

# SOME REMARKS ON THE DOCUMENTARY SOURCES OF THE „FORTIFICATIONS” OF IAȘI

BY  
CĂTĂLIN HRIBAN\*

## Abstract:

*There is an academic consensus in that the premodern city of Iași was no walled. However, although there are campaign fortifications in and around the city that are well documented, mainly for the Russian-Turkish wars of 18<sup>th</sup> century, one also finds several sources that give testimony of various “walls” inside the city proper as well as at its outskirts. This paper undertakes a short inventory of these documentary “walls” in the city of Iasi in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as commentary on the location and nature of such walls, making use of the methods of historical topography and the cartographic sources available.*

**Keywords:** Iași; Princely Court of Iași; enclosures; city walls; ditches; pre-modern urbanism; Moldavia.

Whether the pre-modern and early-modern cities and towns of Moldavia were walled or fortified is a debate that is far from being settled. However, the scholarly consensus is that these towns were never provided with permanent walls and only campaign defense works were erected around the city, by the Russian, Austrian and Ottoman armies, during the wars of 18<sup>th</sup> century. There are several sources that mention, however, “walls” and “ditches” in and around Iași.

The great Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 was an important opportunity for the dissemination to Central and Western Europeans of information about Eastern Europe and the Balkans, accompanied by illustrations that depicted, for the first time in the history of printing as well as geographical and historical literature (in a responsible manner) the place and event described. On this occasion, the well-known “Augsburg engraving” is printed, which depicts the Princely Court of Iași (See. Pl. I). However, the majority of scholars regard it as fanciful, but the natural topography and the location of the landmark buildings have a sufficient degree of correlation with reality to allow one to admit that the drawing that was the basis of this image was revised by a person who visited Iasi, if not somehow it was even drawn by such an eyewitness.

The fortifications of the Princely Court are witnessed by a 16<sup>th</sup> century English traveler, John Newberie,<sup>1</sup> who visited the city in 1582:<sup>2</sup> “To the South of Yas is the Castle with a paire of Gallowes before it, and **round about it is a wall of great trees of wood**: and to the South-west of the Towne is a great Lake: and upon the farther side of the Lake is a great Monasterie.”<sup>3</sup> He most probably describes the situation after the destruction of the city and the Court in the battles between Petru Șchiopul and the brothers Ion and Alexandru Potcoavă.

The city itself was not fortified, a well-known fact and cannot be denied, as attested by the 1585 account of François de Pavie: “Iasi is a large city, where the prince of the country resides, and is located in a plain, **without a wall enclosure**, having a lake to the south...”<sup>4</sup>

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\* Institute of Archaeology, Romanian Academy – Iași Branch; catalin.hriban@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> *Călători* II, 517.

<sup>2</sup> Newberie was a London merchant who left England in 1578 for the Mediterranean and the Holy Land and returned back to London in 1579. He undertook a second similar travel in 1580 and visited Iasi on his return leg of the trip, from Constantinople through Black Sea, Moldavia and Poland. The description mentioned in the text is included in his travel report. Based on his expertise, he was appointed head of a trade/diplomatic delegation sent by Queen Elisabeth I to the Mughal Emperor Akbar and to the “King of China” that left England in 1583. He sent regular dispatches to England (HORTON RILEY 1998: 44) until his death in India.

<sup>3</sup> *Hakluytus Posthumus* VIII, 480.

<sup>4</sup> *Călători* III, 181. François de Pavie, Baron de Fourquevaux was a courtier of King Henri IV. He made several trips to Europe and Asia. He died on March 16, 1611. The subject of this travelogue is the trip carried out by de Pavie with sieur de Bioncourt to Jerusalem and Aleppo. The story of his journey begins in Venice where he embarked on June 15, 1585. After visiting the Holy Land, he arrived in the Ottoman capital in March or April 1586. He took the land route back to France: Varna, Krakow, Prague, and passed through Iași in his route to Poland. The manuscript of François de Pavie’s travelogue is incomplete and stops while the author is in Prague: *Relation de François de Pavie, seigneur de Forquevaux d’un sien voyage fait l’an 1585 aux terres du Turc et autres divers lieux de l’Europe*. (BnF, Nlles acq. fr., 6277).

