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THE COLLEGE OF COTNARI – A FIRST ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE
PUBLIC EDUCATION IN MOLDAVIA
(Summary)

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The College of Cotnari emerged as an expression of the willpower of a genius adventurer, Jacob Heraclide, who became the prince of Moldavia in a period when the interests of the Great Powers and in Moldavia overshadowed this country and when the relations between the power factors had stopped. The college was meant to respond to the needs of the protestant population in Moldavia, most of them German and Hungarian, inhabitants of cities, who had abandoned Catholicism, but it also represented a new stage in attracting the Orthodox population to Protestantism. Prince Despot converted to Lutheranism; Calvinism and Unitarianism attracted him, but he also kept permanent contact with the Orthodox Church. The conversion was one of the factors that helped the lucky and erudite adventurer acquire the throne of Moldavia. Hence, once he became the prince of Moldavia, Despot made efforts to outline Moldavia on the map of Reform expansion in Europe. The first public education establishment in Moldavia was the school founded at Cotnari by Prince Despot throughout 1562, and it began functioning in the spring of 1563. Firstly, it appears that the prince began constructing the college of Hârlău, but he did not finalize his idea because the city of Hârlău was badly affected by a fire in March–April 1562, reason for which the founder was forced to construct the building at Cotnari. The building college was constructed near the great Catholic church of Cotnari, which was built from the foundations or at least amply restored as per the order of the same prince Despot. In parallel with building the walls, Prince Despot made efforts to gather teachers from across Europe: Johann Sommer, Gasparus Peucer, Joachimus Rhaeticus, Justus Jonas, Zacharias Ortus, Hermodorus Lestarchus and the Serbian deacon Dimitrije. Prince Despot also called to Moldavia several Lutheran and anti-Trinitarian from Poland, who had to work

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especially in the ecclesiastical setting, but we cannot exclude the intention of using them as teachers at the College of Cotnari: the reformed bishop John Lusinski, Francesco Lismanini and Hieronymus Filipowski. Among this great group of teachers and reformers, only Johannes Sommer, deacon Dimitrije and bishop Lusinski arrived to see Despot at Suceava, and from among them, only the first went to Cotnari, with the task of teaching at the college founded by the prince of Moldavia.

The college functioned for a few months, in the year 1563; it was built for the reformed population of Moldavia; from this population, the students were recruited, and this went on to become “the training place for the future Protestant clergy.” The trainees did not also include children from an Orthodox setting, because the Orthodox persons were suspicious and hateful of the new elements brought by Prince Despot to Moldavia. The Orthodox elite continued to be loyal to the old education method, related to the ecclesiastical and aulic setting. Besides the College of Cotnari, Prince Despot also organized a library, which was mentioned by Johann Sommer, and he even founded a typography.