

# The Seal of the Phanariot Prince Constantine Ypsilantis as Voivod of Moldavia

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## **Abstract**

This paper presents the hitherto unpublished seal of the Phanariot-Greek Voivod of Moldavia Constantine Ypsilantis (r. 1799-1801) in its historical and sigillographic context. While the focus lies on Moldavia, seals from the other Danubian Principality Wallachia will also serve as items for comparison. The aim is to describe the seal as set in the sigillographic tradition of the area and at the same time analyzing its peculiarities, including the protective box. Ypsilantis reign is set towards the end of Ottoman rule in the Moldavia and Wallachia, in a time of increasing Western and Russian influence, but the seal is firmly embedded in the tradition of voievodal titulary and the heraldry of the time. However, differences between the heraldic depictions on the seal and its protective lid show that even in a princely court around 1800, quite important variations such as the missing of some symbols on the arms were permissible.

**Keywords:** Seal, Voivod, Moldavia, Phanariots, Sigillography

## **Introduction**

The seal of a ruler is an instrument to visibly reflect his will, on documents or otherwise, and confirm its authenticity. In widely illiterate times, it identified its possessor, but also his aspirations and claims<sup>1</sup>. Thus, it was an important instrument for any ruler and therefore it usually well protected and coveted. This paper will present the hitherto unpublished seal of the Phanariot Prince or Voivod Constantine Ypsilantis as ruler of the Danubian Principality of Moldavia, a land now shared between Romania and Moldova, with small parts in today's Ukraine.

The aim is to go beyond a simple description and to embed it into its historical as well as sigillographic context. Therefore, the historical setting will be presented first, showing the functions of Constantine Ypsilantis and his family against the background of Ottoman rule in the Principalities and the roles Phanariot Greeks played as administrators for the Sublime Porte. This will be followed by a description of Constantine's seal. The excellent state of preservation of all parts of this seal allows a detailed discussion of the different elements of it as compared to the development of Voivod seals from the lands which now form most of Romania. The conclusion will highlight its peculiarities.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandru Ștefan, "Contemporary Perspectives on the Study of Medieval Seals in Western and Romanian Academia: A Comparative Approach," *Philobiblon: Transylvanian Journal of Multi-disciplinary Research in Humanities* 25/2 (2020), <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26424/philobib.2020.25.2.08>.



## Historical setting

### *Ottoman rule in the Danubian Principalities*

Before the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the region currently occupied by Moldova and Romania, i.e. Moldavia, Wallachia, Transylvania and some adjacent territories, the largest one being the Dobrudja, with access to the Black Sea<sup>2</sup>, was under the influence of either Hungary or the second Bulgarian empire. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century on, Moldavia (with Bogdan the Founder) and Wallachia (with Basarab) gained independence – with discontinuities<sup>3</sup>. From the 15<sup>th</sup> century on, ottoman influence increased, and in the 1520s, Wallachia was first amongst the Danubian principalities – Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania – to acknowledge Ottoman suzerainty. However, this was also interrupted by short periods of near-independence (under Michael the Brave in both Moldavia and Wallachia), suzerainty of the Empire (under Rudolf II), occupation by Polish (and Moldavian-supported) armies, Ottoman rule again, and other incursions from neighboring powers<sup>4</sup>.

Nevertheless, Ottoman influence was strong throughout and the Turkish Empire imposed the first rulers (or hospodars) from the 15<sup>th</sup> century on, with an accompanying increase in importance of Greek and Levantine nobility competing with the local boyars. Greek subjects of the Ottoman Empire were increasingly frequently sent to rule Romanian lands, although at least in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Porte still demanded family members as hostages from some princes. As will be discussed below, a small number of families from Constantinople competed for the two thrones the Ottomans awarded, always for a limited period only<sup>5</sup>. Thus, “pax ottomanica” reigned over the principalities, semi-autonomous and rich provinces of what now is Romania<sup>6</sup>.

Alas for the voivods (another title for the hospodars or rulers, the Romanian equivalent at the time would be “domn”<sup>7</sup>), in the wake of increasing conflict between Russia and the Ottomans, the Principalities became a plaything of stronger powers, and becoming voivode lost some of its financial appeal because

<sup>2</sup> Robert Stanciugel and Liliana Monica Balasa, *Dobrogea in secolele VII-XIX, evolutie istorica* (Bucarest: DC Promotion, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Neagu Djuvara, *Între Orient și Occident. Țările române la începutul epocii moderne*, trans. Maria Carpov, 8th ed. (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Ömer Bedir, “The Phanariote System in Moldavia and Wallachia under the Ottoman Rule,” *Journal of Social Sciences* 5 (06/01 2022), [https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2022.5\(2\).07](https://doi.org/10.52326/jss.utm.2022.5(2).07).

<sup>5</sup> Djuvara, *Între Orient și Occident. Țările române la începutul epocii moderne*.