However, there are sufficient mentions of “the Wall” or “walls” in internal documents to justify a historical topography research. There are several cases in which these indications do not provide any indication of the location and no other determinant that would provide and identification of that wall (See Pl. II.2). For the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries there are documentary mentions of several “walls” on the territory of Iași, as follows:

- Monastery enclosure walls:
  - Golia (1662)
  - St. Nicholas (the Princely) (1677)
  - The St. Three Hierarchs (1744)
  - St. Spiridon (1757)
  - St. Savva (1761)
- The enclosure wall of the Princely Court
- Above-ground aqueducts

We will list below the documentary mentions of these walls, in the chronological order of the respective documents:

The earliest of such documentary mentions, dates from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century:

“... This house plot I sold to his lordship master Solomon Bărlădeanul, the grand chamberlain,<sup>5</sup> just four hundred thalers cash; but for the arrangement I made with his lordship, me and my wife shall be allowed to lodge in another house that his lordship has here in town, **about the wall**, no longer than two years, and thereupon his lordship shall be in power with his house.”<sup>6</sup> The fact that the plot next to the wall is the property of Solomon Bărlădeanul, who owned a large tract of real estate in the Upper Market area, makes us believe that the “wall” in question is the fortified enclosure of Golia monastery, as this nobleman owned several properties in the area of the end of the Hagioaiei Street.

A second mention without precise location is one in 1700, when the prince Antioh Cantemir confirms prince Petru (Rareș)’s land donation for the Beggars’ guild of Iași: “Namely, the following came before my lordship and before our Moldavian boyars, big and small: Ion starost of the beggars together with all the beggars of this here place, the town of Iași, and they made a big plea for a place that was given to them here, in Iași, from Prince Petru with his lady Ileana, which place is **at the head of the Upper Market, near the Wall**, telling the starost of beggars together with all the beggars how other merchants encroached upon their place and built houses on their land and they also moved a border stone which was placed at the upper end, in front of Giurgea’s house, in the ravine that comes from the Market”<sup>7</sup> (July 6, 1700). The location on the western end of the Upper Market street (Hagioaiei Street, the present-day Boulevard of Independence), allows one to believe that this “wall” is in fact the above-ground aqueduct (“waters wall” that crossed the ravine of St. Nicholas (the Poor), coming from Copou.

This aqueduct that crossed St. Nicholas Ravine (the present-day Râpa Galbenă) is mentioned by name by a document of September 7<sup>th</sup> 1736: “... some house plots that are here in Iași, **on Pîrvăleștilor Street, at the end of the cistern wall**, downhill, which plots are owned by Dumitrașco, acquired from Miron Gafenco the scribe, who purchased these from the following: a plot from Gavril the potter, brother to Vasilie Tărița the priest, from Iași and another plot next to the that, uphill, which they bought from Vasile and his wife Nastasia, daughter of Constantine Claie deacon; and these plots are between the house of George Țăruș and between the house of Pilat the magistrate and the house of Jeremiah the typographer.”<sup>8</sup>

This wall is mentioned in clearer terms by an act of August 15<sup>th</sup> 1756, a confirmation by prince Constantin Racoviță of the deed for the open place in front of the fountains located at the main gate of Princely Court: “... the way of the waters, on either side only four and half sazhen<sup>9</sup>, as shown by the princely charters that have the pipelayers [i.e. waterworks men] from other princes, to **the wall of the waters** that is at the ravine of Muntenime, and from the ravine of Muntenime at the end of **the wall of the waters** were measured, on the one hand, to the east, seven and half sazhen on

<sup>5</sup> *Clucer* = literally Key-bearer.

<sup>6</sup> *Documente Iași I*, 448 (doc. 384, 6.05.1662).

<sup>7</sup> *Documente Iași III*, 136 (doc. 159, 6.07.1700).

<sup>8</sup> *Documente Iași IV*, 215 (doc. 296, 7.09.1736).

<sup>9</sup> The *sazhen* (Rom. Stânjen) is an ancient Eastern European unit of length equivalent to the *fathom*, in its Moldavian usage, it varied from 1.85 to 2.4 meters.

the sides, and on the other hand, on the Bahlui side, again seven and half sazhen, and there were two border stones placed, and in this manner shall continue down to the plot of Gănscă, as this is all the way princely land and open field ...”<sup>10</sup>

The other walls in Iasi are mentioned by location as early as the last quarter of 17<sup>th</sup> century. The enclosure wall of St. Nicholas church was built by Prince Antonie Ruset, who rebuilt the 15<sup>th</sup> century church and added a very large exonarthex. In his reconsecration deed of March 29<sup>th</sup> 1677 it is stated that: “... we did not want to let it be ruined and broken completely, but we have taken help from our Lord God and have given a large expense and started from the ground and up to the roof and built the bell-tower and decorated it in full, as it is proper. **And we made a wall and cells all around it**, and we made it a Metropolitan chair, to be submitted to the ancient chair, the Metropolitan See of Suceava, to be both a single Metropolitan See undivided, of the whole Moldavia.”<sup>11</sup>

The same enclosure wall of St. Nicholas is located in the close northern proximity of the Princely Court by an act dated in May 27<sup>th</sup> 1739: “We make known with this letter of my lordship that these people appeared in person before my lordship and before our entire Council, Neculai the merchant, the son of Iani the merchant, and the priest Ianache, his son-in-law, with Nastasia, the daughter of Lupa, the wife of Cristian the intendent of guardsmen, and with her sister Ilinca, the wife of Apostol the messenger, and with Dumitrache, their brother, and other brothers of theirs, the sons of Lupa, the grandchildren of Paraschiva, the first wife of Iani the merchant, and asked for judgement for some houses with stone cellars in this town, in Iași, **at the end of the Russian Street, along the wall of St. Nicholas.**”<sup>12</sup>

The enclosure of St. Nicholas is mentioned along with its gate in August 15<sup>th</sup> 1756, in a matter relating to the measurements of the land reserved for waterworks: “... And ordering him the Gate magistrates to measure with the princely sazhen the whole place of the cistern and the waterworks, they started to measure the place for the new cistern, from the end of the street that passes before St. Nicholas and enters the Grand Street, and straight downhill to the gate of the Princely Court, next to the Grand Street, to the end of the footbridges, where the gutters flow into the ravine, and there were twenty sazhen; and from thence toward the east, **to the first buttress of the wall of St. Nicholas, downhill from the gate**, and there were twenty six sazhen measured; and from the buttress, along the wall up to the corner of Captain Panaite’s shops, and there were twenty six sazhen measured.”<sup>13</sup>

The enclosure wall of Golia monastery is mentioned as such seven decades after its construction, in April 8<sup>th</sup> 1731: “... a house plot of Ene the merchant, son-in-law to Maria, the daughter of Miha, the wife of Sandu Manea, which property is located **down from the Hagioaiei street, along the wall of Golia**, behind the shops of Toma the barber, Dumitru Boldin and Dumitru the furrier.”<sup>14</sup> as well as in 1766, in a matter relating to the new cistern built in the southern wall of the enclosure, close to the gate tower: “... Although it was necessary to transfer **the cistern of Golia** out to the street and the monastery lacking the place outside the walls for the purpose of the cistern, as it exists **a house with a stone cellar near the wall of the Golia monastery**, of the late Panaite the merchant, **from the gate of the Golia monastery, along the wall**, up to the fence of Enache’s merchant’s yard and up to the Grand Street that goes to the Flour Market, this said place, with the will and acceptance of Panaite’s sons, namely: Sandul, Constandin and Iordachi, as much as it is required for the building of the cistern, it was purchased from them and given to the monastery of Golia, for moving outside and the construction of the cistern.”<sup>15</sup> The 1731 document mentions the northern side of the enclosure, while the 1766 one mentions the southern side.

