PETRU DE MOCIONI – OFFICER AND GENTLEMAN. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE HISTORY OF AROMANIANS IN BANAT – CRIŞANA¹

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Abstract. A descendant of the illustrious (de) Mocioni / Mocsonyi family, of noble rank and impressive wealth, Petru de Mocioni benefited from a complex education, which prepared him to develop a multiple cultural identity. This formal and non-formal education, which occurred in a diverse, multi-ethnic and multilingual cultural environment, was completed during his military service - first as a one-year volunteer in the 15th Dragoons Regiment and then as a reserve officer of this prestigious unit. Against this background, the young de Mocioni integrated perfectly into the plural high society of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, without ever straying from his Romanian roots, which he constantly cultivated and promoted. His meteoric socio-economic career is brutally cut short by the First World War, during which he falls heroically while leading his men in battle. The way in which he managed his own multiple cultural identity, acting for the benefit of his national community and not against the others, meant that his memory was honored beyond the Romanian ethnic border, even in the period between the two world wars, when chauvinist nationalism was at its peak.

Keywords: Aromanians, Mocioni, multiple identity, World War I, Austro-Hungarian Army

Petru de Mocioni belongs to the armalist branch of the illustrious Mocioni / Mocsonyi family² (originally also spelled Motsonyi), one of the most studied families in modern and contemporary Romanian historiography. Its members – descendants of Aromanian immigrants from the Moscopole area, are distinguished on all levels of social life and remain in history as leaders of the Romanian national movement in the Habsburg and then Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The members of this family, raised to noble rank by the Emperor for their merits, are mainly merchants and large landowners who are also heavily involved in the national and Orthodox cause. In the context of the almost exclusive attention these aspects of their activity enjoyed, the military side of some of them is less researched, although the Mocioni family's existence under the Habsburg dynasty begins and ends under the sign of arms.

They originated in the region of Astropotam (now in Greece) and later moved to Moscopole (now in Albania), according to oral traditions maintained in the family

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and recorded by Vincențiu Babeş in 1883. The first Mocioni immigrated to the Habsburg domains at the end of the 17th century, as part of the great movement of Orthodox population (mainly Serbs, but also lots Aromanians) led by Patriarch Arsenius of Pec (1690). Subsequently, at least two of the Mocioni brothers distinguished themselves in the Habsburg armies under Prince Eugene of Savoy, who liberated the Kingdom of Hungary and the Principality of Transylvania from the authority of the Ottoman Porte. One of them fell in the victorious battle of Zenta (11.09.1697), while his brother, the priest Petru, would later die in the battles for the liberation of the Banat of Timişoara, around 1716. More precise genealogical data on the family members began to be recorded with the priest Constantin Mocioni, who settled in the Kingdom of Hungary in 1747. Two of his sons went on to accumulate significant wealth and were the founders of the two noble branches that would play such an important role in the work of promoting the rights of the Romanians under the House of Habsburg. Andrei's descendants obtained the domain of Foen / Foeni in the County of Torontal (now Timis County) and the noble predicate "de Foen", while Michael's descendants formed the armalist branch. From this last branch are born in the last part of the 19th century the 5 children of Eugen de Mocioni -Ecaterina, (24.06.1883), Eugenia, (20.09.1884 - 05.08.1937), Petru (26.08.1885 -25.06.1915), Alexandru (08.03.1887 - 22.08.1926) and Ioan / Ionel (20.03.1893 -03.10.1930).³