<sup>6</sup> Viorel Panaite, *Ottoman Law of War and Peace: The Ottoman Empire and Its Tribute-Payers from the North of the Danube*, 2nd revised ed. (Leiden: Brill Academic Publications, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Constantin Butnaru, “The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia (14th Century - Mid-17th Century)” (PhD “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi, 2012), [http://phdthesis.uaic.ro/PhDThesis/Butnaru,%20Constantin,%20The%20Titles%20of%20the%20Rulers%20of%20Wallachia%20\(14th%20Century%20E2%80%93%20Mid-17th%20Century\).pdf](http://phdthesis.uaic.ro/PhDThesis/Butnaru,%20Constantin,%20The%20Titles%20of%20the%20Rulers%20of%20Wallachia%20(14th%20Century%20E2%80%93%20Mid-17th%20Century).pdf).

of reduced taxes and tribute<sup>8</sup>. A series of wars between Russia and the Porte continued to reduce the influence of the latter and culminated in the humiliation of the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca. While Russia returned the Danubian Principalities to Ottoman rule, it was given the right to protect Christians from “misrule” – whatever that meant – and used this prerogative to intervene also in the Greek War of Independence of 1821. Regular conflict between the two powers ensued<sup>9</sup>.

### ***Phanariot Greeks as Voivods of Moldavia and Wallachia***

The Phanariots were a class of Greek merchants who rose to influence through administrative service for the Ottoman Empire from the 16th century onward. While perceiving themselves as Greek<sup>10</sup>, they were fluent in Turkish and other languages, which helped their rise to power<sup>11</sup>. They managed to regularly occupy four important positions in the Ottoman Empire: Grand Dragoman (linguists and diplomats), Dragoman of the Fleet (deputy Grand Admiral and administrator for a number of maritime territories of the empire) and the Voivodeships of Wallachia and Moldavia<sup>12</sup> (for a map, see Appendix 1). In addition to that, some Phanariots assimilated into the local “boyar” (landowner) class and, consequently, some Phanariot families held influential positions even after the end of Ottoman rule<sup>13</sup>.

From 1711 on, the Sublime Porte sent Phanariots as rulers to Moldavia, then from 1714 to Wallachia, often after having served as dragomans, a position they kept with no interruption until the Russian occupation of 1828. However, the voivodeship was temporary and normally held for no more than one to five years, rarely longer<sup>14</sup>. They were initially called Kaymakam (or *qâim makâm*, literally lieutenant or deputy, Ottoman sub-governors). However, the traditional title in Wallachia and Moldavia was Voivode or Prince.<sup>15</sup> The frequently used Slavic equivalent was “*hospodar*.” The Phanariot rulers were quickly allowed to adopt these<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Mihail Berza, “Haraciul Moldovei și al Țării Românești în sec. XV–XIX,” *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie II* (1957).

<sup>9</sup> Alex Drace-Francis, *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture* (Bloomsbury, 2006); Djuvara, *Între Orient și Occident. Țările române la începutul epocii moderne*.

<sup>10</sup> Jaques Bouchard and Nikolaos Mavrocordatos, *Les loisirs de Philothée*, ed. Association pour l'étude des Lumières en Grèce (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Nir Shafir, “Phanariot Tongues: The Mavrocordatos Family and the Power of the Turkish Language in the Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Empire,” *Oriente Moderno* 101 (12/27 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1163/22138617-12340262>.

<sup>12</sup> Alexandros Pallis, “The Phanariots – A Greek aristocracy under Turkish rule,” in *Greek Miscellany: A Collection of Essays on Mediaeval and Modern Greece*, ed. Alexandros Pallis (Athens: Pallis, 1964).

<sup>13</sup> Stefan Ionescu, *Bucureștii în vremea fanarioșilor* (Cluj: Editura Dacia, 1974).

<sup>14</sup> Constantin Rezaचेvici, *Cronologia critică a domnilor din Țara Românească și Moldova, a. 1324 - 1881*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Sándor Papp, “Transylvania’s and Poland’s Participation in the Struggles between the Moldavian Voivode Family, the Movilās, and the Wallachian Voivode Radu Șerban,” *Prace Historyczne* 148 (12/01 2021), <https://doi.org/10.4467/20844069PH.21.045.14021>.

<sup>16</sup> M. A. Yalçinkaya, “The role of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia on ottoman foreign policy at the time of Selim III (1789-1807),” *Codrul Cosminului* 24 (07/01 2018); Rezaचेvici, *Cronologia critică a domnilor din Țara Românească și Moldova, a. 1324 - 1881*, 1.



While some were not, many of the Phanariot princes were capable rulers and introduced important innovations such as the abolition of serfdom as well as tax reforms (as was the case of Constantine Mavrocordatos, 6 times prince of Wallachia and four times of Moldavia, or Alexandros Ypsilantis, twice prince of Wallachia and Moldavian Voivod from 1786–1788, who reformed the legal and administrative system)<sup>17</sup>. Under Ypsilantis, not only economic and social life but also art and philosophy increasingly tended towards the western world and further reforms<sup>18</sup>. However, there also exist very critical accounts of chaos and corruption<sup>19</sup>, Romanian historians are traditionally critical,<sup>20</sup> while nationalist and communist Romanian literature tends to condemn Phanariot rule as oppressive and brutally reactionary.<sup>21</sup> It is frequently described as an impediment to the creation of a Romanian nation<sup>22</sup>.

### ***Constantine Ypsilantis and his family***

Constantine Ypsilantis was the son of Alexandru, who ruled Moldavia from 1786 until 1788 and was also voivode of Wallachia twice. After serving as Grand Dragoman of the Porte, Constantine was Moldavian hospodar from 1799 to 1801<sup>23</sup>. He later became Voivod of Wallachia, which he ruled until 1806, but attempted revolt in order to support Greek liberation. He ultimately had to flee to Russia in 1807<sup>24</sup>.

Two of his five sons, Alexandros and Dimitrios Ypsilantis, became officers in the Russian Army, reaching high rank before joining the secret *Filiki Eteria* society, founded in order to promote Greek independence and later participating in the Greek uprising of 1821 against Ottoman occupation<sup>25</sup>. During this revolution,

<sup>17</sup> Djuvara, *Între Orient și Occident. Țările române la începutul epocii moderne*.

<sup>18</sup> Drace-Francis, *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture*.

<sup>19</sup> Mihaela Mehedinti-Beiean, "Political instability and corruption. The Phanariot regime as seen by Russian and Nordic travellers," *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies* 8 (08/15 2016), [https://doi.org/10.53604/rjbns.v8i1\\_3](https://doi.org/10.53604/rjbns.v8i1_3).

<sup>20</sup> e.g. A. D. Xenopol, *Istoria Românilor Vol. V*, vol. Istoria Moderna Partea II Epoca fanarioților (Iasi: H. Goldner, 1892).

<sup>21</sup> As can be seen in Mihai Eminescu, "Scrisoarea a III-a," *Convorbiri literare*, 1881; Constantin C. Giurescu and Dinu C. Giurescu, *Geschichte der Rumänen* (Bucharest: Wissenschaftlicher und Enzyklopädischer Verlag, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> Constantin Iordachi, "From Imperial Entanglements to National Disentanglement: The "Greek Question" in Moldavia and Wallachia, 1611–1863," in *Entangled Histories of the Balkans* (Brill, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică a domnilor din Țara Românească și Moldova, a. 1324 - 1881*, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Yalçinkaya, "The role of the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia on ottoman foreign policy at the time of Selim III (1789-1807)."

<sup>25</sup> Peg Porter, "The Ypsilantis: Constantine, Alexander and Demetrius," *Ypsilanti Gleanings*, 2011, <https://aadl.org/ypsiganings/89924>.

Alexandros briefly became military ruler of Moldavia, thus being the third, and last, member of this family to hold power in what later became Romania<sup>26</sup>. However, the attempt to draw the Danubian Principalities into the struggle for Greek independence failed, and Alexandros had to flee to Austria, effectively marking the end of Phanariot rule in Moldavia<sup>27</sup>. From this time on, the Sublime Porte resorted to local nobles as rulers, albeit some still were of Phanariot descent<sup>28</sup>.

### Description of the Seal of Constantine Ypsilantis as Voivod of Moldavia

The privately owned seal, protected by a round box hanging on a double cord, tasseled at the end, measures 6.3 cm in diameter, the box measures 6.7 x 2.8 cm, the cambered lid 6.9 x 1.6 cm to its top. The upper part of the cord, as shown on the photograph, measures about 29 cm in length, the tasseled ends 27 cm (see Appendix 2). Altogether, it weighs 282 grams. Its use is unclear. It might have been meant to identify a herald, messenger or envoy, as is also an attested use of seals<sup>29</sup>. It might also have been attached to a lost document (see the example of Alexander Lapușneanu in Appendix 3), but as it shows no signs of wear, it might not have been fixed to any object. Because of its shape, it cannot be used to stamp.

The seal itself is made of a reddish-brown paste (as of yet not analyzed) and bears a circular inscription around the arms of Moldavia, as borne by Constantine: an aurochs with a five-pointed star between its horns. These arms are presented on an oval shield, set upon crossed sword and scepter or mace, common symbols in Moldavian princely heraldry<sup>30</sup>. Below are crossed olive branches, a symbol which was used before<sup>31</sup>. Below stands the date 1799. Above the shield, the princely crown of Moldavia is shown in an open version and below it, an orb similar to a royal one but with no cross visible on top of it. The inscription on the seal, written in the Romanian Cyrillic alphabet used in the area at the time<sup>32</sup>, reads as follows:

<sup>26</sup> Ilse Eichler, *Erinnerung an Alexandros Ypsilantis und seinen Tod in Wien*, vol. Supplement 2, ETEOKPHTIKA, (Vienna: Phoibos Verlag, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Richard Schubert, *Lord Byrons letzte Fahrt. Eine Geschichte des Griechischen Unabhängigkeitskrieges* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021).

<sup>28</sup> Bedir, "The Phanariote System in Moldavia and Wallachia under the Ottoman Rule."

<sup>29</sup> Phillipp R. Schofield, *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2015). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvh1dsk8>.

<sup>30</sup> Maria Dogaru, «Particularités et évolution des ornements extérieurs de l'écu dans les sceaux des princes régnants de Valachie au XVIIIe siècle» (paper presented at the 11e Congrès International des Sciences Généalogique et Héraldique, Liège, May 29th, 1972 1972).

<sup>31</sup> See examples in Dogaru, «Particularités et évolution des ornements extérieurs de l'écu dans les sceaux des princes régnants de Valachie au XVIIIe siècle.»

<sup>32</sup> Alexandr Paskal, "Cyrillic Writing System: From Slavic to Romanian," *Научно-практический журнал* 3 (7) (2020).



+ IO KOSTANDIN ALEXANDRU YPSILANTI:  
VOEVOD KU MILA LUI DOMNU A TOATA MOLDOVII

This translates into IO (a title in itself, see below) Konstantin Ypsilantis, Voivod, By the Grace of God (literally “by His Mercy”) Lord of all Moldavia. The next section will further explain the meaning of this fragment and compare it to the inscriptions on other seals of rulers of the Danubian Principalities. There are also some inconsistencies in spelling, such as 8 (usually “U” or “Y”), which might have been used as “O” and “B” used as the second “A” in “TOATA”, but this is in line with other seal inscriptions<sup>33</sup>.

The protective box is made of slightly oxidized silver colored metal (probably silver-plated as signs of oxidation are too slight for a silver object of that age), with an engraved removable lid. A similar box is known from Alexandru Ypsilantis as Voivod of Wallachia<sup>34</sup>. The engravings show the Moldavian aurochs, this time with no shield but with a crown similar to the one on the seal. The star is six-pointed on the lid and accompanied by a half-moon to the left (heraldic right) and a sun to the right. These symbols are a common feature in many representations of the coat of arms of Moldavia<sup>35</sup>. Below, a wreath of two twigs is engraved, this time without the distinctive olives shown on the twigs on the seal, so that it is unclear whether olives, laurels or other plants are depicted.

The lid is inscribed: to the left of the crown, in Romanian Cyrillic, are engraved the letters NO, to the right KS, and at the bottom the date 1800. In the lower third one reads at the left side IPS with two Cyrillic letters, an “I” (И) and a “psi” (Ψ), the “I” erroneously engraved back-to-front, together probably standing for “Ypsilanti”, although the “Y” is spelled with the sign “V” on the seal. To the right VV (BB) is engraved, also in Cyrillic script and in all likelihood short for Voivod. One can thus discern a number of differences in arms and spelling between seal and lid, a phenomenon which will be discussed in the next section.

### Comparison with Other Seals of Rulers of the Danubian Principalities

Next to its appearance and use, a seal bears as main characteristics the inscription, including the title of the person whose authority it represents, and the images, especially the heraldry on its face<sup>36</sup>. This section will first introduce

<sup>33</sup> See the examples in amongst other sources “De Rode Leeuw,” Hubert de Vries, 2012, accessed November 4th, 2022, [hubert-herald.nl](http://hubert-herald.nl); Maria Dogaru, *Sigiliile, marturi ale trecutului istoric* (Bucharest: Ed. Stintifica si encyclopedica, 1976).

<sup>34</sup> De Vries, «De Rode Leeuw.»

<sup>35</sup> As shown in Dogaru, «Particularités et évolution des ornements extérieurs de l’écu dans les sceaux des princes régnants de Valachie au XVIIIe siècle.»

<sup>36</sup> Dogaru, «Particularités et évolution des ornements extérieurs de l’écu dans les sceaux des princes régnants de Valachie au XVIIIe siècle.»; Schofield, *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages*.

the titles used on princely seals in the Danubian Principalities and compare it to Constantine's inscription, then look at the imagery. Some examples of Voivod seals are shown in Appendix 3.

### ***Princely Titles on Seals in Moldavia and Wallachia***

#### IO

The title IO, with which the inscription on the seal discussed here starts, has been used by the Bulgarian Tsars and is first attested in Moldavia in the 14th century<sup>37</sup>. While it did for instance not figure yet on the seals of Mircea the Elder of Wallachia in 1390, it shows on a 1392 seal of Roman I of Moldavia<sup>38</sup>. It is an abridged form of Ioannes or John and was used in both Wallachia and Moldavia, probably to underline the patronage of St. John the Baptist, thus the god given power of the prince and the role as defender of the Faith<sup>39</sup>. While Dionysopoulos<sup>40</sup> argues that it might be a misunderstanding of the Slavonic abbreviation for "in the name of the Father", it was clearly used as a princely title with religious connotation in the Danubian Principalities<sup>41</sup>, and so does Constantine use it, one of the last Moldavian rulers to do so.

Variations exist, Stefan Kantacuzinos for instance uses IOAN in 1714<sup>42</sup>, see Appendix 3. IO gradually was phased out, not universally understood and replaced by "Noi" or "We". On the seal from 1814 of Scarlat Callimachi, three times Voivod of Moldavia and in 1821 of Wallachia, it simply states "We Scarlat Alexander Callimachi voievod"<sup>43</sup>, and the first Domnitor of the United Principalities used a mixed cyrillic-latinised version written "HOI"<sup>44</sup>. However, "Nos" at the beginning of the enumeration of the titles was also used from medieval times on, in Latin texts but not exclusively so<sup>45</sup>.

#### Voivod and Hospodar

Voivod, also spelled Voivode, Voyvoda, Waivode and more, was the title of the rulers of the Danubian principalities, but also of Transylvania, the third major part of what today is Romania. While the title was especially common in this area, it

<sup>37</sup> Butnaru, "The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia (14th Century - Mid-17th Century)."

<sup>38</sup> Dogaru, *Sigiliile, marturi ale trecutului istoric*.

<sup>39</sup> Ion Croitoru, «Rolul tiparului în epoca domnului Moldovei Vasile Lupu» (paper presented at the *Istorie și cultură*, Chișinău, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> Nikos Dionysopoulos, "The Expression of the Imperial Idea of a Romanian Ruler in the Katholikon of the Great Lavra Monastery," *Zograf* 29 (2003).

<sup>41</sup> Butnaru, "The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia (14th Century - Mid-17th Century)."

<sup>42</sup> De Vries, «De Rode Leeuw.»

<sup>43</sup> Maria Dogaru, *Un Armorial Romanesc din 1813. Spita de Neam a Familiei Balș dotata cu Steme* (Bucharest: Directia Generala a Arhivelor Statului, 1981).

<sup>44</sup> Sorin Iftimi, *Vechile blazoane vorbesc. Obiecte armoriata din colecții ieșene* (Iași: Palatul Culturii, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Butnaru, "The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia (14th Century - Mid-17th Century)."



was also used elsewhere<sup>46</sup>. For instance, the first local ruler of Moldavia, Bogdan the Founder (r. ca. 1359 – 1367), was already Voivod of the Vlach people before becoming the Moldavian one<sup>47</sup>. Thus, Voivod was used to convey the idea of leader or head administrator, but was increasingly translated as “prince” (in the sense of ruler of the land, not son of one such). While sometimes also translated as Duke, Butnaru<sup>48</sup> shows examples of Voivods using the title “hertzeg” (Hungarian for Duke) for other lands they rule together with the title of Voivod for the Romanian principalities. Prince thus seems to be the more correct interpretation on how the Voivods saw themselves. Prince is for instance used in the Latin translation on e.g. the seal of Hungarian King Sigismund Bathory (see Appendix 3) or by Polish kings when asserting a claim to a Danubian Principality<sup>49</sup>.

However, when they did not use the title of Voivod, mainly in texts in Slavic languages they also styled themselves “hospodar”, also meaning “ruler”<sup>50</sup>. This was sometimes extended to “sole gospodar” in documents<sup>51</sup>, but the author did not find any example of a seal using “hospodar” instead of Voivod with regards to the Romanian Principalities. It could, however, be used instead of “domn” (see below and Appendix 3, seal of Stephen III). This held true until the end of Phanariot era when then title was considered a symbol of foreign rule<sup>52</sup>.

### Domn

The Romanian term “Domn”, meaning “lord” or “ruler”, could also be used for the Voivods. “Domn”, or in Latin texts “dominus” featured in chancery documents, but it was also used in combination as in “dominus et wayvoda”<sup>53</sup>. This is also the case in many seals, where Voivod, often with no specification whereof, stands next to the title “domn” followed by the lands the Voivod is ruling<sup>54</sup>, as also in the present example, proclaiming its owner to be “Domnu a toata Moldovii”. In this context it might be interesting to note that the “of all of Moldovia” addition could

<sup>46</sup> Panaite, *Ottoman Law of War and Peace: The Ottoman Empire and Its Tribute-Payers from the North of the Danube*.

<sup>47</sup> Radu Carciumaru, “The genesis of the medieval state on the Romanian territory: Moldavia,” *Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana*, no. 2012 No. 2 (2012).

<sup>48</sup> Butnaru, “The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia (14th Century - Mid-17th Century).”

<sup>49</sup> Ádám Novák, “Additions to the itinerary and seals of King Wladyslaw I of Hungary in the light of recent Hungarica research,” in *THE JAGIELLONIANS IN EUROPE*, ed. Attila Bárány and Balázs Antal Bacsa, Memoria Hungariae (Debrecen: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică a domnilor din Țara Românească și Moldova, a. 1324 - 1881*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> Butnaru, “The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia (14th Century - Mid-17th Century).”

<sup>52</sup> Drace-Francis, *The Making of Modern Romanian Culture*.

<sup>53</sup> Butnaru, “The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia (14th Century - Mid-17th Century).”

<sup>54</sup> As shown in Dogaru, «Particularités et évolution des ornements extérieurs de l’écu dans les sceaux des princes régnants de Valachie au XVIIIe siècle.»; Dogaru, *Sigiliile, marturi ale trecutului istoric*; Dan Cernovodeanu, *Știința și Arte Heraldica în România* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1977).



be used in a similar way to the “sole ruler” title also common in Eastern Europe and the Byzantine Empire, i.e. underlining the full autocratic powers in said land<sup>55</sup>.

Outside of documents, *domn* or similar terms thus do not seem to stand as a title on its own but rather as a means to specify the lands ruled as Voivod. When ruling other lands than the Romanian Principalities, Voivods added the customary titles of these territories<sup>56</sup>, such as Ban or Hertzeg<sup>57</sup>. However, after Phanariot rule ended, the title under its then-modern Romanian form of “*domnul*” and later “*domnitor*” became the designation of Romanian rulers<sup>58</sup>. This ended with the formation of the Romanian Kingdom, but the title of Voivod lived on in the part of the full royal title of Michael I which contained “Great-Voivod of Alba Julia”, a town in Transylvania<sup>59</sup>.

### ***Coat of Arms and Symbols of Moldavia and its Rulers***

The crown on the seal discussed here, also the one on the lid of the protective box, is common in Voivod seals. However, some rulers preferred to use a hoop crown with hat inside as the voievodal crown, such as Constantine Mavrocordat in 1769 or Mihail Racovița in 1741<sup>60</sup>. Which crowns to use for which rank might not have been as clearly defined as it would have been in Western Europe, witness the varieties found in arms and heraldic achievements, many self-assumed, of noble families in Moldavia – of which some even use very similar crowns to the Voivod ones<sup>61</sup>. Early depictions also show hats similar to the German electoral hats above, with ermine topped by a red (probably velvet) hat<sup>62</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Butnaru, “The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia (14th Century - Mid-17th Century).”

<sup>56</sup> See the examples in Cernovodeanu, *Știința și Arte Heraldica în România*; Dogaru, «Particularités et évolution des ornements extérieurs de l’écu dans les sceaux des princes régnants de Valachie au XVIIIe siècle.»

<sup>57</sup> Butnaru, “The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia (14th Century - Mid-17th Century).”

<sup>58</sup> e.g. Cristina Ionescu, “Un *domnitor* prea puțin cunoscut: Mihail Sturdza – devalizatorul Moldovei,” *Atac de Constanta*, July 15th, 2013, 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Michael Kroner, *Die Hohenzollern als Könige von Rumänien : Lebensbilder von vier Monarchen 1866 - 2004* (Heilbronn: Johannis-Reeg-Verlag, 2004).

<sup>60</sup> See Appendix 3 and Dogaru, «Particularités et évolution des ornements extérieurs de l’écu dans les sceaux des princes régnants de Valachie au XVIIIe siècle.»

<sup>61</sup> Tudor-Radu Tiron and Mihai-Bogdan Atanasiu, «The noble heraldry of the pre-modern Moldavia,» *ANALELE ȘTIINȚIFICE ALE UNIVERSITĂȚII „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” DIN IAȘI - Istorie* TOM LXV (2019), <http://history.uaic.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/ASUI-LXV-2019-cuprins-content-nou.pdf>.

<sup>62</sup> Grosses\_Wappenbuch, *Großes Wappenbuch, enthaltend die Wappen der deutschen Kaiser, der europäischen Königs- und Fürstenthäuser, der Päpste und Kardinäle, Bischöfe und Äbte bis zu den lebenden Repräsentanten zur Zeit der Regentschaft Kaiser Rudolfs II. und Papst Gregors XIII*, BSB Cod.icon. 333 ed. (South Germany, 1586). [https://codicon.digitale-sammlungen.de/Band\\_bsb00002481.html](https://codicon.digitale-sammlungen.de/Band_bsb00002481.html).



Round shields, while not predominant, are common in depictions of Romanian heraldry<sup>63</sup> and also show on a seal of Constantine's father (see Appendix 3). The color of the arms is not indicated on the seal of Constantine, but while the "Grosses Wappenbuch" shows the Moldavian aurochs with its accompanying star, half-moon and rose on blue, the more recent sources mostly show red. However, not only were colors not clearly defined, there is also some discussion on the heraldic figures, and even the identity of the aurochs as emblem is being challenged<sup>64</sup>. The color of all the elements changed over time before setting to all gold (i.e. yellow) on a red background as is currently presumed for the Principality. However, in the current Romanian arms, the aurochs is black and moon and rose silver and the Republic of Moldova (most of which used to be Eastern Moldavia) shows a gold aurochs with golden accompanying symbols on a red over blue shield – similar but different<sup>65</sup>.

There were also other changes when it comes to the symbols. There are versions of the Moldavian arms with a sun instead of the rose<sup>66</sup> and variations on the number of points of the star, rays of the sun, type of the flower, side the symbols are on or whether the symbols around the aurochs head are present at all<sup>67</sup>, witness the differences between the seal under discussion and the lid of its box. Sword (sometimes saber) and mace (or scepter) become common in the 17<sup>th</sup> century<sup>68</sup>, but clearly optional such as the relatively rare orb (not always clearly identifiable, see the seal of Alexandru Mavrocordat in Appendix 3).