The enclosure wall of St. Spiridon monastery, which was built as unitary project in middle of 18<sup>th</sup> century, to serve as hospital, is mentioned in the deed that sets the income appropriated to the construction of the project: “... And all these revenues shall henceforth be taken from the first day of January, and what will be taken, firstly to be expended **to build the houses and wall around the monastery**, until these shall be completed ...”<sup>16</sup>

The wall enclosing the Metropolitan compound was built at the beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century, as its construction is mentioned in a confirmation deed issued in February 20<sup>th</sup> 1735: “... Theretofore, from the God-given zeal we were urged,

<sup>10</sup> *Documente Iași VI*, 45 (doc. 53, 15.08.1756).

<sup>11</sup> *Documente Iași II*, 425 (doc. 468, 29.03.1677).

<sup>12</sup> *Documente Iași IV*, 266 (doc. 367, 27.05.1739).

<sup>13</sup> *Documente Iași VI*, 44 (doc. 53, 15.08.1756).

<sup>14</sup> *Documente Iași IV*, 86 (doc. 118, 8.04.1731). The document includes the three upstream generations of owners, which places the original ownership close to the time the enclosure wall was erected (1667).

<sup>15</sup> *Documente Iași VI*, 620 (doc. 715, 9.06.1766).

<sup>16</sup> *Documente Iași VI*, 45 (doc. 70, 1.01.1757).

knowing also of the ardent desire his Holiness has towards for the addition, strengthening and well-being of the holy Metropolitan See, since it was presented to us how he also desire to embellish the church with the paintings and with other things, and with a wall all around it, and with the cells in sufficient numbers, as that everything would be as it is proper in the Metropolitan compound, and moreover other houses to be built for the Slavonic school.”<sup>17</sup> The wall so ardently desired by the Metropolitan Antonie was already built one generation later, in 1766: “Whereas, I, Ion Larion cellarer of the second rank, together with my wife, Ilinca, and our sons, and I, Costandin Istrati, together with my wife, Safta, have made our true deed, to the honest hand of Ioniță Cantacuzino hetman, to make known that, having a house with its plot as much as it is fenced **near the wall of the Metropolitan compound**, here in the town of Iași, near the plot of Evloghie the teacher, near the garden of Constantin Paladi the steward ...”<sup>18</sup>

The wall of the St. Three Hierarchs monastery is mentioned for the first time in 1744, in a lease contract issued by the neighboring Catholic church: “I, the priest Ion Franțăscul Mane Auxiliia, the vice-prefect of the holy Catholic monastery of Iași, gave this letter of mine to Necula the spice merchant whereas the church had a place at the street gate, about the our own shops of the church, next to the wall of the Three Hierarchs, he bargained to build 2 shops at his expenses ...”<sup>19</sup>

The enclosure wall of St. Savva monastery, although was probably built in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is mentioned for the first time in 1761: “By the command of your enlightened lordship, as ordered by letter, I inquired into the litigation of Ioniță Ghinda, the son-in-law of Costandin Loizu the merchant, who died, and Mihălachi Loizu, the brother of Costandin Loizu, Ioniță Ghinda’s father-in-law. The former argued that at his marriage, when he took Mary, the daughter of Costandin Loizu the merchant, his brothers-in-law Costandin and Dumitru, the sons of Ioniți Loizu, who were also brothers with Mihălachi and with Ghinda’s father-in-law, showed him that out of the inherited three shop plots, which are located **on the Old Street, near the wall of the monastery of St. Savva**, one shop plot, which he took, is owned by their cousin Maria.”<sup>20</sup>

The walls of the Princely Court, which by reason should be the oldest in Iasi, as their 15<sup>th</sup> century foundations were uncovered close to the actual Palace of Culture,<sup>21</sup> are mentioned as late as mid-18<sup>th</sup> century in relation to the matter of constructing the waterworks and the fountains at the Court gates: “And His Magnificence Scarlat Grigorie Ghica voivode took pity on Dima and his brother Costandin, waterworks craftsmen, who are caretakers in perpetuity of the guardianship of the water of the princely waterworks, because his lordship had mercy on them and gave them that piece of land, **which stands next to the wall of the Princely Court**. And, following the command, when we went to this place, we made a princely sazhen-stick of eight palms. And first I took the measure from the end of the Garbage Street, where it joins the Grand Street in front of the Court Gate, and set a border stone; and from this stone it was measured crosswise, along to the clock-tower, and there were 12 sazhen measured, and a border stone was set; and from here, along the wall to the west towards the prison ...”<sup>22</sup>

