

### Financing Social Care in the Romanian Principalities in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

Livadă-Cadeschi, Ligia

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*SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT AND HISTORICAL MEMORY IN ROMANIA /  
PENSÉE SOCIO-POLITIQUE ET MÉMOIRE HISTORIQUE EN ROUMANIE /  
GÂNDIRE SOCIO-POLITICĂ ȘI MEMORIE ISTORICĂ ÎN ROMÂNIA*

**FINANCING SOCIAL CARE IN THE ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES  
IN THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES\***

**LIGIA LIVADĂ-CADESCHI**

*Abstract*

Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, members of the local aristocracy, the Metropolitans of the two Principalities, or the Phanariot rulers created the first charitable foundations aimed at caring for the poor. The prince placed himself as originator of all organised welfare initiatives in the Romanian Principalities. By being very present in charitable actions, the prince ensured that the state controlled charity and set the direction it took, so that charity consequently became a matter of state. Despite constant appeals from the central authority, private initiative remained poorly organised. On the other hand, individual gestures, which certainly took place, are scarcely reflected by historical documents, being confined to families and having a smaller impact at the larger level of society as far as welfare and poor relief are concerned. In the first half of the nineteenth century, concern for the poor moved away from the religious sphere and became attributes of a good citizen's civic and patriotic duty. Charitable foundations started to be described as "patriotic assets", and their progress to be linked to the country's level of civilisation. Charity therefore gradually became a "branch of administration", and thus strongly dependent on its limited and always insufficient budget.

**Keywords:** social care, charitable foundations, poor relief, pauper hospitals, Alms Box (*Cutia Mîlelor*), Department of social care for the poor (*Casele făcătoare de bine și de folos obștesc*).

The first systematic concern for the fate of the poor in the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia can be traced in primary sources from the eighteenth century. The available documentary evidence comes from social elites, meaning the ecclesiastical elite and foremost the political elite. In investigating the beginnings of poor relief in Romanian history, therefore, I shall concentrate on efforts made by these social groups. Throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, members of the local aristocracy, the

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Metropolitans of the two Principalities or the Phanariot rulers, appointed in Istanbul but nonetheless eager to be accepted within the ruling elite, created the first charitable foundations aimed at caring for the poor. Amongst these foundations were pauper hospitals but also the *Cutie Milelor*, the “Alms Box”, an office or charitable department handing out aid for various categories of impoverished people.

A caveat is necessary before examining differences in financing and administration between private and public poor relief. For the period covered by this study, a strict separation between such apparently opposite categories as lay/religious, private/public, personal/institutional (especially where the Prince is concerned) should be approached carefully: there is a constant blurring of such concepts, rendering them less antonymous and more complementary. In the Romanian principalities, the rights of ecclesiastical patronage (*drept ctitoricesc*) followed the standard Orthodox doctrine, having inherited its main elements from the Byzantine right of patronage<sup>1</sup>. The church granted the title of patron, while the Prince approved the foundation as an attribute of his princely powers. The ruling prince also reinforced older foundations: the diplomatic formula of princely privileges stated that the Prince participated in the foundation and donation by his act of confirmation, often adding other direct donations and granting administrative privileges. When the Prince numbered among the founders, this annulled the private character of the foundation. All these elements reveal most clearly the Byzantine tradition of Romanian foundation practices<sup>2</sup>.

The prince placed himself as originator of all organised welfare initiatives in the Romanian Principalities. He is thus co-founder of the private foundations whose privileges he confirms, he founds his own charitable institutions, and he sets up the first administrative office dealing with the poor and the impoverished. At the same time, princely charity is an ambiguous and complex concept. In the best Byzantine custom of imperial philanthropy, it justifies and urges the prince's direct or mediated actions in the social sphere. Coming from the prince, charity represents the usual gesture of any Christian who gives alms to the poor, but it also bears the larger significance of good governance, conveying the prince's love for his subjects, sense of justice and of just measure. Princely charity was morally and politically charged. Because charity and poor relief have strong religious implications, Romanian Princes sought to bring the church into financing public welfare work, but also to control and channel ecclesiastical charity for their self-serving aims for social cohesion. This attitude was inspired again by the Byzantine tradition of state tutelage over the Church; princely endeavours were met with silent resistance from the

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<sup>1</sup> Valentin Al. Georgescu, *Bizanțul și instituțiile românești până la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea*, Bucharest, 1980, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 174-175.

ecclesiastical establishment. A document concerning the monasteries which the Wallachian prince issued in 1798 stated that monasteries were endowed by their founders with wealth and by the princes with statutes, "so that by using them sparingly and wisely to be preserved forever, they do good in eternity and be of help to the poor, for political unity and eternal remembrance."<sup>3</sup> 'Political unity' confirms the argument that "charity consolidates social reality, bringing out the ways in which the powerful care for their subjects (...) It represents the obligation to strengthen solidarities through social protection and, as we would say, by being aware of reality."<sup>4</sup>

I emphasised the relationship between political power and charity in order to highlight the particular traits of charity, its organisation and financing in the Romanian society of that time. By being very present in charitable actions, the prince ensured that the state controlled charity and set the direction it took, so that charity consequently became a matter of state. Despite constant appeals from the central authority, private initiative remained poorly organised. Individual gestures, which certainly took place, are scarcely reflected by historical documents, being confined to families and having a smaller impact at the larger level of society as far as welfare and poor relief were concerned. This is even more evident when the state took charge of mobilising the political ideal of social cohesion or stability and bringing it together with the Christian commandment of loving one's neighbour. The Phanariot princes of the Romanian lands, and the local princes who followed them until the mid-nineteenth century, practised a political pragmatism built upon the idea of the common good. Although this policy was in line with European political thought, Romanian rulers also maintained a strong bond with their past and their Orthodox legacy.<sup>5</sup> In 1775 the Wallachian prince Alexandru Ipsilanti set up the first office for charitable work, and introduced a mandatory contribution for all state employees. He justified his decision to turn Christian charity into a public obligation in the following terms: "We do not doubt that everyone follows the commandment of the Gospel the best they can (...) however we wanted that the community also do this useful work, and decided that of what all earn from being in my employment, some small payment be made, and when a sum has been collected from everyone (...) it shall be given to people in need, and also help should be provided for the paupers and impoverished."<sup>6</sup>

A second observation is necessary before discussing the poor relief methods in the Romanian principality, concerning the methods and the historical sources found in the Romanian archives. The primary sources dealing

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<sup>3</sup> V. A. Urechia, *Istoria românilor*, vol. VII, Bucharest, 1895, p. 377.

<sup>4</sup> Alexandru Dușu, "Mila și filosofia socială", in *Dilema*, III, 108, 3-9 Feb. 1995, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Roxane Argyropoulos, "Modifications du mode de vie et rôle des mentalités dans les Balkans (XVIII<sup>e</sup>- XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles)", in *Études Balkaniques*, 1, 1991, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> ANIC – B (National Archives of Bucharest), „Manuscrite”, mss. 1, f. 53v.

with charitable foundations and institutions fall into one of the following categories: foundational documents and administrative documents related to financing and functioning; ownership papers of acquisition or confirmations of these; or applications for support addressed to authorities. The account books are much less numerous, covering only short periods and being too disparate for a serial analysis. There is also an evident lack of concern for accuracy in recording incomes and expenses in detail, while the main focus was on balancing the books.

At the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Cantacuzino family founded the Colțea hospital. In 1735, Prince Grigore II Ghica established the St. Pantelimon monastery and hospital; in 1757 Constantin Racoviță founded the St. Spiridon hospital in Jassy; and around 1814-1815 the Filantropia hospital in Bucharest was built through public subscription. Apart from the Filantropia hospital, the first hospitals dedicated to the poor were part of monasteries, where they functioned more as asylums for sick paupers or beggars who were invalid, without family or shelter. The medicalisation of hospitals began only in the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, but their free medical services were still aimed at the poor population.

The first of these charitable foundations, the Colțea hospital, seems to have been a small scale replica of certain Italian models, such as the *Ospedale di S. Lazzaro e dei mendicanti* in Venice<sup>7</sup> or the *S. S. Pietro e Paolo* hospital in Castello,<sup>8</sup> the latter being a hospital for the poor.<sup>9</sup> The exact nature of the Colțea monastery is not clear from the few existant historical sources, while we know that it had multiple functions. According to the foundational document, it was a monastery which housed within its walls a hospital for the poor (12 men and 12 women) and a school. Eight administrators were appointed by the Bucharest merchants, and confirmed by the prince.<sup>10</sup> In the account book of 1731-1739 – a unique document of this kind – the sick paupers are recorded, though not in much detail. Each year their food cost 332 thalers, following the founders' orders to spend a new thaler every day. The hospital had no distinct sources of income, while the revenues of the monastery came from the landed property which it owned. Of the monastic establishments' total expenses, the hospital accounted for 26%, equivalent to the monastery's other outgoings.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Nicolae Vătămanu, *Contribuții la istoricul înființării spitalului Colțea*, in *Din istoria medicinei românești și universale*, Bucharest, 1962, pp. 145-165.

<sup>8</sup> Nicolae Iorga, "La Continuation des hôpitaux byzantines par les hôpitaux roumains", in *Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen*, oct.-déc. 1932, pp. 395-450.

<sup>9</sup> Ugo Stefanutti, Reinhold Mueller, "Charitable Institutions, the Jewish Community and Venetian Society, a Discussion of the recent Volume by Brian Pullan (II)", in *Studii Veneziani*, XVI, 1972.

<sup>10</sup> Alexandru Galeșescu, *Eforia spitalelor civile din București*, Bucharest, 1899, pp. 20-44.

<sup>11</sup> C. Șerban, *Spitalul Colțea în prima jumătate a secolului al XVIII-lea*, in *Din istoria medicinei românești și universale*, pp. 167-174.

In the case of the St. Pantelimon monastery and hospital, a later copy of the will of their founder, Prince Grigore II Ghica, mentions a hospital with 12 beds and another hospital for the plague-stricken, with no further detail about its size.<sup>12</sup> The foundation was endowed with landed property, ownership of Gypsy slaves, and a share from the incomes of customs and salt mines, which traditionally belonged to the princely treasury. Political changes as well as the chronic deficit of the Wallachian state budget (not clearly separated from the private income of the ruler until 1831/1832) offered very little to St. Pantelimon hospital. It is known that during the Russian-Ottoman war of 1806-1812 and the Russian occupation, the 20-bed hospital struggled to survive because the Russian administration had taken over the salt mines.<sup>13</sup>

In 1813, responding to the increased needs for hygiene and sanitation in Bucharest, a Filantropia hospital was founded as a "house of the poor" with 200 beds.<sup>14</sup> It was built and endowed after a public subscription to which Bucharest aristocrats and great merchants had contributed. A princely decree ordered that the hospital receive certain sums of money from the lease of the customs and salt mines, from other taxes (on pigs, wine and sheep) collected by the state treasury (again a strict separation of princely and state income was not made at the time) and from appointments to public offices. Furthermore, the hospital drew income from the monasteries of Arnota and Govora as their ecclesiastical patron owned 10 settlements of Gypsies belonging to the prince, and 25 of its employees were exempt from taxes. During Sunday service, various Bucharest churches collected alms for the sick paupers of Filantropia. The hospital had two doctors, a surgeon (*hirurg*) and a pharmacist, thus being very similar to its modern counterpart.

The authorities took notice of the pauper in the street only to have them removed from the public space, while the impoverished middle class or even aristocracy were offered monthly stipends or occasional grants directly by the treasury, or by specialised institutions such as the Alms Box. The Moldavian financial department was especially involved in supporting the impoverished. The 1776 account book of Grigore III Ghica mentions amounts deducted from employees' salaries; half a *leu* from every hundred. The money collected was meant to go "under official seal, to impoverished households that lack provisions of food."<sup>15</sup> Other account books from the Moldavian treasury in the period 1792-1826 list sums of money offered to *known recipients, impoverished recipients, poor ladies*.<sup>16</sup> The 1817-1818 Moldavian financial accounts register

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<sup>12</sup> Al. Galeşescu, *Op. cit.*, pp. 176-230.

<sup>13</sup> V. A. Urechia, *Istoria...*, IX, Bucharest, 1896, pp. 893-894.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, X-A, Bucharest, 1900, pp. 1030-1035.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, I, Bucharest, 1891, pp. 129-133.

<sup>16</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Documente și cercetări asupra istoriei financiare și economice a Principatelor Române*, in *Economia națională*, Bucharest, 1900.

entries under the heading of "Gifts and Alms". The treasury used approximately the twenty-seventh part of total incomes for alms. Out of 78 beneficiaries, 26 individuals (one third) were not named and registered under the common heading of a *known recipient*, three were deemed *poor* (one of whom was *ill*, another one, Teohari, father of a family, was impoverished), while others were listed by name without further details of their status. Most of the grants directed to the *known recipients* amounted to 200-300 lei (eight), followed by seven grants between 30-50 lei, three grants of 600-700 lei, three grants of 900-1000 lei, one grant of 2500 lei and one of 5000 lei.<sup>17</sup> Comparing these sums with those of 30-150 lei given to paupers, and of 50-150 lei offered to named beneficiaries, we can suppose that the anonymous beneficiaries of the more generous grants were impoverished members of the aristocracy.

Sometime around 1775 Alexandru Ipsilanti created the Department of Common Administration (*Epitropia Obștească*) in Wallachia, which took charge of poor relief. The prince ordered that a chest be kept at the Metropolitan See, to which contributions for the poor were to be made as follows: from the prince (in the manuscript corrected into *from the treasury* in order to make the distinction from the prince's private chest), from the boyars who were appointed to titles or offices, from all state employees, from the heads of monasteries, from the Metropolitan and bishops when appointed, from merchants. All revenue was to be recorded in a separate register. Further, all inhabitants of the country, laymen or clergy, had to pay into the Alms Box a share of the legacies they inherited, in some instances as much as a third. Priests and deacons paid one and a half thaler a year. Thus, at least in theory, all these various revenues came from all sectors of society. Other types of income, not listed in the princely foundational document but encountered in other official documents, include penalties for breaching the moral code (immorality, divorce, kidnapping of girls), taxes on marriage, penalties for stray cattle. The charter establishing the Alms Box indicated the source of income; the sums collected were to be entered up every three months, when applications for grants and lists of beneficiaries were also entered centrally. The Metropolitan was in charge of the Alms Box, while the prince named eight boyars to oversee accounts. The founding charter describes the status of those entitled to alms: "first, if someone becomes impoverished and is ashamed to ask, if an old boyar's daughter needs help for getting married; if a respectable noble man is jailed for his debts (...); if widows cannot go out to beg (...) and for other poor people."<sup>18</sup>

The size of the financial support depended on the applicant's social status, but also on the "condition of the box". Petitions to the Wallachian prince reveal that beneficiaries were mostly elderly and sick state employees or soldiers, or

<sup>17</sup> V. A. Urechia, *Istoria...*, X-B, Bucharest, 1902, pp. 467-502.

<sup>18</sup> ANIC-B, "Manuscrite", mss. 1, f. 53v.-57r.

their families (widows and children). Other alms recipients included paupers, widows and invalids from the neighbourhoods of Bucharest, more rarely from other places in the country, who were given 5, 10, 15, even 20-30 thalers, either on a monthly basis or on just one occasion, for instance as a dowry for marrying girls. Social status made a huge difference in the amounts of the payments: a petty county office holder, the son of a boyar, impoverished but with many daughters, received 150 thalers to marry off one of them.<sup>19</sup> In the same year of 1793, a foreign poor woman was offered a grant for converting to Orthodoxy, but of only 2 thalers per month, because "her family is not of the best sort".<sup>20</sup>

The chronic financial troubles of the Alms Box led to a reorganisation of the pensions in March 1803.<sup>21</sup> Those entitled to a pension were divided into six categories, and payments were set at 40, 30, 20, 15, 10 and 5 thalers. The measure also ordered that the greatest number of grants should be "the lowest pensions of 5 thalers". It is difficult to assess the efficiency of this measure. Documentary evidence from the last decade of the eighteenth century shows that abuses in the distribution of alms were frequent, as was financial mismanagement. Despite the revised plan for payments to the poor, from 1794 the Alms Box could not cope with all demands and the prince had to cover some of these from his personal income.<sup>22</sup> There were difficulties in collecting revenue for the Alms Box, although the prince sent out repeated orders to bring them in. In some account books we encounter a division between certain and uncertain incomes. In 1814 the treasury came up with a plan to reorganise income and expenditure in order to set up a reserve fund for emergencies and pressing cases, "that is the weddings of poor girls or the funerals of impoverished gentlefolk."<sup>23</sup> The incomes of the Alms Box were centralised as follows:

- incomes due to the Alms Box that were not coming in (*condeie canonisite ce sunt a se da la Cutia milostenii și nu se dau*), namely debts from the buyers of salt mines and from the pig tax, also arrears to the central treasury, a sum total of 19,600 thalers;
- the annual certain incomes of the Alms Box of 79,715 thalers;
- "incomes that have been ordered since old times and are not collected", i.e. taxes levied upon ordination of priests and deacons, taxes paid by newly appointed heads of monasteries, some taxes on the circulation of goods, fees for weddings.

The 1815 budget of the Alms Box is a very good example of how social support was meant to work.<sup>24</sup> Of 164 listed beneficiaries, the vast majority were

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<sup>19</sup> V. A. Urechia, *Istoria ...*, VI, Bucharest, 1893, pp. 652-653.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, V, Bucharest, 1893, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, XI, Bucharest, 1900, pp. 339-340.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, V, p. 374.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, X-A, pp. 1054-1059.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, X-B, pp. 271-278.



widows, and 53% of these were wives or daughters of former state employees. In percentages, grants of 10 thalers represented nearly 22% of the total sums, and grants of 20 thalers made up 25% of the totals. On the whole, grants between 5 and 25 thalers accounted for 79.8% of the alms, while 11% of the total sums was paid for amounts of 30-45 thalers. The list of alms was drawn up for one year, and during this time it was strictly closed. In order to balance revenue and expenditure, the boyars responsible for the administration of the Alms Box removed from the list *certain ladies* (probably belonging to impoverished noble families), asking the prince to find other sources of support for them.

