wonderful family and how much is opened when reading the book! What a superficial was our knowledge about Maria Dmitrievna, who in the second half of the 19th century became one of the central heroines of the works of historians and writers enthusiastically ready to support the legend that this beautiful woman was not only the sister of the outstanding Russian poet (Antiochus Cantemir) and the daughter of a well-known Russian official, but also the emperor Peter the Great's intimate friend, who had been unsuccessfully delivered of a child and unable to give him the long-awaited heir.

According to the opinion of the outstanding Moldavian specialist in source study, the gender historian and daily life student Lilia Zabolotnaia, mysteries, secrets and myths around the figure of Maria Cantemir have always been explained by the lack of necessary documentary material, the scarcity of reliable knowledge and the free interpretation of numerous speculations. As before, so

¹ L. P. Zabolotnaia, *История жизни Марии Кантемир в письмах и документах* [History of Maria Cantemir's life in letters and documents], Chişinău, Lexon Prim Publ., 2018, 271 p. (Series *Women's History*)

now the researchers did not much trouble themselves with archival work, believing that the figure of one of the women of the Russian elite of “the insane and wise century” is not the most indicative for describing the social layer or cultural and everyday practices that were significant for that time. That's why Lilia Zabolotnaia's study is unique. It differs from previous editions in that it introduces into the scientific circulation unique historical and legal documents of the first half of the 18th century discovered as a result of painstaking research in the collections of Russian archives, including materials of correspondence between Maria and her younger brother, the above-named poet Antiochus Cantemir. Being fascinated by the reconstruction of the women's history of the country in which she is currently working, Lilia Zabolotnaia set out to publish all documents that relate to the life and work of Maria Cantemir, both those published (including excerpts) and new ones found in archives. This is done in strict chronological order, which allows us to enter the social portrait of an educated noblewoman into the socio-cultural constellation of the epoch, and at the same time to represent Maria's personality in dynamics and development.

The collected materials are read in one breath, allowing (in new frames of the biographical history) to comprehend the personality of M. D. Cantemir, who was a student of Anastasios Kondoidi (a Greek monk who became a secret informer for the Russian ambassador in Istanbul), who taught her not only to freely master Greek, Latin, Italian, the basics of mathematics, astronomy, rhetoric, philosophy, ancient and Western European literature and history, but also to achieve success in drawing, and in music. This upbringing in childhood taught Maria to conduct conversations with educated people, and the natural tact (so clearly manifested in her letters ...) gave her the skills to get along with people. Brilliant education was, as we see from the peer-reviewed publication of sources, the basis of her way of thinking and acting, including in the field of complex property relations (and when, in what times they were simple?), and interpersonal relationships in the family.

The structure of the book consists of two parts, uncomplicatedly called *Documents of a general nature* and *Documents of a private nature* (in the second part, copies of the letters of Maria Cantemir to her brother Antiochus were published). In the first part, the reader will find 26 texts. These are originals and unique copies of the 18th century of a property-legal nature (among them spiritual/testamentary) deeds (nos. 2, 7, 9-10), testamentary letter (no. 8), examinations of wills (nos. 13, 14), petitions (nos. 11, 21), inventories of land, houses, jewelry, household goods and art objects (nos. 6, 25-26), certificates and confirmations for possession of movable and immovable property (nos. 15-16,

21), notes about the beginning of coming into the rights of inheritance (nos. 17-18, 20.) In this same part one can find the texts of imperial decrees and petitions addressed to Empresses Anna Ioannovna, Catherine II, reports from the Collegium of Justice etc. Some of these documents have never been introduced into scientific circulation, they were discovered by the compiler of this collection in the archives and libraries of St. Petersburg, in the Manuscript Department of the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) of the Russian Academy of Sciences. In addition, in the L. N. Maykov's Archive Lilia Zabolotnaia found "Preparatory materials for the essay «Princess Maria Kantemirova»", which turned out to be a unique repository of copies of the documents of the middle and second half of the 18th century, which until now were considered irretrievably lost. The Fund no. 166 (Pushkin House, Institute of Russian Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences) have preserved unique and still never described evidences of the life of Princess Maria Cantemir: her two spiritual deeds (of 1725 and 1757), a spiritual (testamentary) letter to her brother Sergei, two petitions addressed to Empress Elizabeth Petrovna (1741-1762) for her estates previously owned by the Cantemir family, and the letters to her brother.