The wall surrounding the Golia monastery survives to this day, in its entirety, as well as the enclosure of St. Spiridon. The wall erected by prince Antonie Ruset to cloister and to defend church of St. Nicholas survives, however, as a small fragment of the southern curtain. The enclosure walls of the St. Three Hierarchs, the Metropolitan compound, the St. Savva monastery and the Princely Court, as well as the “Waters Walls” mentioned in the documents and appearing in the topographical plans disappeared completely, victims of the development of the modern city.

<sup>17</sup> *Documente Iași IV*, 162 (doc. 227, 20.02.1735).

<sup>18</sup> *Documente Iași VI*, 615 (doc. 707, 15.05.1766).

<sup>19</sup> *Documente Iași V*, 252 (doc. 447, 1.09.1744).

<sup>20</sup> *Documente Iași VI*, 375 (doc. 411, 24.11.1761).

<sup>21</sup> ANDRONIC 1986: 47, 92

<sup>22</sup> *Documente Iași VI*, 92 (doc. 106, 10.07.1757).

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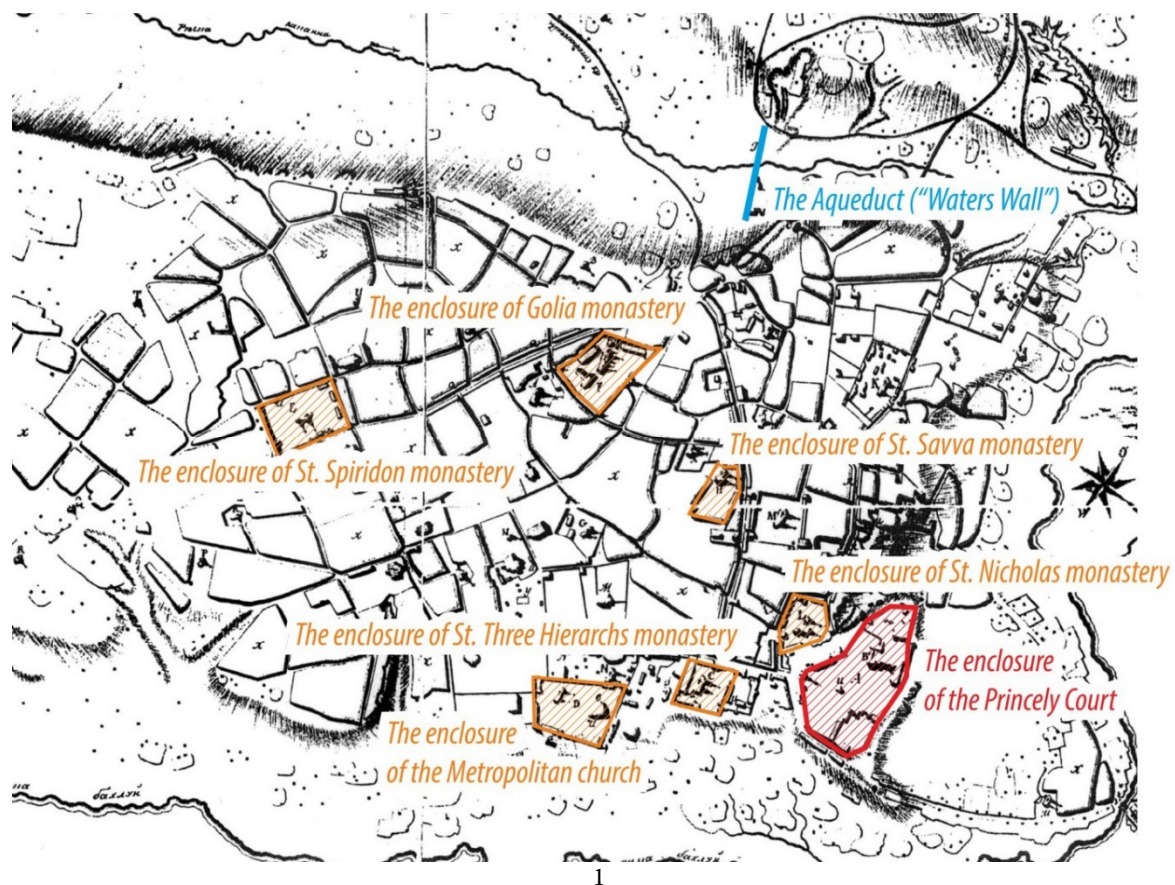