In 1823<sup>25</sup> the Alms Box already had 557 beneficiaries, mostly widows of former employees and public office holders of various ranks. A *Catagrafia de lefile ce se dau de la Cutie la obraze scăpătate* (Register of grants paid from the Alms Box to the impoverished) was compiled in 1823, as a monthly budget containing all expenses of the Department administering the Alms Box. These were as follows: 7835 thalers to the charity salaries, 2750 thalers alms and salaries from a separate page (not listed in the register), 1080 thalers to the doctors, 3077 to the trustee (*epitrop*), 442 thalers for the public fountains and 700 thalers for the orphans. The alms given to the 577 recorded paupers range from 5 thalers (41.29%), through 10 thalers (24.95%), 15 thalers (62 cases), 20 thalers (63), 25 thalers (10), 30 thalers (19), 40 thalers (10), 50 thalers (7), 70 thalers (3), 80 thalers (2), 100 thalers (7), and 150 thalers, up to 250 thalers (one case for each such grant).

After 1831 the Alms Box became the Alms House, and continued to function within the legal framework established by the *Regulamente Organice*, the first modern constitutions in Romanian history. These introduced a fundamental change in the purpose of the Alms Houses: they were no longer intended for the impoverished but for beggars. Hospitals were at the same time evolving from asylums into modern medical institutions, even though care for the poor was part of their services until the end of the nineteenth century. The *Regulamente Organice* introduced pensions for former state employees and for their widows and orphans.

The *Regulament Organic* of Wallachia stipulated that the Ministry of Internal Affairs was in charge of hospitals, state funded schools and the Department of Social Care for the Poor (*Casele făcătoare de bine și de folos obștească*); shortly afterwards they were taken over by the Ministry for Church Affairs.<sup>26</sup> In Moldavia, a central committee (*comitet central*) supervised the various welfare and charity houses (*casele de faciri de bine sau de folosință obștească*). The Metropolitan presided over this committee, which also included the already existing trusteeships (*epitropii*). Each house was administered

<sup>25</sup> ANIC-B, "Mitropolia București", 397/ mss. 1

<sup>26</sup> *Regulamentele Organice ale Valahiei și Munteniei*, ed. Paul Negulescu, George Alexianu, Bucharest, 1944, p. 69.

separately but in harmony with all the others.<sup>27</sup> The Alms House aimed to help impoverished families, with pensions (or alms, as the code of law uses both terms interchangeably) amounting to 15-40 lei per month, "according to the need of the applicant, but taking into account his previous standing within society." The annual income of the Alms House was established at 100,000 lei per annum and was included as a state expenditure in the Moldavian budget.<sup>28</sup>

The accounts of the charity houses for 1832 – presented the following year to the Moldavian Parliament – record a total revenue to the Alms House (with all three departments: the impoverished, beggars, and foundlings) of 72,000 lei. This sum was spent as follows: 46,692 lei for "340 names of impoverished families (...) separated into 9 categories, from 40 lei a month to 5 lei a month per family;" 15,000 lei for "58 names of beggars"; 1,032 lei for "10 foundling babies". The remainder of the total went to pay the salaries of two employees, on chancellery expenses and as a small reserve amount to deal with unforeseen cases of child abandonment.<sup>29</sup>

The Wallachian budget contained similar social payments: pensions for "widows and other noble people", just as before; alms to the poor during the important feasts of the year, which was a well preserved custom (50,000 lei); "expenses with the beggars who shall settle into one place" (50,000 lei); the Bucharest orphanage (100,000 lei); the budget for three hospitals (one in Bucharest, one in Craiova and another to be decided at a future date – 150,000 lei).<sup>30</sup> In the 1847 edition of the *Regulament Organic*, funds for charitable purpose were kept at the threshold of 350,000 lei for schools, 100,000 for the orphans and 150,000 for hospitals, with the specific mention that the treasury would contribute 200,000 lei, the rest to be covered by the Metropolitan office.<sup>31</sup> The first Wallachian Code of Law of 1831 had already involved the church in charity and welfare work, prescribing that "the Metropolitan office, the bishoprics, all monasteries whether affiliated elsewhere or local shall contribute to the state expenses for public foundations and charity with a certain share of their incomes from their estates, as shall be decided." The Colțea and St. Pantelimon hospitals were not included here, since their founders had already established sources of incomes for their maintenance.<sup>32</sup> Appendix B to the code of law, comprising yearly sums for each state revenue, lists under the last heading "the part that shall be collected from the landed revenue of the Metropolitan See,

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>29</sup> *Analele Parlamentare ale României. Obicinuita Obștească Adunare a Moldaviei, 1833-1834*, IV, Bucharest, 1894, p. 387.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

bishoprics and all monasteries without exception". This sum was estimated to be 400,000 lei of the total state revenue of 14,319,000 lei.<sup>33</sup>

The three Bucharest hospitals, namely Colțea, St. Pantelimon and Filantropia, came under the administration of the Hospitals Department (*Eforia Spitalelor*) from 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1832, but continued to be managed separately according to their foundational documents until 1847. In that year, Prince Gheorghe Bibescu cancelled the separate administration of these three charitable foundations and put all hospitals in Wallachia under the control of the Hospitals Department, which became a state institution with a budget approved by the prince, its expenses under the same control as other state expenditures. The *Eforia* (which had become the Department of Civilian Hospitals in the meantime) was granted a separate budget and ownership of estates by a law of 16<sup>th</sup> October 1864, when its status as a public service institution was also confirmed. The budget of the *Eforia* was voted by the House of Representatives just like the state budget, and its asset management followed the rules of the administration of state property under the law on public accounting and the control of the Court of Accounts.<sup>34</sup>

The actual organisation of the Department of Social Care for the Poor was slow to take shape, and beset with difficulties. The main obstacles in making it an effective and functional administrative body were its excessive centralisation and, as a direct consequence, the fact that the state budget was its only source of revenue, mostly scarce. An examination of the 1833 financial report, at the end of the department's first year of existence,<sup>35</sup> confirms my opinion that only immediate emergencies were attended to efficiently: burying foreign paupers, who otherwise would have been left on the streets, and placing foundlings, mostly babies, into the care of wet nurses in order to keep them alive and safe.

The Parliament, and subsequently the prince, learned periodically of the Alms Houses and their situation. A multiyear balance for the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 1831 – 1<sup>st</sup> January 1835 shows the money received by the Alms Houses and also the outstanding sums. Article 65 of the code of law prescribed that schools were to be paid 350,000 lei annually, hospitals 150,000, and poor children 100,000. The grand total of 600,000 was supposed to be covered jointly by the monasteries (400,000 lei) and the state treasury (200,000 lei). The balance showed that the Alms Houses were due 366,829 lei from the treasury and 430,879 from the monasteries: "the rest from the treasury comes in very slowly, and as for the monasteries not only is there no response but in the future it will lack 150,000 lei per year, because the monasteries affiliated to mother houses outside the realm do not pay anything, because to this day they do not follow any

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> *Eforia Spitalelor Civile. Acte de fundațiune și regulamente*, Bucharest, 1892, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> ANIC-B, "Eforia caselor făcătoare de bine și de folos obștesc", 71/1833, f. 49-51.

rule".<sup>36</sup> Until the authorities took measures regarding the tributary monasteries, the Alms Houses received money only from the incomes of non-tributary monasteries, such as Glavacioc, Strehaia, Arnota and Govora, just as previously.

The "Regulation for the Institute of Poor Children, Institute of Beggars, for Alms Houses giving alms to the poor on great feasts days and at churches and monasteries" came into effect in January 1832.<sup>37</sup> The Institute cared for two hundred children according to the rule, but since no proper building had been found, foundlings were entrusted to nurses who received 18 lei a month and two sets of children's clothing and diapers each year. As for beggars, they were strictly forbidden from begging in the street; the police was to check and tally them. If they had family, beggars were entitled to 15 lei per month and one set of clothes per year. Those who were healthy and thus seen as lazy, were "to be forced by the police (...) to work for a living (...) for the town, as in public building, streets, cleaning the roads and other such, being offered enough payment to feed themselves." Beggars without family were to be put into an institute "where they learn a trade suited for their ability". The Regulation prescribed a total number of 120 state-assisted beggars; 70 in the institute and 50 with a pension. When the number of beggars exceeded this threshold, further cases were sent temporarily to various monasteries.

Putting all these decisions into practice proved to be difficult and incomplete, mostly due to lack of funding. The authorities found a compromise and sent beggars to monasteries, paying them a state subsidy; this solution had already been applied in the late eighteenth century. Beginning with 1835, the state budgets of Wallachia listed expenses of the House of Beggars in payments made first to the monastery of Plumbuita, then to Malamuci<sup>38</sup> and finally to Mărcuța. In 1839 for instance, the House of Beggars supported 41 people in Bucharest with pensions of 15 lei a month, and 60 beggars at the monastery of Malamuci, giving them 1 leu per day.<sup>39</sup> Since 1843, the Institute for the mentally ill and beggars from Mărcuța features almost every year in the official publication of Wallachia - the *Buletin. Gazetă Oficială a Țării Românești* – with announcements of public bids to clothes or feed the approximately 100 beggars and mentally ill people housed there. Mărcuța was a sixteenth century monastery near Bucharest, which from 1774 to 1863 was under the patronage of the Ipsilanti princely family.

Pensions for poor fathers of families were paid according to the lists of poor people supported at home. The Department issued individual non-

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Analele Parlamentare ale României. Obicinuita Obștească Adunare a Țării Românești, 1831-1832*, II, Bucharest, 1832, pp. 255-268.

<sup>38</sup> Ioan C. Filitti, *Domniile române sub Regulamentul Organic, 1834-1848*, Bucharest, 1915, p. 177.

<sup>39</sup> Iacob Felix, *Istoria igienei în România în secolul al XIX-lea și starea ei la începutul secolului al XX-lea*, Bucharest, 1901/II, p. 9.

transferable tickets, recording the identity of the beneficiary, together with the value of the pension. One person in each family was entitled to state support, and monthly pensions excluded any other state aid, such as the “periodical” alms. These were offered during great church feasts or for celebrations of the ruling family and were aimed mostly at impoverished nobility rather than at beggars. The value of the periodical alms differed according to the rank of the beneficiaries, mostly widows. Naturally, other people in need were offered periodical alms, provided that they were not registered on the lists of monthly pensions.

Establishing the purchasing power of such state aid is no easy task, mostly because the available primary sources are often ambiguous, while the great variety of weights, measures and moneys used in the Romanian principalities makes it nearly impossible to establish a common denominator. Prices and values recorded in administrative documents differed from real prices, a fact that authorities often referred to without actually giving specific details that could enable us to calculate the actual ratios. We know that from 1775 to 1831 the price of bread, meat and wine rose by 200%, while the real value of salaries increased by 120%.<sup>40</sup> For instance, in 1811, during penury and famine, the Wallachian prince set the maximal prices for the *oka* of ground millet flour to 5 pennies (*parale*) and that of unground millet flour to 4 pennies; the *oka* of ground corn to 7 pennies and unground to 6 pennies.<sup>41</sup> In 1834 an *oka* of bread cost between 12 and 24 pennies, an *oka* of beef was 18-28 pennies, an *oka* of beans was 20 pennies- 1 leu; a pail of cheap grog cost 8-35 lei; bad wine was 1.10-6 lei; a horse cost 30-350 lei; a cow 45-180 lei; and 1 pig 12-50 lei. The daily wages of a shepherd or a tailor varied between 2 and 5 lei, while hired hands in the field were paid 2- 25 lei per day depending on the region and on the difficulty of work (carters had the highest wages).<sup>42</sup> The thaler or the leu was 40 pennies (*parale*), an *oka* weighed approximately 1.250 kg, a pail held nearly 14 liters.<sup>43</sup> One leu, therefore, could buy one 4 kg of lower quality bread, 2.5 kg of beef of lower quality or 14 litres of cheap wine. Though it might seem that a married beggar's pension could feed a family every day, it should be taken into account that a household implied other costs besides food: firewood, candles, clothing the other members of the family.

Available information on eating habits among the Romanian population is neither abundant nor very precise. Dr. Constantin Caracaș, a public physician in early nineteenth-century Bucharest, noted that "the food of peasants and lower

<sup>40</sup> Mircea Popa, *La circulation monétaire et l'évolution des prix en Valachie (1774-1831)*, Bucharest, 1978, pp. 210-212.

<sup>41</sup> V. A. Urechia, *Op. cit.*, XI, pp. 925-927.

<sup>42</sup> *Statistici din epoca regulamentară. Extract din prețurile oficiale (Țara Românească) dela 1830 până la 1858 (în lei vechi și parale)*, pp. 264-269.

<sup>43</sup> Lucian Predescu, *Enciclopedia României. Cugetarea. Material românesc, oameni și înfăptuiri*, Bucharest, 1999.

classes" was "scanty, careless and irregular, consisting mainly of polenta instead of bread, and of salt, onions or garlic on fast days. Sometimes they cook meals made of various greens, with water and a little flour (...) very rarely they cook beans, dry field beans or pickled cabbage. They live on this austere and meagre nourishment two thirds of the year (...) For the other three months of non-fasting days they eat more: curdled milk, hard cheese, eggs and fish, mostly salted (...) very rarely meat, cooked in a simple way, with water and onions or fried."<sup>44</sup>

More information is available from administrative documents on the diet of sick paupers and beggars from the Colțea, Filantropia and Mărcuța hospitals, even though it is hard to discern whether they represent the daily routine. The three hospitals offered similar dietary regimes: each resident was to eat 1 to 1.5 kg of food daily, including vegetables, meat and bread, and a quarter litre of wine. Mărcuța offered wine only on Sundays and holidays. The Colțea and Mărcuța hospitals relied heavily on bread (approximately 1 and 1.4 kg a day), while Dr Constantin Caracaș made efforts to impose a more balanced diet at Filantropia. Here, bread and meat cooked with vegetables were served in equal quantities of cca. 500 grams split between two main meals and rounded off with soup. Mărcuța served 320 g of vegetables and just as much beef or fish (on holidays during Lent) per day. Rules for the diet at Colțea prescribed "sufficient" vegetables and twice as much mutton meat.<sup>45</sup>

Returning to the discussion on the state benefits from the first half of the nineteenth century, the pension paid to paupers with families was in fact half of the payment to the monasteries for one beggar: 15 lei a month as opposed to 1 leu per day. The Mărcuța hospital and monastery had separate pay-rolls for their employees, and offered them meals comparable to those of the residents, except for the administrator, who received a double share. At Malamuc monastery, only one superintendent is documented as an employee of the Department of Charity Houses (*Eforia*). The wages paid by this Department are listed individually in the statutes of the institution only for the general manager (600 lei/month), the cashier and the secretary (400 lei/month), the registrar (200 lei/month) and the two clerks (100 lei/month each).<sup>46</sup> Balances made at the end of the month or quarter record only the total sums paid out to the employees, which also included doctors occasionally, without further details. Other information known about the Department's payments, apart from the

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<sup>44</sup> Pompei Samarian, *O veche monografie sanitară a Munteniei. "Topografia Țării Românești" de doctor Constantin Caracaș (1800-1828)*, Bucharest, 1937, p. 100.

<sup>45</sup> Ligia Livadă-Cadeschi, "Institutele pentru săraci din Țara Românească în prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Îndestularea cerșătorilor și a smintiților de la Mărcuța", in *Caiete de Antropologie Istorică*, 1-2, 2006, pp. 281-294.

<sup>46</sup> ANIC-B, "Eforia ...", 1/1832 f. 5.

grants to the poor (15 lei/month) and the nurses (18 lei/month), concerns the 15 lei paid for a baptism and 8 lei for a funeral.<sup>47</sup>

People applied for these benefits for the same reasons that qualified others to get admitted to the „Institute for Beggars”: poverty, invalidity, old age, a large number of children or dependents. The applicants came from various walks of life: from former professional beggars who were legally banned from practising, to former petty clerks stricken by illness or infirmity, and solid citizens who started well-off but lost their money and had no source of income. Approval of a benefit claim had no connection to the severity of the cases, as it depended more on the available places on the lists. If the number of applications exceeded the prescribed number of pensions, claimants were told to wait for an opening, which in fact only happened when beneficiaries passed away. A document from 1837 seems to be such a waiting list, arranging the requests by neighbourhoods.<sup>48</sup> It must be stressed that during the first three months of the year, the number of applications on the waiting list nearly matched the total number of 50 pensions by law. Once a pension was awarded, the beneficiary continued to receive payments until the end of his life. Even for extremely dramatic cases the authorities would only give theoretical approval for a pension: the actual payment could not happen without an “opening.” In their turn, applicants criticised the cynicism shown by the authorities, where “opening” was merely an euphemism for the death of a pauper. A married couple, both of them invalids, complained to the princely court about authorities who “(...) cut us out, saying that until others die, we cannot be [enrolled]”, and rhetorically wondered “whether to believe there is any basis to their promise that we must wait until others die.”<sup>49</sup>

In the first half of the nineteenth century, concern for the poor moved away from the religious sphere and became attributes of a good citizen’s civic and patriotic duty. Charitable foundations started to be described as “patriotic assets”, and their progress to be linked to the country’s level of civilisation: “philanthropic foundations prosper as nations progress toward civilisation.”<sup>50</sup> Charity therefore gradually became a “branch of administration.”<sup>51</sup> Private charity continued to need princely confirmation, as custom dictated. For the first half of the nineteenth century, there is only one noteworthy private contribution to poor relief: the Brâncovenești Foundations. Poor relief and welfare remained part of state administration, and thus strongly dependent on its limited and always insufficient budget.

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 71/1833, . 56.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 211/1837. f. 2.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 189/1836, ff. 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Buletin. Gazetă Oficială a Țării Românești*, 24 (3 apr.)/1838 p. 93.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 37 (22 nov.)/1834, p. 154.