All three boys served during the Great War as officers in the Austro-Hungarian army, in whose ranks Peter fell in battle with Russian forces in 1915. In the following, we aim to contribute to the illustration of his social and military career, in which he successfully combined multiple facets of existence into a multiple identity. Throughout his life, Petru de Mocioni successfully integrates his constant fidelity to his Romanian national consciousness and the duties and privileges that he had as a nobleman and a great landowner, member of an upper social class of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Like most of the members of this class, he is the fruit of a mixed marriage. He was born on 26.08.1885 in Căpâlnaş (Szörény / Severin County), the son of Eugen de Mocioni and Therezia Horváth of Zalabér (of noble German, Hungarian and Italian descent). He would have a relatively typical educational background for a scion of a noble family of great means. Its later stages would involve studies in the main languages of the Monarchy, but the family took care, in the best Aromanian tradition, that the first, formative stage would be in Romanian and would instill in him a Romanian national consciousness. All the private teachers employed by the family are Romanian, and Eugen de Mocioni carefully supervises and is personally involved in the educational process. Petru attends primary school as a private pupil of the Romanian Greek Orthodox Gymnasium (high school) in Brasov, where he also begins his secondary studies.⁴

From the third grade of secondary school (equivalent to the current sixth grade), he will continue them in Hungarian at the Piarist Gymnasium in Budapest. In the yearbooks issued by the institution during Petru de Mocioni's studies (1898 – 1903), his Greek-Oriental (Orthodox) denomination is constantly recorded under his

name, a sign that he openly maintained his confessional and ethnic identity. Apart from the 5th grade (school year 1900 – 1901), he is registered as a private pupil. In this capacity, his grades are not published in the yearbooks, as he studies with private teachers – mainly Romanians, which helps to strengthen the national spirit whose foundations were laid in the previous stage. In 5th grade his grades illustrate the solidity of his Orthodox education – he gets the highest mark (1, the lowest being 5) in the subject of religion. On the other hand, his results in German (grade: 2) are much higher than in Hungarian (grade: 3), which also foreshadows his future preferences for military service.⁵

After graduating from high school, Petru de Mocioni prepares himself to be a good manager of the family estate, including the extensive Căpâlnaș estate – now in Arad County, at that time in Szörény / Severin County – by attending the Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Magyaróvár (Moson County). Founded in 1818 on the initiative and on the grounds of Prince Albert Cazimir of Saxony, Duke of Teschen, son-in-law of Empress Maria Theresa, and Governor of Hungary, it offers academic and practical training of European standard, for students from many countries on the continent. An institution of great prestige, until 1906 it was the only university of its kind in the Kingdom of Hungary. After graduating from the agricultural academy, Petru de Mocioni traveled extensively throughout Europe, during which he perfected his practical skills in the field and learned lessons that contributed to the better management of the family estate.⁶

During this period he also served in the Austro-Hungarian army as a one-year volunteer (Einjährig-Freiwilliger / egyévi önkéntes) in the "Erzherzog Joseph" Dragoon Regiment No. 15 (DR15). This type of military service is introduced, after the Prussian model, with the reorganization of the Habsburg army following the Dualist Pact of 1867. The Austro-Hungarian army now became a mass army – organized according to the principle of compulsory military service, which led to a massive increase in the number of troops on mobilization. The need for a large number of officers in the reserve is implicit, and for this purpose the one-year voluntary service is introduced as a way of training young people with a good education and superior material means. As a subsidiary aim, it is meant to incite and captivate the mind of the middle class, strengthening their attachment and loyalty to the Dynasty.⁷



32. Petru de Mocioni.

Fig. 1 – Petru de Mocioni, in the uniform of the 15th Regiment of Dragoons⁸

The 15th Dragoon Regiment had its command cadre and its reserve training unit in Wiener Neustadt - where the most important military academy of the Monarchy was also based - in 1908 - 1909. The rank and file is recruited from the Vienna Territorial Military Circle, mainly from the Brünn/Brno area (in the presentday Czech Republic), so the majority of the other ranks are ethnic Czech. After passing the rank examinations in 1908, Petru de Mocioni was commissioned as a reserve cadet of DR 15 in 1909, with a rank date of 01.01.1909. He fulfills his obligations as a reservist and participates annually in the exercises and maneuvers stipulated by the regulations, and as a consequence advances quickly. Within two years he is promoted twice, passing very quickly through the stage of ensign (Fähnrich / zászlós) in reserve and becoming lieutenant in reserve (Leutnant / hadnagy) of DR 15, with the date of rank 01.01.1911. In addition to his very good physical form and weapons training (as a keen hunter, who sometimes shot over 100 birds in one hunt), his social status, wealth, and his friendships and kinship with important aristocratic and bourgeois upper-class families in the Empire may also have contributed to his accelerated career. By comparison, his comrade Prukl Rudolf became a cadet in the same regiment on 01.01.1905 and an ensign only on 01.01.1909, a rank he still held in 1914.9