Inspired by the success of archival searches in St. Petersburg, Lilia Zabolotnaia continued her work in Moscow, in the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA) and libraries, where she found the originals of copies and other texts that related to various pages of the amazing life of Maria Cantemir, who (it seems) was rather focused on managing the immense property of the family, than on secular entertainments and communication with the emperor of all-Russia. L. P. Zabolotnaia paid special attention to sources in which it was possible to trace the history of property, legal and personal relations in the family – with her father, Dmitry Cantemir, brothers – Konstantin, Matvei, Sergei and Antiochus, with her stepmother, Anastasia Trubetskaya, cousins and relatives on the part of the mother, in particular Constantin A. Cantakuzino. From the point of view of women's history, documents of financial and economic dispositions of this amazing representative of the epoch, which was just beginning to reveal such female talents, are of special interest. Documents about Maria's litigation in the courts, evidence of how she defended her own interests and her brothers' interests in a long lawsuit with her stepmother are the most important proof of the competence and legal enlightenment of educated women in the "centenary of the Russian matriarchy" (in the 18th century, women were on the throne in Russia for more than 73 years). Very significant in this sense are the last wills of M. D. Cantemir, especially the testament of 1757. After several centuries the reader finally finds out who of the close relatives was her heir, who inherited her

lands, how the brothers of Maria and her executor fulfilled the conditions of her will, whether they worthily disposed of her property. In conclusion, we should add that the land in the village of Chornaya Gryaz' near Moscow is at present a place for elite summer cottage construction, and it was there that representatives of modern Russian show business (singer Alla Pugacheva and her young husband Maxim Galkin) built their house resembling a castle: as we see, three centuries of the history of Russian land use and careful care of the soil in the Cantemir family estate, which Maria mentioned in her wills, were not in vain. In the book under review, the unique texts of the wills of Maria Cantemir are supplemented with the descriptions of the houses of Prince Sergei Cantemir on Pokrovka. All this makes it possible to vividly imagine not only what property the family of Maria had, but also their life and customs.

Tactically bypassing legends and fiction around the theme of the love relationship between Maria Cantemir and Peter the Great, the compiler of this collection put the focus on sociality, the publicity of the life path of Maria Cantemir, the circle of her communication, which is represented by dozens of Maria's letters and petitions to various statesmen of the era: Count Ernst J. von Biron, Burkhard Münnich, various members of the Stroganov family, diplomat Artemy Volynsky and others, from which it follows that the soul of Maria was occupied by the problems of relations with her stepmother and her brother Constantin, of granted peasant households, and not at all by the desire to become the mistress of the Russian Tsar.

The peculiarity of this approach of the compiler becomes even more pronounced when the second group of sources published in the collection is subjected to examination, and this is 38 letters from personal correspondence between Maria and Antiochus Cantemir (1733-1743), which were found in the L. N. Maykov's Archive (Pushkin House, Institute of Russian Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences). These letters, their language, their amazing wisdom are an exceptional narrative monument of female subjectivity that allows us to analyze the strategies of women's behavior and decision-making in matters of family, private, spiritual and moral life. The "female texts" by Maria Cantemir to Antiochus, with their literary writing (not for nothing Maria was taught the Russian language by a writer and translator Ivan Ivanovich Ilyinsky, who served at the court of her father), style, text structures, character and manner of presentation make it possible to consider the heroine of this scientific work an outstanding personality of her era. The small traits of the feminine everyday life of the 18th century, the essence of brotherly and sisterly love and devotion, the fineness and nobility of their characters, the wisdom of actions and the

reasonableness of the chosen way of life, the attitude to relatives. What a multifaceted picture opens to the researcher of the life and customs of the 18th century! How similar are the noble and educated people of that time to today's people with their current daily worries, joyful and sad events, love and disappointments, and how different are they!

The significance of the book under review is so indisputable that there is no reason to look for shortcomings or omissions. The researcher's focus on the presentation of her own version of the life of Maria Dmitrievna Cantemir and her contribution to the social history of the Russian elites, to the history of their daily life and private life, her deliberate distancing from the theme of the heroine's love relationship with the emperor deserves recognition and respect. The goal pursued by the publisher, compiler and author of the preface, is achieved. Collected and published sources showed the reader a completely new image of the legendary Maria Cantemir².

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² The review was written within the research work topic “Gender systems and gender relations in the past and the present” of the Ethno-gender Research Sector of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences.