

**THE ONOU FAMILY: FROM THE MOLDAVIAN COUNTRY SQUIRES
TO THE ARISTOCRATS WHO PLAYED A ROLE
IN THE RUSSIAN DIPLOMACY DURING WORLD WAR I
AND THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION**

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Abstract

The author, Filip-Lucian Iorga, descendant of a family of freeholders from south-eastern Wallachia, started studying the genealogy of his family's relatives, the Străjescu family, Moldavian boyars. Thanks to an unpublished genealogical tree of this family, belonging to the Mihai Dim. Sturdza archive, Filip-Lucian Iorga found out about the descendants of the Străjescu family from the Onul (Onou) family (Elena Străjescu married Constantin Onul). Filip Iorga started to investigate the Onou genealogy and the biographies of several members of the family, who served as Russian diplomats: Michel Onou (1835-1901; counselor at the Russian embassy in Constantinople, between 1869 and 1879 and Minister Plenipotentiary of Russia in Greece); and Michel Onou's three sons: Alexandre Onou (1865-1935; historian and diplomat, consul-general of Russia in Great Britain, in 1917), Constantin Onou (1875-1950; chargé d'affaires of Russia in the United States, in 1917; diplomatic chancellor of the Russian White Armies under Generals Denikin and Wrangel, in 1919) and André Onou (1881-1950; Minister Plenipotentiary of Russia in Switzerland, in 1917). The marriages of the Onou are very interesting, because they prove the perfect integration of a Romanian family belonging to small nobility into the highest Russian aristocracy. Future studies on the Onou genealogy will benefit from the recent discovery, by Filip-Lucian Iorga, of Katia Onou's archives, in Italy.

Key words: *Family Archives, Genealogies, Moldavian Boyars, Russian Aristocrats, Russian Diplomats*

Like in so many cases before, my interest in genealogy, in old documents and in the comprehension of the past was too born out of the curiosity regarding the history of my own family. The stories of my grandparents, the photographs, the old papers have sharpened my appetite to set out my ancestors and relatives into their rightful place in the respective family trees. My maternal grandfather, Mircea Stănescu, officer of the Romanian Royal Army during the Second World War and then an engineer, descended directly in the male line from Barbu Bărbulescu, a freeholder from Poiana-Ialomița, therefore a free man and a landowner in an old village from Bărăgan, attested in the 16th century. Subsequent research gave birth to the hypothesis according to which the Bărbulescu freeholders family would be related or even part of the same genealogical tree with the Poenaru-Bordea boyar family¹. The hypothesis is to be confirmed or invalidated in the future, but it is sure enough

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¹ In the family tree drawn up by Alexandru Perietzianu-Buzău for the Poenaru-Bordea family, its first known ancestor was a Barbu Roșu, who lived in the middle of the 17th century. The first patronym which appears in the Poenaru-Bordea ascendancy is that of "Bărbulescu", followed by "Tărcă" and only later by "Poenaru" and "Poenaru-Bordea". In a series of documents at the Romanian Academy Library, dated 1822, notified by Mr. Tudor-Radu Tiron and transcribed by Mrs. Liana Năstăsescu, an easily identifiable character in the Poenaru-Bordea family tree (Gheorghe, *serdar* Răducanu Poenaru's nephew) signs "Bărbulescu and Poenar".

that the bloodline of the Bărbulescu freeholders from Poiana-Ialomița have “became bourgeois” in the second half of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century and they engendered officers, clerks, industrialists, businessmen and intellectuals.



The Bărbulescu family, freeholders from Poiana-Ialomița, in Bucharest, at the beginning of the 20th century. Seated, Maria Bărbulescu born Țențulescu (1846-1944), widow of Stan Bărbulescu. Standing, the children of Maria and Stan Bărbulescu, from left to right: Ștefan Bărbulescu, Dumitrache Bărbulescu, Costache Bărbulescu, Nicolae Stănescu, Smaranda Bărbulescu-Tănăsescu. Archive Filip-Lucian Iorga

The first time I heard the name of the Moldavian boyars Străjescu was in the stories recounted by my grandfather. One of the brothers of my great grandfather, called Dumitrache Bărbulescu, an industrialist from Galați, married Maria-Ana Ștefănescu, the daughter of Hristache Ștefănescu and the niece of the rich landowner from Galați, Ion Hagi-Ștefănescu.



Dumitrache Bărbulescu. Archive Filip-Lucian Iorga

Dumitrache and Maria-Ana Bărbulescu had two children, first cousins of my grandfather: Dumitru (1923-1977) and Maria (1924-2008). The economist Maria Bărbulescu married the former Cavalry Officer Constantin (Dinu) Străjescu (1919-1996).



Maria (Mița) Bărbulescu, married Străjescu. Archive Filip-Lucian Iorga

I have found more about the family of my uncle Dinu Străjescu from aunt Mița Străjescu. He graduated from *Gheorghe Lazăr* Highschool in Bucharest and was a Cavalry Officer (class 1940 of the *King Ferdinand I* School for Cavalry Officers), member of the Royal Guards. During the Second World War, he was decorated with the *German Iron Cross* 2nd Class and with the Order of the Crown of Romania 5th Class, in the rank of Officer, with the Ribbon of Military Virtue (5th July, 1945). He fought both on the Eastern Front (up to Stalingrad) and on the Western Front and was part of: the 3rd *Călărăși* Regiment “General Praporgescu”, the Royal Guards, the Cavalry Commandment, M.A.N.¹ – Military Training Division. From November to December 1943 he took up a specialized course in automotive engineering in Germany. On the 24th of March 1944 he was

¹ Romanian Ministry of Defense.

promoted to the rank of lieutenant, and on the 23rd August 1946, to the rank of captain. He was wounded in 1944, during the military operation on Tisa. He took part in battles in Transylvania, Hungary and Slovakia. In 1945 he was in command of the Royal Guards' Fourth Squadron and in 1946 was at the head of the Supply Service of the regiment. In 1954, he was excluded from the army, on grounds of "socially unhealthy origin"; later on, he worked as a clerk at C.F.R.¹



Dimitrie Străjescu. Archive Filip-Lucian Iorga

Dinu Străjescu was the son of the Cavalry Colonel Dimitrie Străjescu and of Cecilia Codrescu (the daughter of Doctor Constantin C. Codrescu, the founder of the hospital in Bârlad). In his turn, Dimitrie Străjescu was the son of Paul Străjescu (1848-1887; magistrate, mayor of the town of Roman, deputy of the National Liberal Party, decorated with the Russian Order of Saint Anna and The Order of the Star of Romania) and Olimpia Makarovitsch (sister of the General Gheorghe Makarovitsch, hero of the Romanian War of Independence and headmaster of the School for Children of Military Personnel in Iași,

¹ Romanian Railways.

between 1881 and 1894). Paul Străjescu was the son of Petre Străjescu and Eugenia Mavrogheni, paternal sister of Petre Mavrogheni (1818-1887; candidate for the reign of Moldavia, in 1859; conservatory leader, important financial expert, deputy and senator of Romania, Minister of Finance and of Foreign Affairs under King Carol I, Minister Plenipotentiary of Romania in Rome, Constantinople and Vienna).



Dimitrie and Cecilia Străjescu, with their sons, Paul Străjescu (Navy Officer) and Constantin (Dinu) Străjescu (right), 5th February 1937. Archive Filip-Lucian Iorga

But this was only one branch of the Străjescu family. In 2008, I have dedicated a study to the Bessarabian branches of the family, which was accepted for publication in one of the volumes of the historical, genealogical and biographical encyclopaedia coordinated by Mihai Dim. Sturdza, which will include the families starting with the letter “S” of the alphabet. Without being always able to make the connection between the Străjescu from Bessarabia and the branch related to my family, I found the documents from the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova in Chișinău¹ very interesting. They provide us with information about several members of the Străjescu family who, after 1812, received the citizenship of the Russian Empire and became members of the

¹ National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, Fond Nr. 88, Inv. Nr. 1 UP Nr. 103, 134 and 303.

Bessarabian nobility, organized according to the rules imposed from Sankt Petersburg. I wrote in my study about the Cavalry Captain Constantin Emanuil Străjescu, born in 1799, registered in the second part of the Register of Nobles from Bessarabia, married to Elena Pavlovna Leonard, with whom he had three sons, Ioan, Ștefan and Emanuil Străjescu (all three of them were officers in the Russian Army) and two daughters, Ecaterina married Bogdan and Maria married Evtasiev. I also wrote about the *serdar* Ioan Dimitrie Străjescu, son of the *șetrar* Pascal Străjescu, steward of Hotin between 1822 and 1825 and who died childless. A few years after my research, a detailed study about the Bessarabian branches of the Străjescu is due to Dinu Poștarencu, who examined several files in the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova¹ and added some interesting genealogical details, proving that the officer Ioan Străjescu, son of Constantin Emanuil Străjescu, is the same with that Ioan (Iancu) Străjescu, a Romanian patriot and founding member of the Romanian Academic Society. In 1870, he would be elected honorary member of the Romanian Academy. The subject regarding the link between this Bessarabian branch of Constantin Emanuil Străjescu and the rest of the family² remains open to discussion.

In 2010, Mihai Dim. Sturdza has provided me with an unpublished genealogical tree of the Străjescu family, to be found in his personal archive. I filled the tree with the information I had about my uncle's branch and, in turn, I discovered a descent through women of the Străjescu family which held my attention. According to this genealogy, Elena Străjescu, daughter of *serdar* Pavel Străjescu, married *medelnicer* Constantin Onul, bailiff of the Rosetti-Roznovanu family. But the rather obscure country squire Constantin Onul and his wife born Străjescu are the parents of an exceptional man, who, by both personal merit and marriage, quickly integrated into the highest Russian aristocracy. Surprised by the fact that the grandchildren of Elena Străjescu and of the country squire Onul married in illustrious aristocratic families like Trubetzkoy or Shakhovskoy, I tried to fill in and elaborate the data in the genealogy of the Străjescu family. I have thus discovered new facts, new characters, I discovered life stories and I have found interesting documents for the history of relations between our nobility and the Russian aristocracy. I have also found interesting facts about the life of a Russian aristocratic family of Romanian origin during World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution.

But let us return to Mikhail (or Michel) Onou (1835-1901), son of Elena Străjescu and Constantin Onul. Noted by the Russian General Budberg, Mikhail Onou entered in the latter's orderly room and made an oath of allegiance to Russia in 1854. He spoke Romanian, Russian, French, Turkish and Greek. He was secretary and dragoman of the Russian consulate in Adrianople, of the Consulate-General of Constantinople (1857-1859), of the Consulate-General in Beirut (1859-1863), head of the archives and of the library of the Department for Asia in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Secretary and first dragoman, then advisor to the Russian Embassy in Constantinople

¹ Dinu Poștarencu, *Neamul Străjescu din Basarabia [The Străjescu Family of Bessarabia]*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie, Stat și Drept: Materialele sesiunii științifice anuale, 27 decembrie 2012" ["The Annual of the Institute of History, State and Law: Materials of the annual scientific session, December 27, 2012"], Chișinău, Academy of Sciences of Moldova, Institute of History, State and Law, 2013, pp. 179-187. Mr. Lucian Lefter acquainted me with the article.

² I also wrote about the Bessarabian branches of the Străjescu family in Filip-Lucian Iorga, *Strămoși pe alee. Călătorie în imaginarul genealogic al boierimii române*, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2013, pp. 157-163.

(1869-1879) and Minister Plenipotentiary of Russia in Athens (from 1889; Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Athens in 1898). The name of Michel Onou appears, especially during his work at the embassy in Greece, in French publications such as *Le Figaro*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Gaulois*, *Le Matin*, *Le Temps*, *La Presse*, *Journal des débats politiques et littéraires* etc.

