

## THE ROLE OF UDRIȘTE NĂSTUREL IN MATEI BASARAB'S CHANCELLERY

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**Abstract.** *Udriște Năsturel was the second chancellor during all of Matei Basarab's ruling. The testimonial evidence reveals that Udriște was a man with extraordinary culture and due to him, the role of the second chancellor gets a new, more powerful meaning. He was Matei Basarab's intimate and most trusted adviser.. Udriște Năsturel had important contributions in both cultural and political activities of that epoch.*

**Keywords:** *Matei Basarab, Wallachia, 17th century, Udriște Năsturel, chancellor.*

The main activity of Wallachia's Chancellery was the issuance of official acts according to the decisions made by the ruler (Rom. "domn", Lat. *dominus*) and the country's council. Its members were the ones who wrote and validated those documents. In historiography, some aspects related to Chancellery's activity have been subject to several studies.<sup>1</sup> These aspects included Chancellery's internal organization, personnel tuition (chancellors and clerks) as well as development of diplomatic wording and standardized types of documents. Due to lack of clear information, the moment when this service was set-up or the manner in which it was created remained unclear so far.

Chancellery's internal organization developed in time. Relevant data regarding this evolution needs to be searched within the Chancellery's official acts, as they state the members and their hierarchy. The Chancellery was led by a boyar called Chancellor ("logofăt"). He is

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<sup>1</sup> Giurescu, 1927, 25-37; 91-108; Stoicescu, 1968; Văcaru, 2006.

firstly stated in a document of December 27, 1391.<sup>2</sup> He was referred to as the last boyar in the country's council, which shows he did not occupy an important role at that time. But his importance increased rapidly in time and starting in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, he occupied the third position among the most important boyars of the country's council.

As the Chancellery developed and the number of personnel increased, the Chancellor started to be named as the First Chancellor, as to be identified separately from their subordinates. Afterwards, he was to be called the Great Chancellor, a title which appears for the first time in a document from April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1478<sup>3</sup> and this shall remain the dedicated term for most important member of the Chancellery. He checked the work of the scribes and in some special cases himself wrote the text of the documents. Being the guardian of the ruler's sealing, the Great Chancellor was the one who validated the official acts. Among the duties of this dignitary was also the shipment of the voivode's correspondence.

The development of social activities resulted in an increase in documents needing to be prepared, resulting in a reorganization of Chancellery staff responsibilities. Therefore, in the middle of 15<sup>th</sup> century appears a second chancellor and then, at the end of the same century a third chancellor. This boyars came up next in the Chancellery's hierarchy. The second Chancellor, was called Small Chancellor in documents dated at the end of 15<sup>th</sup> – beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> He is attested for the first time in a document dated June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1494.<sup>5</sup> Even in this period he was an important boyar, being mentioned as a member of the country's council. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century there were attested two persons occupying the position of a Second Chancellor – this was also the case of Matei Basarab's Chancellery. The two persons attested with this position in were Sima Păușescu and Udriște Năsturel.

Due to Udriște, the role of second chancellor gets a new, more powerful meaning. One of the most remarkable figures of his times, Udriște Năsturel had an important contribution in both cultural and political activities of that epoch. The testimonial evidence reveals that Udriște was a man with extraordinary culture. He is known in history as being the second chancellor during all Matei Basarab's entire ruling. He

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<sup>2</sup> D.R.H. B I, 1966, 36-39.

<sup>3</sup> D.R.H. B I, 1966, 261.

<sup>4</sup> The documents of September 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>, 1508 refer to Stan as being the second Chancellor (in the first document), and also as being small Chancellor (in the second document).

<sup>5</sup> D.R.H. B. I, 1966, 407-408.

was Matei's most trusted person, an intimate adviser and his ideas were always taken into account.

Udriște descends from an old family of boyars whose origins goes back from the time of Vlad Călugărul (1482-1496)<sup>6</sup>. His father was Radu Năsturel (*postelnic* and then first chancellor) and his mother was a "noble lady Despina" as P.V. Năsturel characterizes her. They had four children, three boys: Șerban, Căzan and Udriște, and a girl, Elina, who will become Matei Basarab's wife. Testimonial evidence regarding Udriște's personal life are not sufficient to establish the main key moments of his existence. He was born in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the exact year of his birth being unknown. P.V. Năsturel proposes the year 1597 but then, after taking into consideration the date of Radu Năsturel's marriage and the years of birth and death of Elina (the youngest child of Năsturel family), he thinks that the year of Udriște's birth was 1596<sup>7</sup>.