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Pl. I. 1. The „Castle” of Iași in 1686 (the so-called “the Augsburg engraving”); 2. The “Castle” of Iași depicted in 1788.

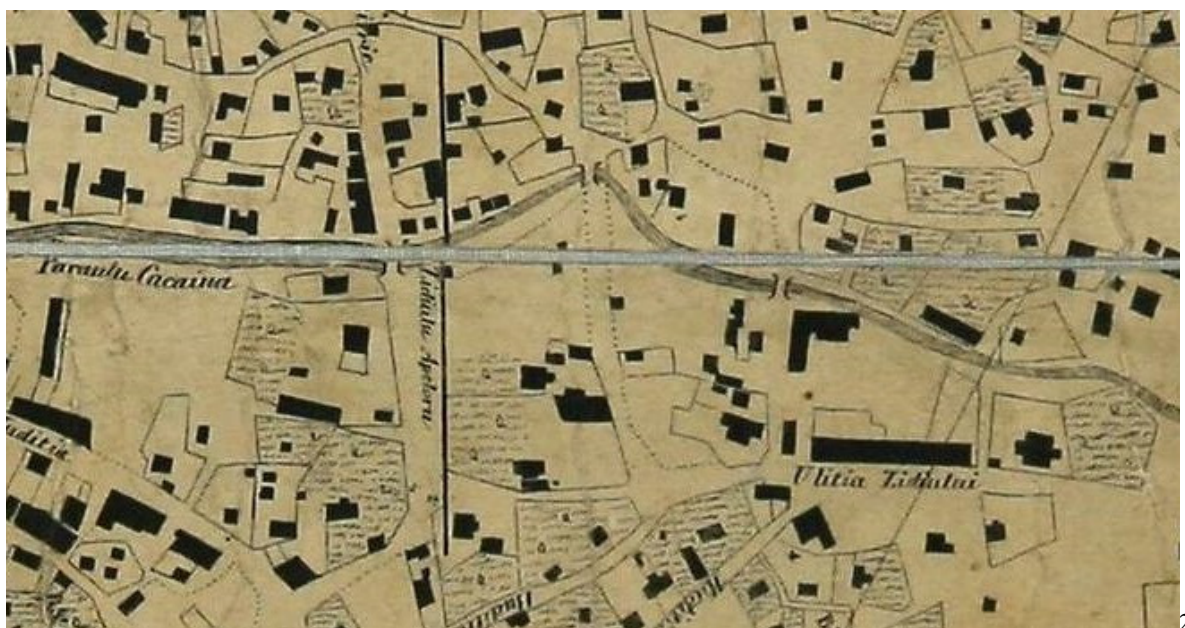


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Pl. II. 1. The walled enclosures in Iași in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the “Water Wall” across the Cacaina, on the Russian military plan of 1789, after ȘLAPAC 2008; 2. “A View of Iași from the Tătărași Hill. The rivers Bahlui and Cacaina”, by the Russian painter M. M. Ivanov, 1793 (after BĂDĂRĂU 1958, 81) The portion of the aqueduct that crosses the Cacaina on arches is visible, upriver from Prince Stephen’s bridge (no. 10).



Pl. III. 1. The aqueduct of Prince Grigore Ghica crossing the Ciric (c) and the Cacaina (b) and its terminus at the cistern in the walls of Golia Monastery (a). The plan of the City of Iași by J. Baiardy (1819);  
 2. The "waters wall" across the Cacaina and the "Wall Street", on the "Planulu Jassiloru" of 1857, by Fr. Peytavin.