It is worth noting that Petru de Mocioni chose to do his military service as a one-year volunteer in the DR 15, one of the prestigious units of the Austro-Hungarian cavalry recruiting from the "Austrian" side of the Monarchy¹⁰. Given that most of the wealthy young nobles or bourgeois in the Kingdom of Hungary prefer the hussar regiments of the Common Army, whose officers are held in high esteem in society here, his choice of a dragoon unit (the elite of the "German" cavalry) is telling in itself. A probable reason for his choice was his devotion to the Romanian national cause, for which Vienna was seen as an important support against the national policy of the Budapest authorities. Wiener Neustadt is also at a convenient distance from Magyaróvár, which makes it easy for him to attend reserve officer courses during his university years.



Fig. 2 – Uniform of the Imperial and Royal Dragoon Regiment No. 15, pre-war period¹¹

His entire cultural development so far, which took place in plural and varied cultural environments – from his studies in different languages to the multi-ethnic and multilingual aristocratic environment in which he spends his free time, has created the prerequisites for the formation of a multiple identity in young Petru de Mocioni. This is strengthened by contact with the joint Austro-Hungarian army – a "border culture" that exists between, and at the same time connects, the regions with different linguistic specificities and religions from which the cadres come. As a result, it generates mainly compromises and in only very few cases antagonisms and exclusions. The resulting multiple identity requires the equal assumption of different cultural, linguistic, and religious roots and the creation, as a synergistic result of these, of an identity different from the original ones - that of an officer and a citizen of the Monarchy. Through this multiple identity of the individual, the cultures of origin are overcome, without being abandoned, and their elements are integrated into a new intercultural and interfaith format. As a result, a more articulated 'policy of recognition' is developed, which largely eliminates discriminatory interpretations and practices. Constant multilingual communication leads to the sharing of a range of cultural values that counteract radical ethnicist tendencies and cultivate a cosmopolitan orientation that fosters cohabitation and cooperation.¹² In this respect, Petru de Mocioni fits perfectly into the plural socio-cultural environment of the Monarchy's elite, without ever ceasing to be (A)Romanian and to act for the benefit of his nation.

Apart from the brief intervals when he is busy with military training or regular maneuvers, Petru de Mocioni continues to manage the considerable wealth he owns. He manages the vast Căpâlnaş estate, the economic value of which makes him one of the major property tax payers to the budget of the Kingdom of Hungary. He owns valuable real estate in Budapest, Timişoara, etc., but is also constantly embarking on new business ventures, such as prospecting in the Oraviţa area or investing in bank shares. He was also quick to adopt the technological developments of the time – in 1913 the castle at Căpâlnaş was already connected to the telephone network.¹³

At the same time, Petru de Mocioni continues to lead a very active social life, typical for his place in society. In the course of this life, the reserve officer distinguishes himself through traits like his generosity towards Romanian social and religious causes, or a distinguished conviviality, as a member of aristocratic circles, as a host or participant in impressive hunting parties or as a valued member of the Hungarian National Casino in Budapest. His status, wealth, education, and qualities made him regular guest at the most important social events of the period, and create cordial relations with representatives of the high aristocracy. He was present at the marriage of Count Teleki Pál and Countess Bissingen-Nippenburg Hanna, officiated in St. Stephen's Basilica in Budapest by Dr Boromisza Tibor – the Roman Catholic Bishop of Szatmár / Satu Mare. In 1910 he became a member of the Hungarian National Casino, where the social, political, military, and economic elite of the Kingdom of Hungary congregates. Members of the family participate in large-scale hunts on the Mocioni family estates – Petru de Mocioni's partners are aristocrats such as Counts Károlyi József, Cziráky György and Pejacsevich Márkus, or Barons Vécsey

Miklós and Baich Mihály. In 1913 he also joined the Hungarian National Hunting Association, another nexus of the elite of the time.¹⁴

Despite his perfect integration into the Hungarian and Imperial high society, he never gave up his support for the Romanian community in the Kingdom of Hungary. He allocated significant sums from his fortune to ensure a cultural life of its own, which would contribute to the maintenance and cultivation of the Romanian national identity. Petru de Mocioni supports the economic and cultural progress of the Romanian peasants in the Căpâlnaș area, as president of the local Orthodox parish committee. He pays from his own funds for the renovation of the church here, consecrated by Bishop Ioan Papp of Arad on 26.10.1913. In the same register, he sponsors charitable actions for the purchase of a clock for the church in Birchiş and generously donates to the church in Lalasint (Romanian villages in the vicinity of Căpâlnaș). He also contributes massively to the funds of the Orthodox diocese of Arad and is one of the main donors on the occasion of the concerts of the Romanian Orthodox church choir in Budapest. Petru de Mocioni also supports the associative life of the Romanian community. He participates in the jubilee celebrations of the Transylvanian Association for Romanian Literature and Culture – ASTRA (50 years) and of the Literary Society "Petru Maior" in Budapest (60 years), becoming a founding member of these societies based on substantial donations. He made major financial contributions to the collections for the erection of the busts of Mihai Eminescu and Gheorghe Barițiu, as well as to those for the relief of flood victims in the counties of Krassó / Caraş and Temes / Timiş. He is also one of the largest contributors to collections for the distribution of free newspapers in Romanian to people without material means. The aim is to combat the national-linguistic and religious assimilationist propaganda to which they are subjected, including in the issue of the Hungarian-speaking Greek-Catholic diocese of Hajdúdorog. His support for the Greek-Catholic Romanians clearly illustrates that for Petru de Mocioni the national cause is more relevant than the tension between the two confessions to which most Romanians belong at the time.15

On the other hand, even before the First World War the young officer in the reserve again comes into contact with military life in the context of the Balkan wars of 1912-1913. The Monarchy does not take an active part, but some of its armed forces are mobilized as a precautionary measure. Lieutenant Petru de Mocioni answers the call to mobilize with his unit and spent a period under the flag, for which he was awarded the 1912/1913 Memorial Cross (Erinnerungskreuz 1912/13). Created by order of Emperor Franz Josef on 03.07.1913, the decoration is awarded to those who spent at least 4 weeks under arms during the mobilization of Austro-Hungarian forces.¹⁶

A year later he is again mobilized with DR15, this time for true war. He does his duty to the Throne according to his oath, though he does not believe in the victory of the Central Powers. He makes no secret of this fact, which he openly conveys in discussions with his aristocratic friends. According to the memoirs of Baroness Bornemissza Carola (née Szilvássy), Petru de Mocioni was already making gloomy prophecies about the fate of Transylvania at the end of August 1914, about a month after the outbreak of the conflict. He fought for less than a year. The young nobleman

fell heroically in battle on 25.06.1915, at 02:00 AM, at the head of his platoon which he led in an assault against Russian forces at Jargezov Stary (Galicia, north-east of Lemberg – today Lvov in Ukraine). For his heroism, he is posthumously promoted to the rank of first lieutenant of dragoons and awarded the Military Cross for Merit, 3rd class, with war insignia. Initially interred in Galicia, later his mortal remains were brought to the family sepulcher in Foen. In remembrance, his relatives commissioned a German language leaflet that called for him to be in people's prayers and celebrated his heroic, albeit short, military career.¹⁷



Fig. 3 – Leaflet calling for prayers in memory of Petru de Mocioni / Peter von Mocsonyi¹⁸