The year of his death is also unknown. P.V. Năsturel thinks that the last testimony of Udriște being alive is the inscription from Nămăiești cross, dated May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1659. The genealogist thinks that after that year, Udriște will retire to his Fierăști mansion, interrupting his contacts with public activities and died not too long after that<sup>8</sup>. Dan Horia Mazilu, in his book "Udriște Năsturel", contradicts the above theory, expressing the belief that the crosses inscription was not made by Udriște. Mazilu thinks that the cross was made after Udriște's death as a sign of gratitude<sup>9</sup>. Nicolae Stoicescu had another perspective. He thought that he was *spătar*<sup>10</sup> under Mihnea the Third, between December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1658 and June 12<sup>th</sup> 1659 when he was the victim of a revenge<sup>11</sup>. From my point of view this theory cannot be accepted. As documents reveal, Udriște was second chancellor for about 25 years, even when the ruler of the Wallachia was Matei Basarab, his brother-in-law. He never desired to have any other role in the country's council. To conclude, the year of his death still remains unknown. Nevertheless, what can be stated with certainty at this moment is that the last chancellery document written by "Udriște, second chancellor from Fierăști" is dated July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1658.

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<sup>6</sup> Mazilu, 1974, 42.

<sup>7</sup> Mazilu, 1974, 44.

<sup>8</sup> Năsturel, 1910, 326.

<sup>9</sup> Mazilu, 1974, 46.

<sup>10</sup> Important rank in country's council, the *spătar* was the one who commanded the army in absence of the ruler.

<sup>11</sup> Stoicescu, 1971, 215.

Regarding other aspects of his personal life, documents reveal that Udriște had two marriages. His first marriage with Maria, daughter of the Vintilă Corbeanu, was over during Alexandru Vlad Cuconul's ruling (1623-1627)<sup>12</sup>. From this marriage Udriște had a son, Mateiaș, who was adopted after his mother died, by Lady Elina (Udriște's sister and Matei Basarab's wife). But the life of Mateiaș was short, and in 1645, when he was only seventeen, his death is attested.

Udriște was then married with Despa and together they had two children: Radu, sometimes called Radu-Toma or Toma-Radu, and Marica or Maricuța, the future wife of Alexandru Ghiormescul<sup>13</sup>. About his son Radu we know that he had an extraordinary career, reaching the highest rank in the country's council<sup>14</sup>. Radu Năsturel was one of the most educated persons of his time, being the one that founded the school of Câmpulung.

As far as Udriște's cultural formation is concerned, we know that he was familiar with the Slavonic and Latin, having certain knowledge of Greek and maybe Hebrew<sup>15</sup>. There aren't any clues to indicate how his intellectual training was carried out. Most probably, his father, Radu Năsturel, provided him and his brothers an exceptional education based on foreign teachers. In sustaining this theory we can remind Udriște's testimony according to which he mentioned learning Latin after being a teenager, at home, with a teacher<sup>16</sup>. We can assume that when he started his career, at approximately 30 years old, his main intellectual formation was completed.

He is first attested as a scribe in Alexandru Cuconul's chancellery when he writes the documents from February 8<sup>th</sup> and March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1625.<sup>17</sup> In the same year he wrote in Latin on the East wall of St George church in Hârlău, using for the first time the name Uriil. We don't know for sure what the purpose of his trip to Moldova was, but we can assume that he followed Radu Mihnea for his new ruling. He won't stay there for long, being back in Walahia before June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1627. On that date he writes a document for Pana from Pietrari who sells a part of his land from Voinești to grand chancellor Hrizea. He signs that document "Udriște Năsturel from Fierăști"<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Năsturel, 1910, 325.

<sup>13</sup> Mazilu, 1974, 44.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Năsturel, 2000, 202-203.

<sup>16</sup> Mazilu, 1974, 49.

<sup>17</sup> D.I.R. B. IV, 1954, 482-493; 486-487.

<sup>18</sup> D.R.H. B. XXI, 1965, 415-416.

