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The Prince in Sixteenth Century Moldavia and Wallachia
Between Renaissance and Reformation

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**The Prince in Sixteenth-Century Moldavia and Wallachia
Between Renaissance and Reformation**

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INTRODUCTION

1. General statement

The present research focuses on three figures of princes that ruled in sixteenth-century Moldavia and Wallachia. These rulers are the following: Petru Rareș, prince of Moldavia (1527-1538; 1541-1546), Jacob Heraclides the Despot, prince of Moldavia (1561-1563) and Petru Cercel, prince of Wallachia (1583-1585). There are two reasons why these princes are considered as case studies. The first is that their personal religious affiliation is different: Petru Rareș was Orthodox, Jacob Heraclides the Despot was Protestant (an adept of the Socinian Radical Protestantism) and Petru Cercel was Catholic. The second reason is that all these princes were considered to illustrate Renaissance types of rulership by the relevant Romanian historiography.

The two reasons constituted at the same time the main two motivations and guiding points of our work. This research has based its argument on two main issues: the first is to discuss the concept of the Renaissance prince corroborated with the realities of the period, and the second is to discuss the problem of confessionalisation of the state. Consequently, the following thesis aims to answer two main questions: firstly, whether one can speak about a Renaissance rulership appearing in sixteenth-century Wallachia and Moldavia, and secondly, whether one can speak about a confessionalisation of the state in this particular region and period.

2. The thesis outline and argument

The first chapter intends to contextualise the argument, namely to provide the reader with an as concise as possible overview on the three princes studied and their foreign policy. The reason for analysing this particular issue of their rulership is that I considered the diplomacy to be the most valuable indicator showing how these particular rulers coped with the challenges of a particular epoch, namely the period after 1526, in a particular region, East Central Europe. The discussion of this aspect of rulership will try to stress the organic link between the diplomatic initiatives of these rulers and the international political context of the period: nevertheless, the undoubted influence of the personal ambitions and decisions is to be an important issue in our discussion.

The second chapter will discuss the problem of the existence and manifestation of the Renaissance model of rulership concerning the three case studies. The discussion will be based on the concept of the Renaissance prince as it was developed in the relevant Romanian scholarship, and will try to analyse its validity in correlation with the relevant international scholarship. The argument will follow the main relevant aspects of rulership, liable to bear Renaissance influences: legitimacy, diplomacy, state administration and cultural initiatives.

Finally, the last chapter will discuss the influence of the religion on these particular rulerships. Within this frame, a special focus on a possible influence of the personal religious affiliation is put, as the three princes bore different religious backgrounds. The main question this final chapter will try to answer is whether we can speak about an important influence of religion in various aspects of rulership: the relation of the ruler with the “official” Church in the state (in our case the Orthodox Church), the confessional policy of the ruler (attitudes of tolerance or intolerance towards the religious communities in the state), the “international” relations of the ruler (either “official” or particular) in order to see whether religion constituted as a criterion of selection, and the relation between religion and the cultural initiatives of the ruler.

3. *The stage of the scholarship: argument for our research*

The first concept has been developed by the international scholarship since the publication of Jacob Burckhardt’s – already famous – book, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, in 1860. Basically, the Swiss historian was the first scholar who created the concept of the Renaissance and gave its first shape. It is not our intention to discuss here the enormous impact of Burckhardt’s concept of the Renaissance on the scholarship and the debates on it in the scholarship, rather his concept of Renaissance prince, whose paternity Burckhardt also “claims” for posterity.

Interpreting Machiavelli almost *stricto sensu*, Burckhardt defined the rulership that developed in the Italian city-states from fourteenth until the fifteenth century as “tyranny” or “despotism,” the Italian despots being seen as unscrupulous, cruel, violent, but also, intelligent and admirers of the arts. The new prince was the creator of a new state, the Italian city-state, the princely republic, a result of “reflection and calculation.” The Renaissance prince strove to be a good manager, a good warrior, a

good businessman and a good diplomat. His court, in which the artist had a leading position, had to reveal his magnificence and his fame. Last but not least, the attitude of the Renaissance prince towards religion was also fundamentally new: the Italian princes, unlike their medieval predecessors, separated religion from state affairs.

Analysing Burckhardt's model of Renaissance princes one can easily notice the evident and "heavy" influence of Machiavelli's *Il Principe*. Burckhardt tried to construct the concept of the Renaissance prince following the ideal Machiavellian model of a ruler. Therefore, his emphasis strongly lay on "despotism" as the definition *per se* of the Renaissance Italian rulership.

In a similar way as for Burckhardt, Machiavelli's model of a prince proved to be a temptation difficult to avoid by scholars dealing with the problem of the Renaissance princes. And actually one cannot simply deny its importance. Machiavelli described his ideal prince, able to create a united Italy, starting from real figures of princes. (he actually consecrated in history the figure of Caesar Borgia as a classic Renaissance prince).¹

However, the focus of the scholarship shifted to the image of the Renaissance prince seen as a patron of the arts rather than an illegitimate and violent tyrant: cruelty, violence or outstanding appetite for power and glory were considered rather as individual features and not a permanent and dominant feature of the Renaissance princely profile. The cultivation of the arts was considered the most peculiar, striking and representative phenomenon of the epoch. The famous Italian scholar of the Renaissance, Eugenio Garin, stressed the importance of princely patronage of arts: for him the Renaissance prince was first a Humanist and then a warrior.² Peter Burke in his study, *The Italian Renaissance. Culture and Society in Italy*, emphasised the political function of culture as an efficient tool for princely propaganda. The patronage of art was conducted and promoted mainly to achieve prestige. Burke also noticed the pattern of the classic antiquity of the "princely art": princes were glorified by medals or equestrian statues like the ancient Roman Emperors.³ Consequently, the princely palace and court were designed especially for displaying the power and magnificence of the ruler.

¹ On Machiavelli and his influence on the political thought see John Greville Agard Pocock also Friedrich Meinecke (To shorten the bibliographical references in the footnotes of the present introduction I preferred to provide only the name of the author, as the full entries can be found in the available Selected Bibliography).

² See Eugenio Garin.

The patronage of the arts was not simply a new expression of the Renaissance rulership. Medieval rulers developed similar attitudes and used art for propaganda, although not using the Antique pattern. The most important issue is the new function of the art in society, the new position of the artist, the new approach of the art itself, more impregnated with lay symbols and meanings even when the general theme is religious. And this was considered a significant difference from the medieval tradition.⁴

John Law in his article “Il Principe di Rinascimento” published in *L’Uomo di Rinascimento*, extensively criticised the concept of the Renaissance prince. His article significantly ends with the rhetorical question: “Have not really the historians somehow exaggerated the novelty and the power of the new ‘monarchies’ from sixteenth-century Europe?” thus stressing the idea that in many issues (such as the legitimacy, the state administration, the attitudes towards religion), the concept of the Renaissance prince still did not manage to clarify a clear distance between it and the medieval model. Law suggested that it is in fact impossible to draw a clear-cut distinction between the two concepts.

Some elements, however, still remained as undoubted facts of change, as in the case of the diplomacy, which significantly changed due to the particular political circumstances in the Italian peninsula during the Renaissance. The “new diplomacy” was based on entirely new principles in the international relationships, the principle of the power equilibrium, later becoming the fundamental basis of modern European geopolitics. Also the mechanism of the diplomatic relations underwent significant innovations, such as emergence of the institution of the permanent ambassadors or, as a technical novelty, the diplomatic cipher used in correspondence.⁵

A number of articles, studies and monographs were dedicated to various figures of Renaissance princes such as the Medici, Caesar Borgia, Ferrante of Naples, the French King Francis I, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, the Hungarian

³ See Peter Burke; also Lauro Martines.

⁴ Federico Chabod stressed the importance of the new function of the Renaissance rulers: “It is certain that the Middle Ages were not lacking in human figures of the first magnitude: we do not have to wait for the ‘virtuous’ Italian princes of the Renaissance to provide us with examples of such figures. Men like Charlemagne, Otto I and Philippe Auguste are ‘personalities’ who certainly have nothing to fear from comparison with Gian Galeazzo Visconti, Francesco Sforza and Caesar Borgia. But ... the respective ways in which these powerful personalities influenced the thought of their contemporaries and shaped their ideas were entirely different.” See Federico Chabod, 165.

⁵ See Garrett Mattingly.

King Matthias Corvinus or even to the Russian Tsar Ivan the Terrible.⁶ Most of them dealt with the above mentioned issues when trying to contextualise their argument. As a conclusion, the concept of Renaissance prince cannot be fixed in a clear definition, but it is beyond doubt that the Italian case is to be the main point of reference.

In the relevant Romanian historiography, basically, two main directions can be traced: one exalting the Renaissance princes, the other standing out by its total indifference towards the issue. There is no study or monograph analysing and questioning whether the concept of the Renaissance prince did really exist as such in the sixteenth century Moldavia and Wallachia. However, the available scholarship allows us to make a distinction between two main orientations. The first and most representative orientation tried to connect the “classic” Burckhardtian model of a Renaissance prince with some of the princes, such as Rareș or the Despot.⁷ As I am going to extensively discuss this model in the second chapter, I want to stress here only that the main problem of the pro-Renaissance argument is, in my opinion, the lack of clear definition and conceptualisation. Therefore, instead of clear-cut definitions we are confronted with labelling terms, such as “the Humanist prince” or humaneness, which do not make very much sense. On this moving ground, vague and speculative affirmations appear, such as “But if Rareș did not know, perhaps, the letter of the work of the great Italian thinker, historian and political man [Machiavelli], it is certain that he acted and behaved in its spirit, many of his actions seem to reflect the precepts of Machiavelli.”⁸

The second orientation implies more evidently the influence of the so-called “communist political correctness.” Although its representatives are not numerous, the recent historiography still pays tribute to it. The attempt to invent a sort of Romanian Renaissance (based on the false similarity between “humanism” and “humaneness”)

⁶ See Nicolai Rubinstein; Alison Brown; John Rigby Hale; Ivan Cloulas; David Abulafia; Hugh Trevor-Roper; Tibor Klaniczay and Jozsef Jankovics; also Michael Cherniavsky.

⁷ See Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria românilor prin călători*; Nicolae Iorga, *La place*; Petre P. Panaitescu, “Renașterea și românii”; Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Petru Rareș*; Leon Șimanschi, “Personalitatea Domnului”; Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu; Cristian Luca; Ștefan Bârsănescu, *Schola latina de la Cotnari*; George Lăzărescu, “Despot Vodă și veleitarismul lui umanist”; Magda Petroveanu and Ștefan Bârsănescu, “Jacques Basilicos Le Despote...”; Răzvan Theodoreșcu; Iolanda Țighiliu; Dan Horia Mazilu, Alexandru Alexianu.

⁸ See Gorovei, 229 (the sentence is preceded by a rhetorical question concerning whether Rareș did not have in his hands *Il Principe*).

led to strange affirmations.⁹ For example, according to Alexandru Tănase: “It is not the desire for personal glory which stimulates in the highest degree the heroes of the Romanian Renaissance, but the love and devotion for the ancestors’ land, a strong and stimulating feeling for great deeds of patriotism.”(sic!)¹⁰

Considering the concept of state-confessionalisation, the international scholarship discusses this issue when analyses the changes that occurred in Europe after the Reformation. We have to mention here the confessionalisation thesis supported by two German historians, Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling. It has fast become the “new orthodoxy,” at least concerning the evolution of the German states after Luther. Schilling and Reinhard argued that toward the end of the sixteenth century fundamental changes began to take place in both Catholic and Protestant Germany. According to Schilling, the term confessionalisation refers to a “fundamental societal happening which profoundly altered public and private life in Europe ... [it] is related to the formation of the early modern state ... [to the] modern social- disciplined commonwealth of subjects ... [and to] modern economic systems.”¹¹ The argument goes further, implying that the early modern state and national identities were formed by confessional religion. This confessionalisation thesis became later macro-history, in that it seeks to address the larger question about the nature of historical change. The question how medieval Europe became modern was answered for example by the sociologist Norbert Elias with his civilising theory.¹² Schilling, however, argued quite differently that the modern state had its beginning not in its monopoly of taxation and the military, but its monopolising of

⁹ The first notable monograph on the “Romanian Renaissance Humanism” was written by Zoe-Dumitrescu-Buşulenga in 1971, *Renaşterea. Umanismul şi Dialogul Artelor* (The Renaissance. The Humanism and the Dialogue of Arts), which introduced the concept of the Romanian Humanism *sui generis*. This Humanism could be defined in fact as a large concept including general human qualities and attitudes such as “patriotism, tolerance, wise and rational piety”. All these qualities are given a common name, “humaneness”, which was asserted to be specific for the Romanian people. However, the effort of defining the “humaneness” as a political and cultural phenomenon derived from a vague concept leads also to general and vague conclusions i.e. the affirmation: “They [the Romanian Humanists] do not glorify neither the individual as such, no matter how great he is, nor his culture and his personal heroism, except when the ‘hero’ frames in the general-human ethics, when he works for the interest of the humankind and of his country.” See Alexandru Tănase, 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* Tănase actually rejected the importance of the desire for glory as a „Renaissance dominance” in favor of the Humanism. See for this view also Zoe Dumitrescu-Buşulenga, *Valori şi Echivalenţe Umanistice*; also Ion S.Firu.

¹¹ Heinz Schilling, “Reformation and Confessionalisation in Germany and Modern German History”

¹² See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

religion. Confessionalisation thus means modernisation – and the Reformation may be quite consistently seen as a crisis of modernisation.

Hand in hand with “confessionalisation” went the process of what has been called “social discipline” of the society.¹³ This process began well before the sixteenth century, but accelerated steadily as time went on. It was a collaborative effort of church and state - the Church, both Catholic and Protestant, sought to impose its moral standards upon society, while the state, in exercising its authority through provisions concerning such matters as festivals, vagrancy, begging and poor relief, undertook to consolidate its power. If what the Church did was largely “voluntaristic,” the action of the state was demonstrably repressive.¹⁴

Wolfgang Reinhard considered three main reasons for which the sixteenth and seventeenth century European state encouraged confessionalisation: 1) reinforcement of its national or territorial identity, both at home and abroad, 2) control over the church as a powerful rival of the new state power and, not least, over church property as an important means of power and 3) discipline and homogenisation of its subjects.¹⁵ He furthermore argued that: “The religious concept of the time extended to politics, and conversely the political concept extended to the Church and religion. The early modern state could thus not develop entirely independently of the confessional issue, but only on the basis of a fundamental consensus on religion, the Church and the culture embracing the authority and its subjects alike.”¹⁶

Confessionalisation theory was generally extended to the whole European territory (except the eastern part controlled by the Ottoman Empire).¹⁷ Considering this issue as treated in relation to Moldavia or Wallachia, there is no particular study in the Romanian historiography. Studies concerning the relation between the Church and the state published so far tended to assume the idea of a “monotonous”

¹³ See for example Hsia R. Po-chia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe, 1550-1750*, a valuable book, as it examines not only the centralised states but also the Central European region is taken into consideration.

¹⁴ See Heinz Schilling, “Confessionalization in the Empire: Religious and Social Change in Germany between 1555-1685”; see also Heinz Schilling, “Das konfessionelle Europa. Die Konfessionalisierung der europäischen Länder seit Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts und ihre Folgen für Kirche, Staat, Gesellschaft und Kultur.”

¹⁵ See Wolfgang Reinhard, “Pressures towards Confessionalization? Prolegomena to a Theory of the Confessional Age.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See the collection of studies *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, eds. Ole Peter Grell and Robert Scribner; Paul Kleber Monod; Bodo Nischan, *Society and Culture in the Huguenot*

interdependence between the ruler and the Church, insisting on various but not substantial changes in this respect.¹⁸ The general interpretation assumed is that at least after the second half of the fifteenth century (namely after 1453) the State-Church relation tends to follow the Byzantine model. This transition was to be stimulated by the wide spread circulation of various theological and juridical writings, among them Matthew Blastares' *Syntagma* being the most important due to the fact that it included the political theological work of Patriarch Photius, *Eisagoge* (written around 885-886).¹⁹

However, there are still some studies which tried to deal with the relation between the rulership and religion, or the influence of the religion over society and culture, but there is no valuable hint towards a possible phenomenon of state-confessionalisation in Moldavia and Wallachia.²⁰

4. Available primary sources

Unfortunately, the primary sources on Moldavia and Wallachia, their quality and amount, especially concerning the activity of the three studied princes, do not allow the researcher to launch into profound investigations and to reach firm conclusions. There is still enough room left for possible interpretations and speculations considering either the Renaissance influences or the relation between religion and state. Moreover, there is a notable difference concerning the distribution of various types of sources on each of the three rulers. In the case of Rareș we have a rich

World, 1559-1685, eds. Andrew Spicer and Raymond A. Mentzer, (see especially the chapter 4: "Confessionalisation in France? Critical Reflections and New Evidence," 44-61).

¹⁸ See Nicolae Grigoraș; Mihail M Andreescu; Petre P. Panaitescu, Valeria Costăchel, Aurel Cazacu, *Viața feudală în Țara Românească și Moldova (secolele XV-XVII)* (The Feudal Life in Wallachia and Moldavia); Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria ideilor politice românești (1368-1878)* (The History of the Romanian Political Ideas 1368-1848); Manole Neagoe; Nicolae Iorga, *Sensul monarhiei la români* (The Significance of the Monarchy for Romanians); Mircea Păcurariu; Nicolae Dobrescu.

¹⁹ See Dan Ioan Mureșan. For a general overview on the Byzantine influence on Moldavian and Wallachian rulership see Nicolae Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance, continuation de l'histoire de la vie byzantine*; Andrei Pippidi; Valentin Georgescu; Dumitru Năstase.

²⁰ See Petre P. Panaitescu, "Petru Rareș și Moscova" (Petru Rareș and Moscow); Maria Crăciun, "Protestantism and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth-Century Moldavia"; Maria Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie în Moldova secolului al XVI-lea* (Protestantism and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth-Century Moldavia); Șerban Papacostea, "Moldova în epoca Reformei. Contribuție la istoria societății moldovenești în veacul al XVI-lea" (Moldavia in the Reformation Period. Contributions to the History of the Sixteenth-Century Moldavian Society); Sorin Ulea, "O surprinzătoare personalitate a evului mediu românesc, cronicarul Macarie" (A Surprising Personality of the Romanian Middle Ages, Macarie, the Chronicler); Cesare Alzati.

diplomatic and private correspondence, available especially in the so – called “Hurmuzaki” collection of documents.²¹ This correspondence include letters sent or received by Rareș, or various letters issued by third persons involved in a way or another in Rareș’s decisions and initiatives. There are also official internal documents available, but most of them are judicial documents, sentences and especially land donations.²² The third series of sources on Rareș’ rulerships consists in internal chronicles, most of them written after the death of the prince.²³ There is also an external account, Paolo Giovio’s *Historia sui temporis ab anno 1494 ad annum 1547*, that provides some details on Rareș’s rulership and also on his personality.²⁴ Besides this, the pictorial sources, such as the external frescoes of the sixteenth-century churches founded by him offer very interesting information concerning the possible confessional policies of the ruler.

As opposed to the case of Rareș, the Despot “benefited” from much larger and more generous contemporary accounts. If we just enumerate his *Vitae*, there are four main biographical accounts (while Rareș did not have any).²⁵ These biographies

²¹ See *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor* (Documents Concerning the History of the Romanians) vol. 2, part 1 (1451-1575); *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor* (Documents Concerning the History of the Romanians) vol. 15, part 1. *Acte și scrisori din arhivele orașelor ardelene Bistrița, Brașov, Sibiu: 1358-1600* (Acts and Letters from the Archives of the Transylvanian Towns, Bistrița, Brașov, Sibiu). See also *Călători străini despre Țările Române* (Foreign Travellers on Romanian Countries), vol. 1. See also Ilie Corfus, *Documente privitoare la istoria României culese din arhivele polone. Secolul XVI* (Documents Concerning the Romanian History, Selected from the Polish Archives), vol. 1. Very interesting documents are provided by Panaitescu, “Petru Rareș...”, concerning the confessional aspect in Rareș’ relations with Moscow and Poland.

²² See *Documente privind istoria României. A. Moldova. Veacul XVI* (Documents Concerning the History of Romania. Series A. Moldavia. The Sixteenth Century). Vol. 1 (1501-1550).

²³ The only exception is Macarie’s chronicle which is actually the official chronicle of Rareș’ reign – see Ioan Bogdan, 90-105. The other internal chronicles are those written by Nicolae Costin, and Grigore Ureche.

²⁴ It was partly published (only the parts concerning Rareș) by Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu.

²⁵ These were written by Johannes Sommer Pirnensis (*Vita Jacobi Despotae Moldavorum reguli descripta a Johanne Sommero Pirn, adjectae sunt ejusdem autoris. De Clade Moldavica elegiae XV*), Francis Forgach (*Vita Iacobi Despotae, alias Heraclidae Basilici dicti, excerpta ex monumentis Historiarum illustris ac magnifici*) and Antonius Maria Gratianus (*De Johanne Heraclide Despota Valachorum Principe libri tres*). See in Émile Legrand and in Johannes Sommer Pirnensis, Antonius Maria Gratianus. Sommer’s *Elegiae XV* are very useful, for they contain information on Despot’s library from Suceava and on the Protestant *collegium* from Cotnari. The fourth one is anonymous and it was discovered in the Archive of

provide rich information on the Despot's rulership and also his career, Sommer and Gratianus being the most valuable. There are also several brief external accounts, such as a report made by the papal nuncio in Poland, Giovanni Commendone, Michael Siglerius' *Chronologia universalis*, a secret report of an English spy from Trent, or the chronicle of the Armenians from Camenitsa.²⁶ The reports prepared by the diplomatic envoys, Johannes Belsius and Martin the Literate (who were sent to Moldavia in order to provide information on the Despot's reign to the Habsburgs) contain important and useful data concerning the Despot's diplomatic initiatives, his plans, and also his religious policy.²⁷ There are also the letters that form the Despot's private and official correspondence, either with Protestant personalities or with official authorities (such as the Polish or the Habsburg court).²⁸ The internal chronicles offer also significant information for our research, mainly on cultural and religious initiatives, attitudes towards Orthodoxy and the Moldavian Orthodox Church.²⁹ Also the internal official documents are very few only one particular document is useful for our research.³⁰

On Petru Cercel's rulership the sources are much poorer than in the case of Rareș (whose diplomacy at least is satisfactorily covered). Franco Sivori's *Memoriale delle cose occorse a me Franco Sivori del signor Benedetto doppo la mia partenza di Genova l'anno 1581 per andar in Vallachia*, published for the first time in 1944 by Ștefan Pascu, is the only available contemporary source that provides good data on Cercel's reign.³¹ Besides these, on Cercel's rulership there are various letters, either

Perugia by the Romanian researcher Constantin Radu, who published it in 1934 - see Constantin Radu.

²⁶ See Nicolae Iorga, *Nouveaux matériaux pour servir à l'histoire de Jacques Basilikos l'Héraclide dit le Despote, Prince de Moldavie* (for Commendone's account); Alexandru Lapedatu (on Siglerius); Edward D. Tappe, (the report of the English spy); H. Dj Siruni (on the Armenian chronicle).

²⁷ See *Călători străini*, vol. 2.

²⁸ See Endre Veress, *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești* (Documents Concerning the History of Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia), vol 1, see also Iorga, *Nouveaux*.

²⁹ See monk Azarie's chronicle in Bogdan, 143-146, and the Moldavian-Polish Chronicle in *ibid.*, 165-166. See also Ureche and Costin.

³⁰ It is about the document issued on March, 17, 1562, in the town of Iași, concerning a land donation to the monastery of Humor – see *Documente privind istoria României, A. Moldova. Veacul XVI* (Documents Concerning the History of Romania. Series A. Moldavia. The Sixteenth Century), vol. 2 (1551-1570).

³¹ Ștefan Pascu, *Petru Cercel și Țara Românească la sfârșitul secolului XVI* (Petru Cercel and Wallachia at the End of the Sixteenth Century), 136-278.

diplomatic or private, concerning mainly diplomatic or personal issues.³² Cercel's internal official documents are not really very many; however, they are still helpful for establishing the general attitude of the prince towards the Wallachian Orthodox Church.³³

The lack of a large number of relevant sources, especially on Cercel and partially on Rareș, will consequently determine a certain lack of balance in our presentation and analysis. However, the basic information is still there and, in my opinion, it is liable to allow a logical and comprehensible analysis of the issue and reasonable interpretations, presumably able to offer a picture very close to the reality.

5. *Methodology*

Due to the lack of extensive information, this research will focus on a small number of sources from several points of view. Firstly, needless to say, the critical approach is always necessary throughout the analysis. The next step is the corroboration of all sources available on one particular issue, such as the Despot's attitude towards Orthodoxy, or Cercel's intention to establish Catholic educational foundations in Wallachia. Comparisons with the previous period and with the general situation in the region of Eastern Europe will constitute the main background of our argument, in order to be able to propose a valuable interpretation. Contextualisation is meant to establish a link between particular contexts and particular decisions and initiatives.

6. *Hypothesis and expected conclusions*

There are two main hypotheses that I try to demonstrate in this thesis. The first one is that we cannot speak about a Renaissance rulership in sixteenth-century in Moldavia and Wallachia, as this model could not function in a non-Renaissance environment. A corollary of this first hypothesis is that we can certainly speak about personalities with

³² *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor* (Documents Concerning the History of the Romanians), supplement 1, vol. 1 (1518-1780); *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor* (Documents Concerning the History of the Romanians), vol. 3, part 1 (1576-1600); *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor* (Documents Concerning the History of the Romanians), vol. 11. *Acte din secolul al XVI-lea, 1516-1612 relative mai ales la domnia și viața lui Petru Vodă Șchiopul* (Documents from the Sixteenth-Century, 1516-1612, concerning especially Petru Vodă Șchiopul's rulership and life).

³³ *Documente privind istoria României B. Țara Românească. Veacul XVI* (Documents Concerning the History of Romania Series B. Wallachia. The Sixteenth Century), vol. 5 (1581-1590).

Renaissance attitudes, in the case of the Despot or Cercel (although rather integrated in its late manifestations), but, presumably, not about Renaissance princes.

The second hypothesis refers to the idea of confessionalisation. I will try to stress the idea that in sixteenth-century Moldavia and Wallachia this phenomenon began to take similar shapes as in the case of Central and West European cases, although its finality in the seventeenth and eighteenth century proved to be slightly different. The beginnings are, however, promising and presumably bear certain and important influences of the general European situation dominated by the increasing tension between Reformed proselytism and the Counter-Reformation.

CHAPTER 1

The Prince and his Diplomacy in Sixteenth-Century Moldavia and Wallachia: Facing the New Challenges of the Epoch

Foreword

The aim of this chapter is to present the way in which the three rulers studied in this research constructed their diplomacy. In our understanding (particularly applied to this context) this means the modality which resulted from two main factors: firstly the main ideas of the ruler that influenced his foreign policy, and secondly his particular approach in coping with various diplomatic issues. It is not our intention to put the main stress of our research on the facts themselves as they have been studied extensively, although some details may need further clarification. The East European diplomatic context and the diplomatic initiatives of the studied princes will constitute just as a brief overview, meant to contextualise our argument and to make it logical and easily comprehensible.

1.1. Petru Rareș: “Dreaming” Byzantium

The core idea of Rareș’ diplomacy was the liberation of Constantinople and, as a corollary, the acquisition of the imperial title. These two aims represented the “secret” finality of all his anti-Ottoman projects.

The Moldavian foreign policy was inevitably influenced by the evolution of East Central Europe after 1526. The presence of the Ottoman armies in the very core of this area and the rapid disintegration of the Hungarian kingdom dramatically changed the balance of power in the region. In such circumstances, for Moldavia there was hardly an alternative. The anti-Habsburg policy was at the beginning of Rareș’ reign his only option in order to avoid eventual Turkish reprisals.³⁴ This decision was

³⁴ Petru Rareș, however, conducted several negotiations with Ferdinand II of Habsburg in 1527–1528, as the position of the Ottomans did not become firmly precise concerning the situation in Hungary. See Nicolae Grigoraș, “Precursor al lui Mihai Viteazul” (Forerunner of Michael the Brave), 91 in *Petru Rareș*, ed. Leon Șimanschi (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1978). See also Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Petru Rareș (1527-1538; 1541-1546)* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1982, 19-32. These negotiations, started in February 1527 with the proposals of anti-Ottoman alliance made by Ferdinand through his envoy, Laurentius Mischlinger, were conducted prudently by Rareș, who tried to avoid a premature commitment to the Habsburg cause (this attitude could be seen as entirely logical for a prince enthroned a month earlier, on January 20). The historians seemed to agree that both Ferdinand and Rareș did nothing more than explore the field: neither of them was at that time ready to make valuable

reinforced by the order of the Sultan himself, who asked Rareș to occupy Transylvania and to give it to Zápolya.³⁵ The successful Moldavian “military demonstration” from 1529 against the pro-Habsburg forces from Transylvania was consequently followed by the agreement of Lipova concluded between Rareș and Zápolya on May 11, 1529. Moldavia agreed to support with its military forces Zápolya’s efforts to maintain control over Transylvania, while the Hungarian king recognised the possessions of Rareș in eastern and northern Transylvania, namely Ciceu, Cetatea de Baltă, Ungurașul, the city of Bistrița and the whole Rodna valley.³⁶ At that moment, for the Transylvanian pro-Habsburg party Rareș was a lost cause.

The relation with Poland was also developed on the basis of the position of the Polish king, Sigismund I, concerning the situation from Hungary after 1526. In order to prevent the strengthening of the Habsburgs in East Central Europe by taking over the Hungarian territory, Poland supported the legitimacy of Ioan Zápolya as the successor of Louis II. Rareș concluded a treaty of “good neighbourly relations” with Poland at the very beginning of his rulership, in 1527. Later, the border conflicts and the hostile attitude of Sigismund manifested towards the diplomatic contacts established by Rareș with Moscow (which was until 1537 at least, the enemy of Poland), led to the deterioration of the Polish – Moldavian relations.³⁷ When Sigismund decided to conclude a treaty with the Ottoman Porte in May 1533, which

offers. See also Ioan Ursu, *Die auswärtige Politik des Peter Rareș, Fürst von Moldau (1527-1538)* (Vienna, 1908).

³⁵ Suleyman’s order was obtained by one of Zápolya’s diplomatic missions to Constantinople, carried out by the Polish Jeronym Laski at the beginning of 1528. This decision was meant to put Rareș away of any pro-Habsburg position or influence and to use the Moldavian military forces for defeating the pro-Habsburg party from Transylvania. At that time Zápolya himself was a refugee in Poland and the Habsburg troops controlled the region.

³⁶ See the text in Hurmuzaki, vol. 15, part 1, 325-326.

³⁷ This deterioration produced a war in 1530-1531, when Rareș occupied Pocutisia. The war ended with the Polish victory at Obertyn in August 1531. For extensive details concerning the evolution of the political relations between Poland and Moldavia from 1527 until 1538 see Veniamin Ciobanu, “Apărător al moștenirii lui Ștefan cel Mare” (Defender of Stephen the Great’s Heritage), 109-135, in *Petru Rareș*; also see Veniamin Ciobanu, *Țările române și Polonia. Secolele XIV-XVI* (The Romanian Countries and Poland from the Fourteenth until the Fifteenth Century) (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1985), 137-191. For the main primary diplomatic sources on this issue, see Ilie Corfus, *Documente privitoare la istoria României culese din arhivele polone* (Documents concerning the History of Romania collected from Polish Archives), Sixteenth Century Series (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1979), a useful collection in which the documents can be found transcribed in the original language. Concerning the relation between Moldavia and Moscow, Ciobanu considered that they were based on Rareș’ principle to counterbalance possible Polish pressures (it is perhaps significant to mention here the fact that also Ferdinand of Habsburg considered Russia a valuable ally in his competition with the Polish Jagellons) – Ciobanu, “Apărător...”, 113. For Panaitescu the diplomatic contacts between Rareș and the Great Kenez of Moscow involved also a strong confessional aspect. See Petre P. Panaitescu, “Petru Rareș și Moscova” (Petru Rareș and Moscow) 265-278 in *În memoria lui Vasile Pârvan* (To the Memory of Vasile Pârvan) (Bucharest, 1934).

consecrated the “eternal peace” between the Polish king and the Sultan, the alliance with the Habsburgs represented for Rareș the only valuable option to avoid diplomatic isolation. It must be mentioned here that after concluding the peace with Sigismund, the Sultan decided to depose Rareș from the Moldavian throne, as Aloisio Gritti, one of the Italian officials of the Constantinople court, informed the castelan of Cracow, Andrzej Teczinsky. The Great Vizier communicated this decision officially to Teczinsky, as the collaboration of Poland in this matter was required.³⁸ Later, in 1534, Aloisio Gritti was sent by the Sultan in Transylvania in order to mediate the conflict between Zápolya and Ferdinand concerning the status of the Hungarian crown in the sense of consolidating the Ottoman position in the region. Both Rareș and Zápolya, however, collaborated against Gritti, succeeding in killing him on September 28, 1534, at Mediaș. The “Gritti episode” from 1534 narrowed even more the horizon of choice for the Moldavian prince.

Thus, on April 4, 1535, Rareș concluded a treaty of alliance and vassalage with Ferdinand, officially consecrating his anti-Ottoman position. This position implied for Rareș conflicts also with Poland or with Zápolya, considered by the prince “traitors to Christianity.”³⁹ A new campaign in Pocutsia was organised in August 1535, Rareș hoping unsuccessfully to solve the problem with the help of Ferdinand’s mediation. The fact that Pocutsia remained for Rareș “the Gordian knot” of his relation with Poland was used also by the Sultan, who tried to attract Moldavia into joining an anti-Habsburg campaign in 1536, promising Rareș in exchange that he would solve this problem. For the Moldavian prince, the presence of the Habsburgs in Hungary seemed to be far more important than a hypothetical Ottoman support for recuperating Pocutsia.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, it was hard to believe that Suleyman was ready to risk the peace with Poland for the sake of Rareș, a prince who proved to be rather hostile to the Ottoman interests in the region.

The Sultan confirmed to Ferdinand’s envoys in 1536 his decision to punish the prince of Moldavia for his policy.⁴¹ On July 8, 1538, the *Gazây-i Kara Boğdan* (The Holy War for Moldavia) became a reality. The official chronicler of the campaign, Mustafa Gelalzade, exposed the main two reasons of Sultan’s decision as following:

³⁸ See Corfus, “Activitatea diplomatică în jurul conflictului dintre Petru Rareș și Polonia” (The Diplomatic Activity Carried Out with the Occasion of the Conflict between Petru Rareș and Poland), *Romanoslavica*, 10 (1964), 337-338.

³⁹ See Ciobanu, “Apărător...”, 131.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

1) The constitution of a coalition against the Ottoman Empire in which the Moldavians took active part, and 2) Petru Rareș' continuous acts of disobedience to the Sultan.⁴² Abandoned by his boyars, who refused to fight for a lost cause, Rareș had to leave the throne in September 1538, taking refuge in Transylvania. After long and difficult tribulations he was to succeed in getting back the throne from the Sultan in December 1540. His second rulership, from February 1541 until his death on September 3, 1546, was marked by continuous efforts to maintain official good relations with the Ottoman Porte, although some initiatives to contact anti-Ottoman forces such as Joachim II of Brandenburg still proved the survival of his old projects.

As we asserted at the beginning of this subchapter, the core idea of Rareș' diplomacy was the realisation of an anti-Ottoman coalition able to put an end to the Ottoman domination over Eastern Christendom. It is very significant that his first diplomatic contacts were conducted with Ferdinand of Habsburg, at that time the most powerful and important opponent of the Turkish Empire. The reports of the Habsburg diplomatic envoys in Moldavia stress Rareș' strong willingness to take part in such a coalition. The Habsburgs' envoy to Moldavia, Peter Gerendi, related in 1536 that Rareș declared the following: "And when Your Majesty [King Ferdinand] comes to make a general expedition against the Turks, he should send 15,000 men, to which I shall add from my country 45,000 selected men, 20,000 from Transylvania and 25,000 from Wallachia." Gerendi added that "With these [forces] he wants to go as far as Constantinople, with the help of God."⁴³ Marcus Pemfflinger, sent by the Habsburgs to Rareș' court in the summer of 1536, advised Ferdinand to maintain good relations with Rareș as "later he could serve Your Majesty, especially against the Ottomans."⁴⁴ Such plans concerning "a general expedition against the Turks" could not stop until the conquest of Constantinople. Rareș shared his hopes and projects even with the Emperor Charles V. In a ciphered letter sent on September 14, 1537, from Hârlău, the prince proposed to the Emperor a plan of attack against the Ottomans to free Constantinople. The fact that this letter was sent in cipher and with great precautions (the intermediary who carried it had a false name) suggests the earnestness and consistency of Rareș' initiative.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁴² For this chronicle, see Nicolae Beldiceanu, George Zerva, "Une source ottomane relative à la campagne de Soliman le Législateur contre la Moldavie (1538), *Acta historica* (Munich), vol. 1 (1959): 45.

⁴³ See *Călători străini*, vol. 1, 378.

There is another corollary of Rareș' strongly anti-Ottoman diplomacy. Behind the insistence of the Moldavian ruler in convincing the Habsburgs to organise a general expedition against the Turks seems to be much more than the desire to put an end to the Ottoman domination over Moldavia and over the Balkan region. One cannot avoid this impression when reading Peter Gerendi's report from the summer of 1536, concerning the availability of the Moldavian ruler to go with military troops to Constantinople. It seems that Rareș needed only Ferdinand's military support for this expedition.

The monk Macarie, the superior of the Hilandar Monastery from Mount Athos, came to Moldavia in 1533 to ask Rareș for a donation to his monastery. The donation document was issued on March 13, 1533, confirming for the monastery an annual donation of 3000 *aspers*, available during Rareș' reign.⁴⁵ The promise of the prince that he would donate much more "if the Lord... and the Most Pure Mother of the Lord... will be merciful with us to free us from the hands of the foreign peoples..." was related to the desire of Rareș to escape Ottoman domination. According to the young Romanian researcher Dan Ioan Mureșan, however, it seems that Macarie had also another mission. He was at the same time the envoy of Prochor, the archbishop of Ohrid, and in this capacity, he proposed to Rareș to accept the jurisdiction of the archbishopric of Ohrid, possibly offering in exchange the Imperial title.⁴⁶ This right could not be legitimately used unless its owner was to recover Constantinople, the Imperial capital *par excellence*. Thus, Rareș' hope was organically related to the need to legitimise his claims, a need which was manifested in his desire to liberate Constantinople from the Ottoman domination. In this context, Prochor's offer may have appeared to meet the prince's expectations. To support his interpretation, Mureșan pointed out another interesting fact: in the Moldavian version of Matthew Blastares' *Syntagma* (realised around 1534-1535) the passages, interpolated by the superior of Hilandar in the original text, were also included.⁴⁷ Macarie's interpolation

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 379.

⁴⁵ See *Documente privind istoria României* (Documents concerning the History of Romania), series A (Moldavia) Sixteenth-Century Collection, ed. Ion Ionașcu, L.Lăzărescu Ionescu *et alii*, (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1953), 356-357 (Romanian translation from the Slavonic original).

⁴⁶ See Dan Ioan Mureșan, "Rêver Byzance. Le dessein du prince Pierre Rareș de Moldavie pour libérer Constantinople" (article to be published in *Études byzantines et post-byzantines*, vol. 4, Bucharest, 2001)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 23. This interpolation was made around 1526-1527 and referred to the ancient jurisdiction of Ohrid as it was proclaimed by Justinian's *Novellae*: "... beatissimum vero primae Justinianae, patriae nostrae, archiepiscopum semper sub sua jurisdictione habere episcopos provinciarum Daciae

suggested that Moldavia, Wallachia and Transylvania (called *Daciae*) should be under the jurisdiction of the archbishopric of Ohrid. The fact that this interpolation was inserted also in the Moldavian *Syntagma* from 1534/1535 was clearly Rareș' decision, therefore concurring with Prochor's pretensions.

Rareș' decision to accept the jurisdiction of Ohrid over Moldavia, however, was not carried out purely for Prochor's sake. Mureșan inferred that Macarie offered in the name of the archbishop the promise that after the liberation of Constantinople Rareș would be crowned Emperor.⁴⁸ In these circumstances, it is perhaps not by chance that Rareș decided to marry the Serbian princess, Elena Ecaterina Branković, (the daughter of the Serbian despot, Iovan Branković), who could count as her ancestors Byzantine emperors from the dynasties of the Comneni and the Cantacuzeni.⁴⁹

Rareș' desire to fight against the Turks cannot be better proved than by his own words. The most significant declarations are those recorded during his second rulership, after he bitterly experienced the tragic failure of 1538. Nicholas the Armenian wrote on June 2, 1542, to the Polish king quoting from Rareș' declarations:

If I were to see that a certain Christian king rises against the Turks with power and faith, then I would loyally join him and I would help him with all my power. Now I cannot, however, do otherwise because I have nobody to join, I have to do what the Turk orders... I keep, however, the same firm determination and opinion to join the Christians' side until my death... Tell the king of Poland not to trust the Turks and their friendship at all, as I am with them and I meet them and I have perceived the secrets of their mind and their plots against the Christians.⁵⁰

A more touching testimony is that concerning his son, Alexander, sent to Constantinople as hostage to guarantee the faithfulness of the Moldavian ruler to the Sultan on June, 1542. In the same letter of the Polish envoy, Rareș confessed, "I know that I had to send my son, who will have to be sacrificed for Christianity, but I do not

Mediterraneae, et Daciae Ripensis, Praevalensis et Dardaniae et Mysiae superioris et ab eo illos ordinari" (Novella 131). See *ibid.*, footnote 103. Macarie explained further that "*Dacia*" represented "the Moldovlahia and Ungrovlahia, which is called also Muntenia" while "*Mediterranea*" "is today Hațeg, Transylvania and Munkács." See also Gorovei, 120-121.

⁴⁸ See Mureșan, 23.

⁴⁹ See Gorovei, "Familia" (The Family): 268, in *Petru Rareș*. For a complete picture of Elena Branković's genealogical tree, Alexa Ivici's work, *Rodoslovne tablice* (Novisad, 1928) was considered by Gorovei as the most valuable. Mureșan, arguing that the relations between Ohrid and Suceava must have begun earlier than 1533, supposed that the marriage between Elena Brankovic and Rareș in April 1530 may have been mediated by one of Prochor's agents. See Mureșan, 22.

⁵⁰ See the Latin text in Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 224. The Romanian translation in *Călători străini*, vol. 1, 387-388.

care about it, as from the day when my son was carried over the Danube I have considered him to be dead.”⁵¹

1.2. Jacob Heraclides Despot and his “Dacian” Ambitions

Jacob Heraclides Despot was one of the few princes from Moldavia and Wallachia whose education bore the seal of Renaissance education. Thus, his political projects seem somehow to balance between utopias and pragmatism. His “Dacian” ambitions and also his response to the challenges of the period reflect this tension.

After the battle of Verbia, held on November 18, 1561, between the Despot’s mercenary troops and the army of the Moldavian prince, Alexandru Lăpușneanu, which ended with the Despot’s victory, Francis Zay (the captain of the province of Kosice) wrote to the Austrian archduke, Maximilian, in a letter sent on December 15, 1561,: “Moldavia is... in the power of Your Majesty with true loyalty and everlasting obedience, in all duties with diligence, and all the promised things it will prove them in a short time.”⁵² The fact that the Despot acquired the throne by fighting with a prince who was considered to be loyal to the Ottoman interests strengthened the idea that the new Moldavian ruler was going to bring his country into the Habsburg sphere of influence, and thus to join its anti-Ottoman orientation. The Despot himself issued a proclamation, addressed to all the people of Moldavia, in which he proclaimed that “my wish is not other than to free this country of mine from the tyrants and to bring it again into a good condition as it was before, during the time of my illustrious ancestors.” He added furthermore that his intention “is not other than to fight day and night against the heathen and damned Turks.”⁵³ He even presented a plan of the future anti-Ottoman offensive, which was intended to be carried out both on earth and on sea, through Wallachia and “the Greek Country.” The most important thing was that, according to the Despot, this campaign was to be supported by the Emperor Ferdinand, together with the other “Christian rulers,” and with the help of the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Thus the official position of the new ruler was clearly expressed. Moreover, both the Emperor Ferdinand and the Austrian archduke,

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² See Endre Veress, *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești* (Documents concerning the History of Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia). Vol. I. (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească, 1929), 204.

⁵³ See Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 415-416. He also mentioned here that he is going to recover “the places of Moldavia that the Heathen [the Ottoman Porte] controls” referring to Chilia, Cetatea Albă and Tighina.

Maximilian, encouraged the Despot to maintain his political orientation, promising support.⁵⁴ By the end of 1561, two diplomatic envoys were sent by Maximilian to Moldavia, Iohannes Belsius and Marcus Bergkowicz.⁵⁵ Their mission was to collect and send information on the state administration, the attitude of the Moldavians towards their new ruler, the attitude of the Turks and of other princes, and the available forces of the Despot in the case of military aggression. The main question which the two envoys were requested to answer properly was whether there was a hope for a powerful and lasting rulership and what the Emperor should expect from the Despot (basically what other benefits the Habsburg interests could get from this ruler).⁵⁶

Concerning the issues of foreign policy the first report sent by the two envoys (dated April 8, 1562, from Hârlău) describes the ceremony of investiture carried out by the representative of the Sultan on March 16, 1562, in Iași.⁵⁷ This event consecrated the official diplomatic confirmation of the Despot as the ruler of Moldavia after long and laborious negotiations undertaken by the Despot in Constantinople. For the Despot it was a real coup to convince the Sultan that he did not intend to drive Moldavia into the Habsburg sphere of influence, and the French ambassador in Constantinople, Petrémol, made an important contribution to his success.⁵⁸ This radical change of the Despot's attitude concerning the Ottomans was determined by practical reasons, as the prince realised that it was at that time impossible for him to avoid, if not an immediate confrontation with the Turks, then at

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 395-396 (for Ferdinand) and 392, 397-398 (for Maximilian).

⁵⁵ Iohannes Belsius was the particular secretary of the Humanist Anton Verancsics and later of Francis Zay. He was ordered secretly to stay permanently at the court of the Despot. Bergkowicz's mission was to bring the reports realised in Moldavia to the court of Prague.

⁵⁶ See Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 398-399 (the letter of instruction was issued on February 6, 1562). A Romanian abstract is provided in *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 131 (footnote 2).

⁵⁷ See Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 404-406 (see the Romanian translation in *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 131-136). The description of the ceremony is rather rich in details, especially concerning the gifts that were exchanged between the Despot and the Ottoman envoy, Ferhat Aga.

⁵⁸ See Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, *O domnie umanistă în Moldova. Despot Vodă* (A Humanist Rulership in Moldavia. Despot Vodă) (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1980), 60-61. Petrémol was convinced to support the Despot's cause with generous gifts that made him recommend the Despot to the French king, Charles IX, in terms such as "great and powerful prince of these lands [Moldavia]." The Despot used also the Ottoman governor of the Chilia sandjak, Gili, as his messenger and mediator to the Sultan. Moreover, the prince promised to Suleyman that he would rise the tribute of Moldavia from 30,000 ducats to 50,000. These arguments, and also the fact that a great part of the Turkish forces were engaged in military operations in the eastern part of the Ottoman Empire, determined the Sultan to confirm the Despot on January 15, 1562 (according to the information provided by Daniel Barberigo, the Venetian bail (see Veress, 207).

least a doubtless immediate diplomatic isolation that could irreparably erode his legitimacy both internal and external.⁵⁹

The promises made to the Habsburgs, however, were much more difficult to keep. The first decision that the Despot had to take against the Habsburg interests was not to support the Protestant pretender to the Wallachian throne, the Serbian deacon Demetrius, who was sent with diplomatic missions to Poland and Moscow.⁶⁰ As a prince of Wallachia loyal to Protestantism, Demetrius could serve the Habsburg policy towards Transylvania as much as it was hoped that the Despot would do in his turn.⁶¹ For the Despot, supporting Dimitrie could mean a great risk at that time, due to Ottoman suspicions. The Moldavian prince, however, did not abandon the anti – Ottoman cause. He asked Maximilian to send firearms in Moldavia “for the sake of Christianity,” as he was ready to gather at any moment 40,000 horsemen and 60,000 pedestrians, “but all them without weapons.”⁶² He ordered Belsius to communicate to the archduke that “all my neighbours live in peace with me and behave in a friendly manner; only the Turk gives me trouble: but if he [the Turk] is not more gentle and peaceful, I shall forget about the tribute and the peace.”⁶³ Maximilian answered the Despot’s request favourably, asking him only how to send him arms in order that the Ottomans should not find out.⁶⁴

This lack of resources hindered the Moldavian prince from taking an active part in the expedition of the army led by Francis Zay on March 1562, sent by Maximilian to drive away Sigismund Zápolya. While the Transylvanian troops were

⁵⁹ It is almost certain that the Despot was convinced to adopt this attitude by the Moldavian boyars, as Suleyman himself confirmed in a letter sent to the Polish king in 1562. See Corfus, 203.

⁶⁰ The deacon Dimitrie (Serbian in origin) was the representative of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in the discussions with the Protestants; Melanchthon used his services of mediation to contact the Patriarch. Dimitrie converted to Protestantism and stayed several times in Moldavia, the last time during the Despot’s reign, being an active Protestant missionary as most of the contemporary accounts suggested it. See Șerban Papacostea, *Diaconul sârb Dimitrie și penetrația reformei în Moldova* (The Serbian Deacon Dimitrie and the Penetration of the Reformation in Moldavia), 316-324 in *Evul Mediu Românesc. Realități politice și curente spirituale* (The Romanian Middle Ages. Political Realities and Spiritual Trends) (Bucharest: Editura Corint, 2001); see also Maria Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie în Moldova secolului al XVI-lea* (Protestantism and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth-Century Moldavia) (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujană, 1996), 135-137.

⁶¹ The military expedition of the Moldavian and Wallachian forces in Transylvania from 1556 which defeated the pro-Habsburg forces and helped Ioan Sigismund Zápolya to regain the control over Transylvania was organised mainly for re-establishing the Ottoman dominant positions in the principality (Sigismund Zápolya representing the anti-Habsburg and pro-Ottoman party). The events of 1556 convinced the Habsburgs once again that their hopes to take control over Transylvania and the position of Moldavia and Wallachia towards the principality were still inseparable elements. See Papacostea, 312, Berciu-Drăghicescu, 66.

⁶² See Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 407 (*Călători străini*, 140) (see Belsius’ report from April 13, 1562)

⁶³ *Ibid.*

defeated at Arad, on March 4, 1562, the Moldavian troops did not move. The Despot's measure was justified as he was expecting the Ottoman confirmation. Moreover, the Sultan himself asked him to help Sigismund Zápolya against Zay.⁶⁵ The prince had to maintain the same position during Székelys' uprising against the Transylvanian prince, although Sigismund Zápolya accused him to the Sultan of being "the main cause of his disaster" (namely the defeat of Arad).⁶⁶ The inactivity of the Despot was explained by Berciu-Drăghicescu as a strategy by means of which the Despot intended actually to conquer Transylvania for himself and not for the Habsburgs, and therefore he was waiting for a more convenient moment.⁶⁷ The argument, taken from Nicolae Costin's chronicle, strongly suggests this interpretation (the rumours that the Transylvanian prince had died were also recorded by Belsius in his report from May 9, 1562, sent from Iași). It seems, however, much more probable that the Despot simply did not feel secure engaging in risky military operations without having sufficient resources and support.⁶⁸

His interest in Transylvanian affairs cannot be denied, however. The Despot decided to use the Székelys to get advantages from Sigismund Zápolya. In his report from June 13, 1562, Belsius informed Maximilian about the Despot's intrigues. The Despot sent the boyar Orăș to negotiate with the Transylvanian prince, while Székelys' envoys to Moldavia were urged to continue the uprising. Another stratagem was also planned: to send Paul Székely, the captain (*pârcălab*) of Suceava, either to carry out negotiations for Ciceu and Cetatea de Baltă (which the Despot wanted to recover) or to pretend to be a rebel against the Despot and occupy the Székelys' land by force.⁶⁹ He also asked the Székelys' envoys "to be careful to accept as king either him [the Despot] or anybody else that he would choose, when John's

⁶⁴ See Veress, 217 (the letter was sent on May 1562).

⁶⁵ See Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 576.

⁶⁶ For the Habsburgs the Székelys represented a precious ally in their attempts to take control in Transylvania, due to their hostility towards Zápolya who curtailed their rights and privileges.

⁶⁷ See Berciu-Drăghicescu, 68. The author based her affirmation also on a fragment from the chronicler Nicolae Costin: "Once, the Despot found out that Jicmont [Sigismund], the Hungarian prince, died and set off with troops to enter Transylvania in order to acquire the rulership; and reaching Trotuș some news came that the prince regained his health and he [the Despot] came back to his capital." See Nicolae Costin, *Letopiseșul Țării Moldovei de la zidirea lumii până la 1601 și de la 1709 la 1711* (The Chronicle of the Moldavian Country from the Creation of the World until 1601 and from 1709 until 1711), ed.. Constantin Stoide and Ioan Lăzărescu, vol.1. (Iași: Editura Junimea, 1976), 207.

⁶⁸ We can note, in almost every report sent by Belsius, the Despot's requests for weapons addressed to Maximilian. His concerns to hire mercenaries prove his great lack of resources, as he could not equip an army by himself.

⁶⁹ See Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 432; *Călători străini*, 201.

son [Sigismund Zápolya] were to be banished from the rulership.”⁷⁰ This passage proves the Despot’s concern to have the power of decision in Transylvania.

Moreover, the Moldavian prince “admonished” Belsius for the non-combative attitude of the Habsburgs concerning Transylvania:

What do you want me to do? I can give them [the Székelys’] help but those who began [the Habsburg troops of Francisc Zay who attacked Zápolya] do not go further... There would be still time for us to rise up, your Emperor from one side, me from the other... The Sultan is dying now: his officials consider it certain that he will not survive October.”⁷¹

As the Habsburgs renounced interference in Transylvania after the peace treaty concluded with the Ottoman Porte on June 1, 1562, in Prague, the Despot’s project was later to be abandoned: Francis Zay wrote to the Despot on behalf of Maximilian, urging him to maintain the peace with Zápolya and the friendship with Poland.⁷²

Later, the Habsburgs seem to have considered more cautiously the Despot’s position towards Transylvania. Belsius’ successor, Martin the Literate, noted on March 10, 1563, that “everybody considers that if Your Majesties do not care about the situation in Transylvania, this damned country... will be soon annexed by the Turks or will be occupied even by this one [Despot] for himself at the first occasion that will occur, namely Sultan’s death.” In the postscript Martin added that “it is certain that, this year, the Despot will occupy Transylvania for himself unless Your Majesties take care of this. Because he is thinking of it day and night.”⁷³

The relations with Wallachia are also very interesting in the context of our discussion. According to Belsius’ reports, it seems that the initiative of rapprochement between the two rulers owed to the Wallachian ruler Petru the Young (Petru cel Tânăr) (1550-1568), who sent several envoys to the Despot offering him “peace” and “good neighbourly relations.”⁷⁴ The Despot accepted the offer with only one condition: a new re-consideration of the common borders. But there is one more important detail that Belsius mentioned: the fact that “the envoy negotiates the

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 207. The letter was sent on June 30, 1562.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 250-251.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 146, Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 412. The report is dated April 19, 1562. According to Belsius “the third envoy from Wallachia” (who came to the Despot’s court on April 16, 1562) told the Despot that Petru declared *foris et extra* “that he was brother with the Despot and that he would be friend with anyone who is friend to him and enemy to anyone who is enemy for him, no matter if those would be even the Sultan of the Turks or the Emperor of the Romans...” – *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 146.

Despot's marriage together with the agreement for a kind of hereditary rulership...⁷⁵ It is clear that the Despot tried to create an alliance with Wallachia based on matrimonial links that could get him hereditary rights to the throne of Bucharest. On April 30, 1562, in Iași, the ceremony of swearing the oath (meant to confirm the alliance between Moldavia and Wallachia) took place: the two rulers declared themselves bound "not only with the bond of neighbourhood and friendship... but also with the most holy bond of brotherhood."⁷⁶ Belsius considered this alliance favourably: "... I was filled with great joy, because it seemed to me that through the Despot the powers grow for Your Majesties."⁷⁷ The wedding date was decided for August 15, and the Despot confessed to Belsius that he was going to invite "His Majesty, the Emperor, the king of Spain... Your Majesty [Maximilian] and among Hungarians, the reverend Nicolaus Olahus, Nádasdy and Francis Zay, the Polish [king], the Prussian [Duke Albert] and the son of King John [the prince of Transylvania]. He does not want the Turk at all."⁷⁸ Later, this date was postponed to October 14 in order that the ceremony would take place together with the wedding of the prince Petru to a Transylvanian noblewoman.⁷⁹ Berciu-Drăghicescu supposed that another reason might have determined the postponement: the Ottoman-Habsburg peace from Prague, which damaged the Despot's position. In any case, the marriage never did take place. Martin the Literate noted in his report dated January 8, 1563, in Suceava, that "with the Wallachians the peace is conditioned with an annual tribute of 5,000 ducats; however, the promised bride was not given to him."⁸⁰ Of course, the tribute was to be paid by Wallachia.

It has been argued that the Despot tried to establish with Wallachia a typical feudal relation, between suzerain and vassal, following the model inaugurated by Stephen the Young in his conflict with the Wallachian ruler Radu of Afumați and repeated by Lăpușneanu in his relations with the Wallachian voivodes, Mircea Ciobanul and Pătrașcu cel Bun. The argument for this interpretation is represented by the Despot's attitude after the failure of his dynastic plans, when he brought to his

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 154, Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 408.

⁷⁷ *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 154.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 177, Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 426.

⁷⁹ *Călători străini*, vol 2, 192, Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 429.

⁸⁰ *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 224, Hurmuzaki, 447.

court a Wallachian pretender, Nicolae Basarab, whom he intended to enthrone by force at Bucharest.⁸¹

Did the Despot really think about a possible revival of the ancient Dacia under his sceptre? We may consider this hypothesis – which was supported by Berciu-Drăghicescu – as based on two sets of arguments. The first set is represented by his diplomatic relations carried on with Transylvania and Wallachia. At least concerning Wallachia, the Despot's intentions appear to be clear. In the case of Transylvania we do not have too much except the report of Martin the Literate. The other set concerns the Despot's own language as it appears in his proclamation issued at the beginning of his reign. Recalling the Roman origins of the Moldavians, the Despot tried to construct a collective identity based on the remembrance of a glorious past as a guarantee for future glory: "... if we make acquainted to the world the real Romans and their successors, both our name and our parents' name will be immortal."⁸² The idea of the Roman identity suggests a seductive parallel with the concept of Dacia, an important concept in the Humanist construction of the ancient identity of Moldavians and Wallachians. However, there is no direct reference to this in the Despot's documents and in the contemporary testimonies.⁸³ The strongest part of this argument is a classic example of political propaganda. Johannes Sommer, one of the Despot's biographers, noted that:

... in the morning of that day [January 6], after having risen from the bed, some of his [of the Despot] were immediately received, who knew about that artifice, suddenly one of those who were in the room rushed at the guards from the outside, showing on his face a great astonishment... This man, being asked about the cause of his fear, said that a kind of apparition appeared to him in the princely bedroom. When those guards entered he told them that there were three young men in clothes made from shining flax, as we can see that the angels are depicted, and that each of them was carrying a crown, and according to the movements of their bodies they seemed to greet the prince and then, immediately after, they vanished.⁸⁴

⁸¹ This information appears in a letter sent in the autumn of 1563 by the Moldavian boyars to some Ottoman officials requesting the confirmation for Ștefan Tomșa, who at that time was besieging the Despot in the city of Suceava. Among the reasons invoked by the boyars was that the Despot "intended to appoint as prince (bey) in Wallachia a wicked man like him, naming him Basarab's son." See Berciu-Drăghicescu, 74.

⁸² Hurmuzaki vol. 2, part 1, 415-416.

⁸³ Concerning the evolution of the Roman origin idea see Adolf Armbruster, *Romanitatea românilor. Istoria unei idei* (The Latinity of the Romanians. The History of an Idea) (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1993).

⁸⁴ See Emile Legrand, *Deux vies de Jacques Basilicos, seigneur de Samos, marquis de Paros, comte palatin et prince de Moldavie, l'une par Jean Sommer, l'autre par A.M. Graziani, suivies de pieces rares et inedites* (Paris: J. Maisonneuve, 1889), 36.

According to Sommer “the cleverest ones saw the fraud, although there were many who asserted obstinately that the story was true and explained this miracle to signify that his rulership will extend over three countries.”⁸⁵ In this latter case, the possibility that Despot really intended to realise the union between Moldavia, Transylvania and Wallachia seems to be fully argued by the contemporary accounts.

1.3. *Petru Cercel and the “Diplomacy of Survival”*

After a long odyssey as pretender to the Wallachian throne, in June 24, 1583, Petru Cercel succeeded in getting the official confirmation from the Sultan as the prince of Wallachia, succeeding the prince Mihnea II Turcitul.⁸⁶ The support of France and Rome proved to be decisive. But, what it is more interesting and even striking is that, according to the contemporary sources, Cercel was confirmed as ruler of Wallachia at the end of a kind of “auction.”⁸⁷ Assuming the risk of plunge into huge debts, which he might not be able to pay, Cercel overtook Mihnea’s offer. The “little” difference (only around 160,000 *tallers*) seems to have been decisive at Constantinople. This “method” of acquiring the throne had at that time no precedent, but later it became an inevitable part of the negotiations between the Ottoman Porte and various pretenders.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, diplomacy itself played an important role: one cannot imagine Cercel’s success without the support of French diplomacy. The new ruler did not forget to express his gratitude to the ambassador Germigny, and especially to Henri III and Catherine of Medici.⁸⁹ Cercel seemed to be a promising supporter of the “Oriental policy” that the House of Valois was trying to develop.

In these circumstances, Cercel had to keep the Ottoman and French susceptibilities in mind with regard to diplomacy. His attempts to legitimise his reign by initiating good relations with the neighbouring states, such as Poland or Moldavia,

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ For a more detailed presentation of Cercel’s biography see Cristian Luca, *Petru Cercel - un domn umanist în Țara Românească* (Petru Cercel - a Humanist Prince in Wallachia). (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 2000). See also Ștefan Pascu, *Petru Cercel și Țara Românească la sfârșitul secolului XVI* (Petru Cercel and Wallachia at the End of the Sixteenth Century) (Sibiu: Tipografia “Cartea Românească din Cluj”, 1944).

⁸⁷ Cercel paid huge sums of money (estimated at approximately 1,160,000 *tallers*), while his competitor, Mihnea II Turcitul paid around 1,000,000.

⁸⁸ This situation was also favoured by the increasing corruption of the Ottoman administration. However, this was still not very widespread at that time. (Later on this phenomenon was to become endemic.)

⁸⁹ See Luca, 83.

were influenced by such concerns. The relations with the Polish king, Stephen Báthory, were very poor, due to the fact that Henri III considered Báthory an “usurper” of the French rights to the Polish throne. Cercel’s initiative to send a diplomatic mission to Poland was finally abandoned at the suggestion of Germigny to avoid harming the dignity of his protector.⁹⁰ Moreover, the Polish king was a supporter of the previous ruler, Mihnea II Turcitul, and therefore he was not really interested in establishing good relations with Cercel. Also, the fact that Cercel was supported by the French diplomacy in acquiring the throne could not encourage an easy rapprochement between Wallachia and Poland at that time.

Conversely, the relations with Transylvania experienced good moments. The Transylvanian council of regency, after a short period of reservation, showed constant good will towards Cercel. The intense exchange of diplomatic missions between the two countries suggests an active communication, although the available documents do not provide very much information.⁹¹ Cercel’s interest in developing, and maintaining for as long as possible, good relations with the principality is presented by his secretary and diplomatic envoy, Franco Sivori, in the *Memoriale*:

Considerando Sua Altezza [Petru Cercel] che non ostante la protettione che di Lei teneva il Re di Francia, sendo lontano l’un paese dal altro, poco aggiutto harebbe pottuto riceverne in le occorenze; tenendo all’incontro della poca fede de Turchi, e che a quel tempo non lo deponessero del stado, come che già prendessero sospetto della sua grandezza e vallore, giudicò esser necessario procurar gualche stretto vincolo con Sigismondo Battori, Principe di Transilvania, accio come vicino e confine, potente di militia e di fortezze nel suo Paese, in ogni sinistro evento potesse haver ivi ricorso...⁹²

This passage is highly significant, because it explains the general orientation of Cercel’s diplomacy during his short reign. Considering the great difficulties, financial and political, in which he acquired the throne, the prince sought possibilities to guarantee his safety in case of “sinister events.” In September 1584, Sivori was sent to Transylvania to negotiate the issue of the “political asylum” of Cercel. The offer of the Wallachian ruler concerning the strengthening of the good relations was to

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ One of the main sources concerning the relations between Cercel and Transylvanian territories is represented by the custom registers from the city of Braşov (*Socotelile Braşovului*) which recorded several Wallachian missions crossing through the town to other destinations in the principality. Many of these missions were sent to determine the boyars who took refuge after Cercel was confirmed as prince of Wallachia to come back. For information concerning these missions one can consult Hurmuzaki, vol. 11, 828-829.

propose a matrimonial agreement consisting of his marriage with the sister of the Transylvanian prince, Sigismund Báthory, because “giudicò che fusse bene tentar di haver in matrimonio una sua sorella.”⁹³ According to Sivori, his real mission was to be kept secret, probably in order to avoid possible Ottoman negative reactions: “Era la mia ambasciata in apparenza per domandare alcuni baroni for usciti di Valachia, ritenuti in Transilvania, ma in segreto per trattare detto matrimonio, secondo le comissioni havute a bocca et in scritto da Sua Altezza.”⁹⁴

The council of regency accepted the matrimonial project proposed by Cercel to Sigismund Báthory. Sigismund’s uncle, the Polish king, gave his approval to this marriage, which was planned to take place in June 1585.

Concerning the relations with France, Cercel could not obviously offer a great incentive to King Henri III so that the French monarchy would strongly support him no matter what the conditions were. Cercel’s position depended to the greatest degree on the Ottoman decision. France could only offer him good will and willing mediations to the Sultan, frequently helpful for the Wallachian prince, but not much more than that.⁹⁵ Henri III’s influential position at Constantinople was constantly deteriorating, due to the internal conflicts from France. Cercel himself, as Sivori noted in his *Memoriale*, was aware of this situation. However, he could not – and in fact did not want to – to reconsider his relation with France. In Constantinople, Germigny’s mediations proved to be absolutely indispensable (at least for a while) for the Wallachian prince during his “competition” with the former ruler, Mihnea Turcitul. Moreover, Cercel owed gratitude to Henri III and Catherine of Medici, not to mention Germigny. That is why he decided at the end of 1584 to prepare a diplomatic mission to France, to be led by his Genoese secretary. He had, however, to convince the Sultan about his good intentions concerning this mission. Sivori noted:

... il [Petru Cercel]... comincia a riscaldarsi per dar compimento al suo desiderio di mandarmi in Italia e Francia. E per far le cose senza dar gelosia a Turchi, li parve espediente dar notticia al Gran Signore [Sultan] che desiderava mostrarsi grato col Re di Francia, per la protezione in che lo haveva sempre tenuto, e per haver ottenuto in gratia di Sua Maestà christianissima il Suo Regno, domandando al Gran Signore licenza di mandarli un ambasciata sontuosa, con presenti e dimostracioni di ogni

⁹² See Franco Sivori *Memoriale delle cose occorse a me Franco Sivori del signor Benedetto doppo della mia partenza di genova l’anno 1581 per andar in Vallachia*, in Ștefan Pascu, 183.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ These willing mediations were carried out mainly by the French ambassador in Constantinople, Jacques de Germigny.

gratitudine. E verso la fine di febraro hebbe la Sua Altezza risposta dal Gran Signore che li piaceva che lo facessi...⁹⁶

Finally the relations with the Ottoman Porte were affected by the tension between Cercel and Mihnea Turcitul. Their incessant struggle to maintain or to regain the Sultan's favours created what was later, in the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth century, to become a typical mechanism by which the Ottoman Porte regulated Wallachian and Moldavian princely affairs. Since then, the high official administration seems to have understood the enormous advantages of this mechanism. Germigny's successor, Berthier, referred in a letter sent on April 9, 1585, to "la corruption générale" as one of the main causes of Cercel's deposition.⁹⁷ "Les pratiques des hommes de Pierre Vayvode de Bogdanie [Petru Șchiopul, the prince of Moldavia at that time], oncle de Mihne" mentioned by Berthier in the same letter recall not only the intrigues carried on by Cercel's adversaries, but also to the impressive financial support on which these intrigues primarily based their success.⁹⁸

Petru Cercel is one of the "classic" examples of Wallachian (and also Moldavian) princes who, beginning from the second half of the sixteenth century, were confronted with the necessity of accepting the new election mechanism that the Ottoman Porte had envisaged for the confirmation of the Moldavian and Wallachian princes. As we could see in the case of the Despot in Moldavia, the promise of raising Moldavia's tribute convinced the Sultan to give him the confirmation despite his suspicions towards a prince who acquired the throne by military force dethroning a supporter of the Ottoman interests. In the case of Cercel, the system seems to be much more "run in": the throne of Bucharest slowly turned in an unexpected source of great revenues for a large number of Turkish high officials, starting with the Grand Vizir. In such circumstances for the Wallachian voivode, the horizon of the available options increasingly narrowed. When, on April 1585, Cercel officially received the notification of his deposition from the Sultan's envoy his answer was only the following: *Dominus dedit, Dominus abstulit, sit nomen Domini benedictum*.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ See Pascu, 13. Sivori's mission to King Henri III never took place, Cercel being deposed from his rulership just shortly before.

⁹⁷ See Hurmuzaki, supplement 1, part 1, 93-94. The French ambassador considered that the general corruption of the Ottoman administration led to "continuelz aux biennaux, triennaux et quoy que soit temporelz changement de vayvodes en ces deux Estats de Vallaquie et Bogdanye."

⁹⁸ Cristian Luca considered also the resignation of the Great Vizir, Siavush Bassa, as an important cause for Cercel's deposition, Siavush being one of his active supporters. See Luca, 88.

⁹⁹ Pascu, 199.

Chapter Two

Renaissance and Rulership in Sixteenth-Century Moldavia and Wallachia: Concepts and Issues

Foreword

This chapter will discuss the concept of the Renaissance prince, trying carefully to establish whether such a model of rulership really did function in sixteenth-century Moldavia and Wallachia. In order to set our discussion and argument on firm theoretical and methodological ground, I consider that the discussion of the various issues and concepts concerning the influence of the Renaissance towards the rulership in Moldavia and Wallachia must be primarily based on the comparison with the rulership model that functioned in the previous period (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries). This approach seems to me the best solution, enabling the reader to easily follow and understand my hypothesis and final interpretation. The argument will follow the basic functions of the rulership: internal and external legitimacy, diplomacy, state administration, and cultural initiatives.

2.1. *Internal and External Legitimacy*

The first question that arises in the mind of the reader is how could legitimacy (be it internal or external) bear the change within the mechanism of rulership. “Searching for legitimacy” is one of the main “favourable” arguments considered in the international scholarship dealing with the concept of the Renaissance prince. In the remarkable collection of essays dedicated to the Renaissance man, the British historian John Law discussed the legitimacy of the princes that ruled in Italy during the Renaissance.¹⁰⁰ Considering the interpretation of the Renaissance princes (at least from Italy) as the “new despots” that began a new age in politics and state administration, the motivation of Law’s approach seems entirely logical. And this argument is used by the above-mentioned historian to stress one of the main weak points of the “traditional” concept of the Renaissance prince. Law questioned the validity of Burckhardt’s model, succeeding in demonstrating that most of the Italian

¹⁰⁰ See John Law, *Principele Renaşterii* (The Renaissance Prince), 25-47, in *Omni Renaşterii* (The Renaissance Man), ed. Eugenio Garin, tr. Dragoş Cojocaru, (Iaşi: Editura Polirom, 2000) (I preferred to use the Romanian translation of the Italian original first published in 1988).

princes of the Renaissance did not consider themselves as *homines novi*, illegitimate rulers that did not seem to feel the need for integration in the European “traditional” hierarchical system.¹⁰¹ Law significantly concluded his essay by asserting that real sovereign power eluded the majority of the Italian princes. The need for continuity and integration seems to have been remarkably stronger than the desire for independence.

In the case of sixteenth-century princes from Moldavia and Wallachia, particularly for the three cases studied here, the question of legitimacy is more or less present. The historian Petre P. Panaitescu considered the break of the dynastic principle that appeared at the beginning of the sixteenth century as a real turning point to a new “profile” of the prince in Moldavia and Wallachia. He clearly recalls Burckhardt’s model: “It is the time of tyranny in the Antique sense of the word, when strong personalities replace the offspring of the old dynasties, it is the time of the decline of the dynastic principle ... Then, in the sixteenth century the dynasties of the Bessarabs and Mușatins vanish, and bold boyars, with no princely origin, get the throne.”¹⁰² “Tyranny” is not just a concept that defines an authoritarian rulership, but, nevertheless, its illegitimacy is stressed.

In the case of Petru Rareș we can certainly speak about a continuation of Stephen the Great’s dynasty. According to the chroniclers, Rareș, being confirmed as Stephen’s son, was fully entitled to acquire the Moldavian throne, the dynastic principle (“to descend from a princely bone” – the consecrated formula of the Moldavian and Wallachian chronicles) being respected.¹⁰³ The fact that he was an *illegitimate* son of the illustrious forerunner was a detail without importance. Also the Romanian historiography generally supported the interpretation that Petru Rareș’ reign was permeated – and in many respects determined – by continuous efforts to

¹⁰¹ It is very interesting to follow Law’s analysis, which proved that most of the Italian rulers (who “illegitimately” acquired the power) sought in getting the Roman Emperor’s confirmation by paying important sums to be granted the necessary titles. Moreover, many picturesque representations (emblems, seals, genealogical trees) strongly suggest princes’ need to establish an identity linked with the European “traditional” dynastic principle (see for example the princes from the family of Visconti who sought their genealogical roots in royal families from Cyprus or Sicily and even in the imperial houses from France and England). See Law, 34.