His personal qualities, as well as the way he managed his own multiple identity, acting for the benefit of his national community and not against others, made his memory to be honored by communities outside the Romanian ethnic border, even during the period of maximum flourishing of nationalisms and irredentism between the two world wars. His name appears on the monumental commemorative plaque immortalizing the fallen members of the Hungarian National Casino, made by Kisfaludi-Strobl Zsigmond and unveiled at the headquarters of the institution on 05.10.1920, just 4 months after the Treaty of Trianon. The Hungarian press of the time explicitly records the fact that Petru de Mocioni was Romanian, but in no way denies his personal or military merits, and praises his heroism. It also appears on the commemorative plaque unveiled in 1925 on the premises of the Piarist High School in

Budapest, in memory of former pupils who fell in the Great War, made by Damkó József.¹⁹



Fig. 4 – Memorial plaque unveiled in the building of the Piarist Gymnasium in Budapest

(Petru de Mocioni appears at position 7 in the 3rd column)²⁰

All this fully illustrates how Petru de Mocioni succeeded, even in a historical period characterized by a growing insularity and mutual exclusion between the various national communities, to integrate in a synergic way his own national-cultural heritage and external influences. The process has resulted in a balanced, European, and cosmopolitan approach, with the emphasis on nurturing one's own community and supporting its progress, while not obstructing or discriminating against others. As a result, a study of his short life can reveal a valuable set of lessons learned and best practices, which are very useful in the current international context, characterized by the resurgence of radical and mutually exclusive "zero-sum game" positions.

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- ¹ An initial version of this study was presented orally at the National Conference "Romanian Administration in Arad", 16th edition, 17-19.05.2023.
- ² This Hungarian spelling was also used in Romanian periodicals (*Biserica și școala*, *Românul* etc.) even after the First World War, for example, see *Biserica și școala* 15 (1943): 117.
- ³ See Caragiani, I., *Studii Istorice asupra Românilor din Peninsula Balcanică* (București: Cultura Națională, 1929), 105-139; Babeș, V., "Notițe biografice asupra vieții și activității decedatului Andreiu Mocioni (Mocsonyi), membru al Academiei Române", *Analele Academiei Române* Series II, Tom V, Sect. B *Memorii și notițe* (1883): 3-4; Botiș, T., *Monografia familiei Mocioni* (București: Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă "Regele Carol al II-lea", 1939), 3-20; Berényi, M., *Familii și personalități macedoromâne din Pesta (Secolelele XVIII-XIX)* (Giula, 2017), 132-165; for the original text of the ennobling diploma of the descendants of Andrei (branch of Foen) see *Liber Regius*, vol. 52, 377-379, Available via https://archives.hungaricana.hu/en/libriregii/view/hu_mnl_ol_a057_52_0001/?pg=190&bb

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⁴ Therezia Horváth of Zalabér's parents are Horváth János Nepomuk of Zalabér – general in the Austro-Hungarian army and imperial and royal adviser (1829 – 18.11.1915, Major-General since 01.11.1877, Feldmaschelleutnant since 01.05.1882; retired 01.01.01.1892), respectively Emanuela, Baroness of Colleti; the family of Zalabér was a prominent one in Zala County, its members having over time important political roles at county and national level, as well as military; see Botiş, T., (1939), 379, 382; Nagy, I., Magyarország családai. Czímerekkel és nemzékrendi táblákkal, vol. 5 (Pest: Ráth Mór, 1859), 166-167; Schmidt-Brentano, A., Die k. k. bzw. k. u. k. Generalität 1816-1918 (Österreichischen Staatsarchiv, 2007), 75, Available via https://www.oesta.gv.at/dam/jcr:afa860a0-93aa-4fee-a9f0-

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⁵ Janky, K., "A Kegyes-Tanítórendiek budapesti főgymnasiumának értesitője az 1898/99-iki tanévről" (1899): 91; Janky, K., "A Kegyes-Tanítórendiek budapesti főgymnasiumának értesitője az 1899/1900-iki tanévről" (1900): 89; Janky, K., "A Kegyes-Tanítórendiek budapesti főgymnasiumának értesitője az 1900/1901-iki tanévről" (1901): 98; Janky, K., "A Kegyes-Tanítórendiek budapesti főgymnasiumának értesitője az 1901/1902. tanévről (1902): 101; Kováts, A., "A Kegyes-Tanítórendiek budapesti főgymnasiumának értesitője az 1902.-1903. iskolaévről" (1903): 91; Kováts, A., "A Kegyes-Tanítórendiek budapesti főgymnasiumának értesitője az 1903.-1904. iskolaévről" (1904): 128.

⁶ By decision 72445-1V of 1906, promulgated by Emperor Franz Josef, the courses of the agricultural institutes in Cluj, Kassa/Kosice, Debrecen and Keszthely were also granted the status of university studies, with a duration of 3 years; see von Ammon, C. H., Genealogie ascendante jusqu'au quatrieme degre inclusivement de tous les Rois et Princes de maisons souveraines de l'Europe actuellement vivans (Berlin: Frédéric Guillaume Birnstiel, 1768), table 100; Botis, T., (1939), 382; Kulcsár, I., "A Magyaróvári Gazdasági Akadémia alapításának előzményei", Agrártörténeti Szemle 1-2 (1969): 160-173; "Az országos gazdasági akadémiákat illetőleg ma az alispáni hivatal a következőket teszi közhirre...", Brassói Lapok, XII, 234 (1906): 5.

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- ⁸ Photo published in Botis, T., (1939), 390.
- ⁹ See Schematismus für das k. u. k. Heer und für die k. u. k. Kriegsmarine 1910 (Vienna: Druck und Verlag der k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1909), 775; Schematismus für das k. u. k. Heer und für die k. u. k. Kriegsmarine 1911 (Vienna: Druck und Verlag der k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1910), 748, 779; Schematismus für das k. u. k. Heer und für die k. u. k. Kriegsmarine 1912 (Vienna: Druck und Verlag der k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1911), 750, 783; Somogyvármegye 188 (1906): 4.
- ¹⁰ In German "Die im Reichsrat vertretenen Königreiche und Länder" / The kingdoms and countries represented in the Reichsrat, also known as Cisleithania, as opposed to Transleithania (Kingdom of Hungary).
- ¹¹ "15er Dragoner" work by Austrian painter Ludwig Koch (1866-1934); ca. 30 x 20 cm, mixed media on paper, auctioned in 2016 for 6,750 euros; Available via https://www.dorotheum.com/en/1/1475933/, cited 06.05.2024
- ¹² The concept of multiple identity is defined in Neumann, V., Neam, popor sau naţiune? Despre identităţile politice europene (2nd edition) (Bucureşti: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2005), 206- 215 chapter "The Concept of Multiple Identity"; see K. u. k. Kriegsarchiv, Sechzig Jahre Wehrmacht 1848-1908 (Wien: im Verlage des k. u. k. Kriegsarchivs, 1908), 13; Deák, I., Beyond Nationalism. A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918 (Oxford University Press: Oxford New York, 1990), 58; Neumann, V., "Timişoara between 'Fictive Ethnicity' and 'Ideal Nation'. The Identity Profile during the Interwar Period', Balcanica XLIV (2013): 392.
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- ¹⁴ See Budapesti Hirlap 284 (1908): 10; A Nemzeti Casino évkönyve 1910 year 84 (1911): 41; Vadászlap 10 (1913): 129; Vadászlap 29 (1913): 383; Vadászlap 33 (1913): 440.
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 Românul 214 (1912): 8; Pesti Hirlap 25 (1913): 34; Biserica şi şcoala 23 (1913): 7; Biserica şi şcoala 44 (1913): 1.
- ¹⁶ The decoration is in the form of a slightly convex bronze Maltese cross, with a medallion in the center inscribed "1912 1913"; the reverse is smooth and the triangular ribbon is yellow with 4 narrow black stripes (yellow black being the colors of the House of Habsburg); it is worn on the left side of the chest; see Stolzer, J., Steeb, C., Österreichs Orden vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1996), 264-265; Schematismus für das k. u. k. Heer und für die k. u. k. Kriegsmarine 1914 (Vienna: Druck und Verlag der k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, 1914), 693.
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²⁰ Image published in Kisparti, J., (1926), 14.