On 6th July 1864, in Alexander Nevsky Russian Cathedral in Paris, Mikhail Onou married Louise Alexandrovna, Baroness of Jomini, born Jeanne-Valérie-Louise Petit de Baroncourt (1843-1906), daughter of Marc Petit de Baroncourt (history teacher at the Collège Bourbon in Paris) and of Alexandrina, Baroness of Jomini, therefore granddaughter of General Antoine-Henri, Baron of Jomini (6th March 1779, Payerne, Switzerland – 22nd March 1869, Passy, buried in Montmartre Cemetery in Paris; General in Napoleon's army, Chief of the General Staff of General Ney and Knight of the Legion of Honour, then Russian General and *aide de camp* of Tsar Alexander, famous military strategist who wrote, among other things, *Précis de l'art de la guerre* and *Les guerres de la Révolution*) and adopted daughter of her uncle, Alexandre, Baron of Jomini (1817-1888; known in Russia as Alexander Genrikhovich Zhomini; Russian diplomat, who studied in Switzerland and at the University of Berlin, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, author of a diplomatic diary and of a treatise on the Crimean War, *Étude diplomatique sur la guerre de Crimée, 1852-1856*). After she was adopted by her uncle, Jeanne-Valérie-Louise Petit de Baroncourt adopted the name Louise Alexandrovna Baroness of Jomini (an imperial document from 23rd May 1864, issued before her marriage to Mikhail Onou, acknowledged her right to use the name and the title of Baroness of Jomini).



The diplomat Michel Constantinovich Onou with his children. Dressed as a sailor, Kostia Onou. Archive Katia Sozzani

For the bloodline of Michel and Louise Onou, the primary source is an excellent work dedicated by two Russian genealogists to the descendants of General Antoine-Henri, Baron of Jomini¹. I have completed the information in this paper with data obtained from descendants of Trubetzkoy and Bouteneff families in France, USA and Canada, with data on the graves of the family in France (Clamart and Paris), which I visited in 2012 and with data from the massive genealogy collection *La noblesse de Russie* by Nikolai Ikonnikov (accessed at the Center of Slavic Studies in Paris). Therefore, Mikhail Onou and the Baroness of Jomini had six children.²

Alexandre Mikhailovich Onou (19th April 1865, Constantinople – 7th April 1935, Surrey, England), Russian diplomat, historian, graduate of the Imperial University of St. Petersburg, member and secretary of the Historical Society of the University of St. Petersburg (1911), history professor at the Imperial University of Petrograd (1916), the ad-interim Administrative Head of Chancery in the Provisional Government (from 20th March 1917; close collaborator of Vladimir Nabokov, Secretary-General of the Government of Prince Lvov), Consul-General in London (appointed on 12th July 1917). He was part of the management of several associations of white Russian immigrants in England and he wrote memoirs (published in English, in *The Contemporary Review*, 1933). He was married to Natalia Nikolaevna Golovina, daughter of General Nikolai Mikhailovich Golovin (1836-1911).

Maria Mikhailovna Onou. Married to Alexandre Stepanovich Zinoviev, son of Adélaïde-Louise-Julie, Baroness of Jomini (the daughter of General Antoine-Henri, Baron of Jomini, lady in waiting of Empress Alexandra Feodorovna). Alexandre Zinoviev was therefore the uncle of Maria Onou. Their marriage was declared illegal in 1899 by the Holy Synod of the Russian Church, because of Maria Onou's mental illness. After the dissolution of marriage with Maria Onou, Alexandre Zinoviev married Varvara Vladimirovna Jukovsky. Maria Onou and Alexandre Zinoviev had two children who died at an early age. Here it can be foreseen a family drama whose real proportions will probably never be truly revealed.

Elena Mikhailovna Onou (1870-1955). Married to Prince Wladimir Wladimirovich Trubetzkoy (1868-1931), Counter-admiral of the Imperial Russian Navy. The couple divorced in 1912 and both died in exile in France. They had a son, Prince Nikita Wladimirovich Trubetzkoy (1902-1980) and two daughters. None of the three had children.

Alexandra Mikhailovna Onou (1873-1944, deceased on her land near Tours, Indre-et-Loire, France, during the German bombardment). Married to Prince Vsevolod Nikolaevich Shakhovskoy (1874-1954), naval officer, the last Minister of Trade and Industry in the Government of the Tsar (1916- February 1917), member of the Constitutional-Democratic Party, author of memoirs (*Sic transit gloria mundi*, published in Paris, in 1952, in Russian). They didn't have children.