The olive branches can be found in some depictions of arms and seals of Voivods but are relatively rare in the surviving examples<sup>69</sup> and apparently more common in armorial depictions on paper<sup>70</sup>. They are, however, still in use in Romanian and Moldovan heraldry, witness the Arms of Moldova or the arms of a number of Romanian ministries.

<sup>63</sup> Tiron and Atanasiu, "The noble heraldry of the pre-modern Moldavia."

<sup>64</sup> Igor Bercu, «Stema Țării Moldovei: cap de bour sau cap de zimbri? Coat of Arms of Moldavia: aurochs head or wisent head?» in *Historia est Magistra Vitae: Valori, paradigmă, personalități*, ed. Manolache C., Rotaru L., and Xenofontov I. (Chișinău: Biblioteca Științifică Centrală, 2019).

<sup>65</sup> Monica Heintz, "Republic of Moldova versus Romania: the cold war of national identities," *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations* II, no. 1 (2005 2005), <https://hal.parisnanterre.fr/hal-02892251>.

<sup>66</sup> Dogaru, *Sigiliile, marturi ale trecutului istoric*.

<sup>67</sup> See examples in Appendix 3 and Cernovodeanu, *Știința și Arte Heraldică în România*; Andrei Pogăciaș, «De la Ghindăoani la Vorskla. Domnia și faptele de arme ale domnitorului moldovean Ștefan I,» *Tactica și Strategia*, no. No. 4 (September 2017 2017); De Vries, «De Rode Leeuw.»

<sup>68</sup> As can be seen on the site of De Vries, «De Rode Leeuw.»

<sup>69</sup> For instance the ones in Cernovodeanu, *Știința și Arte Heraldică în România*; Dogaru, «Particularités et évolution des ornements extérieurs de l'écu dans les sceaux des princes régnants de Valachie au XVIIIe siècle.»

<sup>70</sup> See the examples on De Vries, «De Rode Leeuw.»

## Conclusion

As discussed, Ypsilantis voivodeship in Moldavia is set towards the end of Ottoman rule in the Danubian Principalities, in a time of increasing Western and already very strong Russian influence. However, the seal is firmly embedded in the tradition of voievodal titulary and the Moldavian heraldry of the time. The use of “IO” and “Voivod” as the titles on the seal (and Voivod in an abridged version on the lid) fit with surviving examples of Phanariot Voivods and is actually the most classic approach to introducing the owner on a voievodal seal, including the addition “ruler (or lord) of all Moldavia”.

Even with the differences between seal and the lid of the protective box, the arms are also within the tradition, and so are the additaments. While the star between the horns of the Moldavian aurochs is never missing, rose (or sun) and half-moon may not only be confused but are missing in some depiction of the Moldavian arms<sup>71</sup>. Other elements such as sword and mace or scepter are clearly optional, as is the – relatively rare – orb below the voievodal crown and the olive branches, also rare in voievodal seals. The comparison of seal and lid shows that even as late as 1800 and in a princely court – albeit provincial – spelling and the depiction of arms and additaments were not as clearly defined as not to allow variation without the loss of meaning. Visibly, even for the Voivod, close enough meant good enough.

## N.B. Anecdotal evidence

After the death of Dr. Miljeva Princess Ypsilanti, her heirs found a number of family mementoes her late husband Alexander III Prince Ypsilantis had kept safe. They included items related to his great-great-great-uncle Constantin and his sons Alexander and Dimitrios (both heroes of the Greek uprising of 1821), like a finial of a minaret which Dimitrios had allegedly shot from a church the Ottoman rulers had converted into a mosque or a travel writing set in the form of a globe and decorated with Moldavian aurochs heads the Austrian baron Sina had commissioned for Alexander. There are also liturgical items from the former mausoleum of Alexander II in the park of castle Rappoltkirchen in Austria. This material can be made available for research via the author.

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<sup>71</sup> See Dogaru, «Particularités et évolution des ornements extérieurs de l’écu dans les sceaux des princes régnants de Valachie au XVIIIe siècle.»; Cernovodeanu, *Stiinta si Arte Heraldica in Romania*.



## Rezumat

Această lucrare examinează sigiliul inedit al voievodului grec fanariot al Moldovei, Constantin Ypsilanti (r. 1799-1801), în contextul său istoric și sigilografic. Deși accentul se pune pe Moldova, sigiliile din celălalt principat dunărean, Țara Românească, vor servi, de asemenea, ca elemente de comparație. Scopul este de a descrie sigiliul ca fiind încadrat în tradiția sigilografică a zonei și, în același timp, de a analiza particularitățile sale, inclusiv caseta de protecție. Domnia lui Ypsilanti este plasată spre sfârșitul dominației otomane în Moldova și Valahia, într-o perioadă de creștere a influenței occidentale și ruse, însă sigiliul este ferm ancorat în tradiția titlaturii voievodale și în heraldica vremii. Cu toate acestea, diferențele dintre reprezentările heraldice de pe sigiliu și de pe caseta de protecție arată că, chiar și într-o curte domnească din jurul anului 1800, se puteau întâlni variații destul de importante, cum ar fi lipsa unor simboluri de pe însemnele heraldice domnești.