During Alexandru Iliăș's second ruling we find Udriște writing official chancellery documents (on February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1628, March 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> 1628<sup>19</sup>). It is interesting that during the same year we find him attested as the second chancellor in an official act dated July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1628 among other witness boyars<sup>20</sup>. Before that date, there is another private act in which Udriște signs as the second chancellor (dated June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1628)<sup>21</sup>. We cannot find any other document from that year written by Udriște, but in 1629 we can find him attested again as second chancellor on May 14<sup>th</sup><sup>22</sup>.

All the above mentioned documents can make us think of a fast promotion of the young chancellery scribe, which is not impossible at all if we think about his intellectual capacity. But we need to have certain precaution in arguing this because, in the same period, he writes a Slavonic document given by Alexandru Iliăș in which he states his rank "it has been written by the faithful scribe, Udriște Năsturel ... May, 23<sup>rd</sup> day, the year of God 1629"<sup>23</sup>.

Some historians like Petre V. Năsturel and Dan Horia Mazilu thought that the document from February 13<sup>th</sup>, 1632 corresponds to the moment when Udriște became second chancellor. I think it is necessary to reconsider this date and think as a possibility that Udriște became second chancellor since 1628 when he is attested with this position in both a personal document and in an official act. Still, the lack of a consistent certification in this position should raise a question mark and make us see with certain doubts his fast promotion in the chancellery. Again, that will not be so absurd if we think that we are dealing with a man of remarkable culture, far exceeding those he worked with.

Since the beginning of his activity in the chancellery, Udriște wrote documents in Slavonic, and this custom will be maintained during all his activity. The language he uses is a precious one, introducing many new terms in the chancellery documents, terms which were not used before in such acts. I consider it important to be emphasized that all documents written by Udriște as a chancellery clerk, before and after Matei Basarab ruling, are in Slavonic. This comes in contradiction with what other historians considered. For example, Dan Horia Mazilu wrote in his book that Udriște Năsturel wrote official chancellery acts in

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<sup>19</sup> D.R.H. B. XXII, 1969, 23-24, 51-55, 66-68.

<sup>20</sup> D.R.H. B. XXII, 1969, 269-273.

<sup>21</sup> D.R.H. B. XXII, 1969, 264-265.

<sup>22</sup> D.R.H. B. XXII, 1969, 517-519.

<sup>23</sup> D.R.H. B. XXII, 1969, 528-532.

Romanian. One example he gives is the document from Leon Tomşa dated April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1630<sup>24</sup>. But this document is only a copy and not an original document so it may not be considered relevant. All the other documents he mentioned from Alexandru Iliaş ruling are written in Slavonic. This author was convinced that after all documents from this era will be revealed, there will be certainly more documents written by Udrişte in both Romanian and Slavonic. This belief turned out to be wrong because all documents that cover the period of Udrişte's activity were published in the collection *Documenta Romaniae Historica* and no original official act written by him in Romanian was found. Nevertheless we need to say that there are two personal acts written by Udrişte Năsturel in 1627 (June 21<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>) and one personal act from January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1630 written in Romanian. But then again, those are personal acts, not official chancellery acts for which Udrişte used a very beautiful, clean and clear Slavonic. Moreover, he fights to promote this language in the chancellery documents in an epoch in which the Romanian won a stable position in this institution.

From the erudite people's point of view, Slavonic had the aura of tradition. It was still used in churches, and this language, if it was used for publishing, could assure the transfer of cultural values created in Wallachia at the other orthodox slavonic counties near by. This would increase and consolidate the county's prestige. He translated and printed in Slavonic the medieval writing *De imitatio Christi*. The fact that he had a preference for Slavonic does not mean that he was against the usage of Romanian. Therefore he translated in Romanian *Saints Valrlaam's and Ioasaf's lives* but this translation remains unpublished. Also unpublished remain the Romanian versions of *The teachings of Neagoe Basarab for his son Theodosie or Patriarch Nifon's life* – texts translated by a person close to Udrişte<sup>25</sup>.

Udrişte Năsturel tried to write Slavonic documents with the Moscow form of Cyrillic letters, seeking to replace the cursive script that was popular at the beginning of that century<sup>26</sup>. But this attempt had no continuation in future chancellery documents.

The second chancellor writes in this elegant manner, and the documents he signes are special in terms of calligraphy, inks and miniatures used. In this regard, we can give as an example the document dated December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1640, given by Matei Basarab to several monasteries

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<sup>24</sup> Mazilu, 1974, 194.

<sup>25</sup> Mazilu 1974, 290.