Constantin (Kostia) Mikhailovich Onou (1875 Buiuk-Dere, Ottoman Empire – 22nd November 1950, Clamart, Hauts-de-Seine, France), Russian diplomat, secretary of the Russian embassies in Constantinople (1901-1910), The Hague (1910-1915) and

¹ Ivan Grézine, Andrei Schoumkov, *Descendance du Général de Jomini*, Paris, 1997.

² Details about the genealogy of the Onou family can be found in Romanian, on my personal blog: poianamosnenilor.wordpress.com

Washington DC (from August 1916), the Russian charge d'affaires in the United States (April 1917 – late 1917), diplomatic chancellor of the white Russian armies led by Generals Denikin and Wrangel (1919, Novorossisk), adviser in the Russian diplomatic mission to Constantinople, in charge of helping the white Russian refugees (1920-1923). He was married to Catherine (Katia) Constantinovna Bouteneff (1878-1966), daughter of Count Constantin Apollinariievich Chreptowicz-Bouteneff, herself born into a dynasty of diplomats. They didn't have children.



Katia and Kostia Onou. Archive Katia Sozzani

Andrei Mikhailovich Onou (15th November 1881 – 29th September 1950), Russian diplomat, Minister Plenipotentiary of Russia in Switzerland (1917). Married to Tatiana Ippolitovna Komarova. They didn't have children.

Therefore, as stated above, the Onou family is issueless, and the genealogical investigation seems complete. However, thanks to Elizabeth Saika-Voivod, I got in

contact with the Countess Vera Bouteneff, who was so kind as to send me the book that her husband devoted to the history of the family¹. There, in addition to the details about the life of the Onou in the exile that followed the Bolshevik Revolution and the Civil War, I also discovered a detail which made me realize that I was far from the end of my research. In his book, Michael C. Bouteneff cites several times the diary of Katia Onou. Many documents or photos cited by Bouteneff are part of “Katia Onou Archive”. This archive couldn’t be ignored by any dedicated research on the Onou family.

After another year of research, the person holding the archive of Katia Onou and who lives in Italy was so kind as to allow me access to documents and photos. Katia Sozzani, daughter of Nikolai Sergeyeovich Maltzoff and of Praskovia Chreptowicz-Bouteneff kept and carefully inventoried the documents collected by Katia Onou, this authentic saviour of the memory of several illustrious Russian families, but also of the memory of a Romanian family whose destiny identified with the Russian exile. An entire family archive, fiercely guarded for a few decades by two women and which seems to defy the drama which this world was forced to suffer. There is to be found: the correspondence of the beautiful Maria Chreptowicz-Bouteneff, the memories of Cocona Bouteneff-Bariatinsky, the correspondence between Hélène de Nesselrode and Michel Chreptowicz, documents belonging to Baron Antoine-Henri of Jomini, the correspondence between Michel Onou and Baroness Louise of Jomini, the diplomas and medals of Michel Onou, an original work of Michel Onou about Druses, the diplomas and medals of Kostia Onou, and, of course, the diary of Katia Onou and lots of photos.



The Onou family, at the Bouteneff castle in Bordebure, France.
First from left: Constantin Onou and his brother, André Onou. First from right: Katia Onou.
Archive Katia Sozzani

¹ Michael C. Bouteneff, *The Bouteneff Family Chronicle*, New York, 1989.

Far from being the end of the road, the discovery of this archive will allow me to bone up in the future the history of the Onou in Russia, their relationships with the Russian aristocratic families whom they related to and their destiny in exile. Thanks to the merits of Michel Onou and to his kinship in the highest Russian aristocracy, the Onou, Moldavian country squires, came to play an important role in Russia during the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution.

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Archive Katia Sozzani: Onou and Jomini family documents; family photographs.

Archive Mihai Dim. Sturdza: the unpublished family tree of the Străjescu family, including their Onou descendants.

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