**Cuvinte cheie:** sigiliu, voievod, Moldova, fanarioți, sigilografie

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## Appendix 1: Contemporary Map of the Danubian Principalities



The Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1786, Italian map by G. Pittori, since the geographer Giovanni Antonio Rizzi Zannoni<sup>72</sup>

<sup>72</sup> From Dan-Alexandru Popescu, "The Romanian Countries in the Middle Ages: between Byzantium and the West," *Carnival: Journal of the International Students of History Association* 10 (2003), [https://ishainternational.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/isha\\_carnival\\_2003.pdf](https://ishainternational.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/isha_carnival_2003.pdf).



## Appendix 2: Photographs of the seal of Constantine Ypsilantis as Voivod of Moldavia



(Copyright of the photographs with the author)





### Appendix 3: Examples of Seals of Voivods of the Danubian Principalities

Mircea the Elder, 1390<sup>73</sup>



Legend: + S (IGILLUM) MIRCZE WAIWODA  
TRANSALPIN I BAN I DE CZWRINIO MIRCE  
WAIW (ODA)

Roman I, 1392 (Wikidata: CC BY-SA 4.0)



Under CC licence Legend  
(translated): The Seal of IO Roman  
Voivod of the Moldavian Land

Stephen III, 1457 (Wikidata: CC BY-SA 4.0)



Under CC licence from Vladimir Lobatsev,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki>  
Legend (translated): Seal of IO Stephan Voivod  
Gospodar of the Moldavian Land

Sigismund Bathory, 1595<sup>74</sup>



Bathory was Voivod of Transylvania and later  
King of Poland. The legend (Latin) includes  
claims: SIG.G.TRA.MOLVAL.TRA.ET SAC.  
COM

<sup>73</sup> Dogaru, *Sigiliile, marturi ale trecutului istoric*.

<sup>74</sup> from Jean-Baptiste Maurice, *Le Blason des Armoiries de tous les Chevaliers de l'Ordre de la Toison d'Or* (Gaunt: Jean Rammazeyn, 1667)



Mihail Viteazul and son, 1600 (CC BY-SA 3.0)



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<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki>  
Legend IO MIHAILI UGROVLAHISCOI VOEVOD  
ARDILSCOI MOLDA ZEMLI and IML BJE MLRDIE

Stefan Cantacuzino, 1714<sup>75</sup>



Legend: IWAN YEΦAN KANTAKOZINO  
BOEBOΔA BJYIO MATIYU ΓAPZBMAI  
8TPBAXH (note the letter “psi” as “ST”, the  
sun and the closed crown)

Alexandru Ypsilantis, 1776<sup>76</sup>



Seal of the father of Constantine as Voivod  
of Wallachia with supporters

Alexandru Mavrocordat, 1786 (CC BY-SA 4.0)



Under CC licence Tiparituri Romanesti,  
[tiparituriromanesti.wordpress.com/2013](http://tiparituriromanesti.wordpress.com/2013)  
Legend: Cu mila lui Dumnezeu, Noi, Alexandru  
Ioan Mavrocordat voievod, domn Țării Moldavii

<sup>75</sup> De Vries, "De Rode Leeuw.", from „Der Deutsche Herold“, 1880

<sup>76</sup> Dogaru, *Sigiliile, marturi ale trecutului istoric.*



### Examples for special elements:

**Alexandru Lapușeanu, 1560<sup>77</sup>**



Under CC license.

An example with tasselled cord  
but set in what looks like  
stone.

**Georghe Duca, 1680<sup>78</sup>**



From a psalterium. With sun instead of rose  
And two crowns, the lower shown as if part  
of the arms, the upper a Western style princely  
crown. Note Sword and scepter, but no orb.

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[https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Seal\\_of\\_Stephen\\_III\\_of\\_Moldavia.svg](https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Seal_of_Stephen_III_of_Moldavia.svg)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elektron\\_plate\\_of\\_Mihai\\_Viteazul\\_and\\_his\\_son.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Elektron_plate_of_Mihai_Viteazul_and_his_son.jpg)

<https://tipariturromanesti.wordpress.com/2013/03/21/hrisov-de-danie-al-lui-alexandru-ioan-mavrocordat-voievod-catre-manastirea-secu-1786/>

<http://www.pemptousia.ro/2012/10/arhiva-romaneasca/>

<sup>77</sup> Pemptousia Arhiva românească, "Seal of Voivod Alexandru," St. Maxim the Greek Institute, 2012, accessed November 3rd, 2022, <https://pemptousia.com/>.

<sup>78</sup> De Vries, "De Rode Leeuw."