<sup>26</sup> Vârtosu, 1968, 36-48.

he founded. In completing the calligraphy and decoration of that act, Udriște had as an inspiration the West printings. Based on that model he realised the shape and style of the frontispiece capital letters, that were 5.3 centimeters high. The rest of the document is written in a cursive Baroque, of Polish-Ukrainian influence<sup>27</sup>. Other documents he wrote in Matei Basarab chancellery were dated January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1638;<sup>28</sup> October 16<sup>th</sup>, 1640<sup>29</sup> and February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1645.<sup>30</sup>

As a second chancellor during Matei Basarab's rulling, Udriște Năsturel was in charge not only with writting official acts. He is also mentioned as the *ispravnic* of 51 documents. (According to Wallachia documents, *ispravnicul* was the one to manage the process of preparation and issuance of documents. He was thus overseeing the conceiving, writing and reviewing the written text. So, after the decision was made, it was communicated by the *ispravnic* to a Chancellery clerk who became responsible for writing the document). This is very useful information because from those documents we realise that Udriște was together with Matei Basarab on various expeditions. We can find him as the *ispravnic* of a document written in Sadova on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1638<sup>31</sup> then in a document issued in Campulung on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1638<sup>32</sup>. The last chancellery act in which we can find Udriște accompanying the ruler in an expedition is dated August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1643, written at Brâncoveni.

Another interesting observation that we can make is that from all 51 chancellery acts that had Udriște as their *ispravnic*, 32 are written by Dumitru Boldiciu and 9 by Soare logofăt. We can assume that the second chancellor had an influence in selecting the scribes of the documents for which he was the *ispravnic*. The clerks that he preferred and that I have mentioned before were two of the most important chancellery writers.

What is interesting to underline is the fact that not only once but several times, Udriște signs himself *Uriil*. Emil Turdeanu wrote that archangel Uriil is as important as Mihail, Rafail and Gavriil. He was thought to be God's intimate advisor, and likewise Udriste consider himself the ruler's most trusted person<sup>33</sup>. Perhaps here we should seek the explanation of Udriște choise to sign certain documents as Uriil.

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<sup>27</sup> D.R.H. B. XXVII, 2013, XIV-XV.

<sup>28</sup> Ciucă, Duca-Tincuiescu, Vătafu-Găișan, IV, 1981, 505.

<sup>29</sup> D.R.H. B. XXVII, 2013, 586-588.

<sup>30</sup> D.R.H. B. XXX, 1998, 72-75.

<sup>31</sup> Ciucă, Duca-Tincuiescu, Vătafu-Găișan, IV, 1981, 545.

<sup>32</sup> Ciucă, Duca-Tincuiescu, Vătafu-Găișan, IV, 1981, 550.

<sup>33</sup> Năsturel, 1995, 24,

Udriște's role and attributions in the chancellery exceeded by far the duties of a second chancellor. He welcomes and introduces foreign messengers in front of the ruler, discusses with different ambassadors and missionaries or he presents the ruler diplomatic letters. As an example, among more others of course, Udriște is present at the visit that monk Arsenii Suhanov pays Matei Basarab. The Moscow monk himself recounts the events: „Coming chancellor Udriște, read the Tsar (Alexei nn) letter to ruler Matei Basarab”<sup>34</sup>.

He had excellent relations with senior prelates of the Greek Church and missionaries of Romanian Church – with whom Udriște discusses, in a preparatory phase, certain issues that would condition the union of Wallachian orthodoxy with Rome – as well as with other religious figures from the South of Danube, Mediterranean church or the Orthodox East. On the other hand, his skills were used more than once to handle delicate diplomatic issues. In this respect, Paul Cernovodeanu has a well documented and complex study, called *The Diplomat Udriște Năsturel*. From its pages it reveals that Udriște had several diplomatic missions in Vienna, Poland, Transylvania and Ukraine. He also negotiated the truce with Moldova (and ruler Vasile Lupu) in 1644<sup>35</sup>. All these diplomatic actions highlights the confidence that Matei Basarab had in Udriște's skills not only related to culture but also diplomacy.

These are a few of the relevant aspects regarding Udriște Năsturel's activity in Matei Basarab's chancellery. Given his complex personality, I only briefly made certain remarks which are not directly related to his chancellery activity, namely aspects concerning his private life, cultural and diplomatic activity.

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<sup>34</sup> Bezviconi, 1947, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Cernovodeanu, 2003, 341-352.



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