¹⁰² See Petre P. Panaitescu, “Renașterea și Românii” (The Renaissance and the Romanians), *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie Iași*, XXII/2 (1985): 719-734 (re-printed in Petre P. Panaitescu, *Interpretări Românești. Studii de Istorie Economică și Socială* (Romanian Interpretations. Studies of Economic and Social History), (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1994), 189:211 - the most recent edited collection of Panaitescu’s articles, which I actually used for my work)

¹⁰³ See Grigore Ureche, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* (The Chronicle of Moldavia), ed. Petre P. Panaitescu (București: Editura de Stat pentru Literatură și Artă, 1959), 148.

legitimise his authority with the idea of “continuation.”¹⁰⁴ In this context it is perhaps significant to present here some details concerning the “iconography of legitimisation.” A clear example is the first “church-foundation” from Dobrovăț (1529). This “foundation” actually represents a painting on the walls of an earlier foundation established by Stephen the Great. The idea of the continuity, already present *in nuce* in Rareș’ initiative (which took place at the beginning of his reign) is strengthened by the representation of the founders of the church. The painter depicted in a “chronological” succession three princes: Stephen the Great, Bogdan the Blind (Bogdan cel Orb) and finally, Petru Rareș. The faces of the three rulers are painted in the same manner, the effect for the onlooker suggesting a perfect resemblance. A (significant) omission, that of Stephen the Young (who reigned after Bogdan the Blind and before Petru Rareș), becomes logical in the general context: Stephen the Young was the nephew of Stephen the Great, while Bogdan the Blind was one of the legitimate sons. The idea of the natural continuation from father to son is in this way presented unaltered and easily decipherable.¹⁰⁵

The case of Jacob Heraclides Despot is far more striking. In November 1561, this Greek “adventurer” (as he was often called in the historiography) succeeded in acquiring the throne by force, fighting and defeating the legitimate ruler of that time, Alexandru Lăpușneanu. The parallel with famous figures of Renaissance Italian princes becomes strongly attractive. For Panaitescu, the Despot is “the adventurer who recalls Caesar Borgia,” making an allusion to the boldness and cunning of the famous son of Pope Alexander VI.¹⁰⁶ Concerning the legitimacy, at this moment there is no doubt that the Despot was totally foreign at least for any Moldavian dynasty.

The Despot himself tried to build his own legitimacy as ruler of Moldavia. The first step was claiming to have Moldavian origins. Sommer noted that he pretended to be the son of a Moldavian boyar, allegedly killed by Lăpușneanu in Bahlui, where Despot ordered a church to be built to the memory of his “father.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ See for this view mainly Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria românilor* (The History of the Romanians), vol. 4 (*Cavalerii* - The Knights), (Bucharest, 1937); Ciobanu, “Apărător...”, Gorovei, *Petru Rareș*.

¹⁰⁵ For general aspects concerning the significance of the external painting from the sixteenth-century churches from northern Moldavia, see Sorin Ulea, “Originea și semnificația ideologică a picturii exterioare moldovenești” (The Origin and the Significance of the Moldavian External Painting), *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei* (I) 1/1963, 57-94 and (II) 1/1972, 37-54.

¹⁰⁶ See Panaitescu, *Petru Rareș*, 204.

¹⁰⁷ See *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 258. Nicolae Costin asserted that after the battle of Verbia, the Despot ordered that a church be built in the town of Hârlău “to the memory of his father ... (see Costin, 200). The chronicler did not mention who the Despot’s father was.

Earlier, in 1558, (before defeating Lăpuşneanu at Verbia) Despot had published in Braşov his genealogy. Besides the fabulous origin – the legendary Greek hero, Hercules, being presented as his first ancestor – the Despot claimed that his grandfather, Basilikos, was a relative of the Serbian despot, George Branković (son of the Serbian despot, Stephen, and nephew of Lazar). By means of this genealogy, the Despot actually tried to affirm the idea that he was related to Lăpuşneanu's wife, Ruxandra, the daughter of Elena Branković (Rareş' last wife). This pretended kinship was meant to sustain eventual claims to the Moldavian throne at that time.

As we could see in the first chapter, the Despot could not avoid Ottoman confirmation as the inevitable means of his external legitimisation. His internal legitimisation was obtained by the princely coronation carried out on the Romanian Orthodox feast of Saint George (April 23, 1562 in Iaşi). The coronation ritual, described by Grigore Ureche and Nicolae Costin, suggests the desire of the Despot to strictly follow the tradition.¹⁰⁸ Following the tradition meant the public display of the continuity in rulership.

There is one more interesting aspect of Despot's case: the legitimisation by creating a social consensus. Adopting some very popular measures, such as the freedom of trade and the abolition of some taxes (such as the so-called "oxen tax") and also the leniency in passing judicial sentences attracted a large popularity at the beginning of his reign. The chronicler Azarie noted that "at the beginning he showed himself as tolerant and hating injustice. And ... he tamed the boyars with sweet words and promised them to make good things for them." This attitude led to the fact that "all the country submitted to him."¹⁰⁹

Discussing Cercel's case, we should stress from the beginning the fact that at the end of the sixteenth century Wallachia was becoming increasingly dependent on the Ottoman Porte. The circumstances in which Cercel acquired the throne do not leave any room for doubt. The most significant description of Cercel's legitimisation as prince of Wallachia under the auspices of the Sultan was provided by Sivori in his *Memoriale*:

Accompagnata che fu Sua Altezza al Pallazzo, ogn'uno se ne andò al suo allogiamento a riposarsi, e poi subito all'indomani, senilo il Principe ne suo

¹⁰⁸ See Ureche, 162, Costin, 202-203 (Costin noted that "following to the princely custom, the metropolitan Grigorie read the princely mass").

¹⁰⁹ See Ioan Bogdan, *Cronicile slavo-române din secolele XV-XVI* (The Slavonic-Romanian Chronicles from the Fifteenth until the Sixteenth Century) (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1959), 144.

trono sotto il baldachino, si fece la cerimonia del la incoronatione che fu molto sontuosa a l'usanza de quei paesi. E dappoi il Scudiero del Gran Turco che lo haveva accompagnato, facce un breve ragionamento alli baroni at al popolo che era radunato sopra la piazza avanti al Palazzo, comandandogli che per quanto havevan cara la gratia del Gran signore, dovessero obbedire et essere fedeli al loro Principe naturale, al quale il Gran Signore haveva restituito il Dominio di quel Regno; e messo poi in capo a Sua Altezza una beretta di brocato d'oro, alla usanza di Valachia ... ¹¹⁰

The significance of this contemporary account is indeed very important for our research. To my opinion, Sivori's description simply succeeded in revealing the main issue of Cercel's rulership: the legitimisation, which comes from the Sultan and is publicly confirmed in Bucharest by the Sultan's special envoy ("il Scudiero"). Cercel is crowned by this envoy who proclaimed him as "Principe naturale" There is no need for a further legitimisation. And the reign of this highly educated prince is proof in itself.

As a conclusion to this subchapter, we cannot assume that there is a strong difference between the previous period and the sixteenth century. Rareș' legitimisation is beyond doubt, as it is in the case of Petru Cercel, even if Rareș felt the need to reaffirm it. Despot seems to be the exception, but one which strengthens the rule. The Despot needed a legitimisation because he did not have it; but, more than this, he needed not a new legitimisation but a "traditional" one, which had necessarily to create a link with the past. The Despot presumably did not really want to create a discontinuity.

2.2. *The Diplomacy: To Be or Not To Be a Machiavellian prince*

Discussing generally the diplomacy of the sixteenth-century princes from Moldavia and Wallachia, two issues must be taken into consideration. The first one refers to the approach in conducting the diplomatic affairs, namely whether we can speak about a "new style" in diplomacy. The second refers to the mechanism of this diplomacy, trying to analyse whether significant changes occurred. The discussion tries to give an answer to the question whether we can speak about a new diplomacy in the period studied, and if so, whether this diplomacy can be qualified as belonging to the "Renaissance."

¹¹⁰ Pascu, 170.

Why should we discuss the diplomacy in connection with the Renaissance phenomenon? The main reason is the interpretation of the Romanian historiography which dealt with the sixteenth-century rulers and their policy. Historians such as Nicolae Iorga, Petre P. Panaitescu and Ștefan S. Gorovei discussed the diplomacy of Rareș or the Despot as recalling the famous model of the Italian Renaissance prince, as it was developed by Burckhardt. The concept of *virtù*, developed by the political thinkers of the Renaissance, was assumed also by the Romanian historiography, especially when they tried to realise a picture of the sixteenth-century Moldavian and Wallachian rulership integrated into a larger European perspective. Thus, every manifestation of strong individualities, particularly in politics, such in the case of Rareș or the Despot, became manifestations of this *virtù*.¹¹¹

It is significant to quote here the comparison that Panaitescu drew between Stephen the Great and rulers from the sixteenth century, such as the Despot or Michael the Brave. According to the historian, Stephen the Great was a “medieval ruler” who fought “with the manly wisdom of the last centuries of the Middle Ages.” In his external policy “he was always prudent ... he defended his country without great ideas of an imperial policy, like a boyar who defends the borders of his lands against his greedy neighbours; therefore he carried out only defensive wars.” Moreover, “he believed in *Republica Christiana*, as all princes of his time did.” The style of his letters is also significant in this sense: “he is not rhetorical ... but loquacious and with popular good sense.” Panaitescu concludes metaphorically: “He was a man of the Moldavian people, a higher tree in the forest, whose crown guards over the others, but with its trunk and roots alongside them.”¹¹²

Conversely, Michael the Brave, prince of Wallachia, was a “brave hero”, who “gave his life and youth for deeds of glory,” “his wars are held for conquest,” “he is a great personality, a strong individuality in the style of the Renaissance.”¹¹³ Also the Despot – as we mentioned in the previous subchapter – recalls Caesar Borgia.

¹¹¹ According to Jean Delumeau, the Renaissance notion of *virtù* can be defined as “la volonté de créer son destin, l’esprit d’entreprise, l’audace calculée, une intelligence aiguisée. Elle n’exclut ni la cruauté, ni la ruse lorsqu’elles s’avèrent nécessaires ... mais elle s’accompagne nécessairement de maîtrise de soi et d’une certaine grandeur d’âme.” See Jean Delumeau, *La civilisation de la Renaissance* (Paris: Les Éditions Arthaud, 1984), 336. This *virtù*, the Renaissance Italian synonym for the Antique Roman concept of *virtus*, was considered in the Renaissance to be the necessary condition for acquiring and especially for maintaining the state power and obtaining that fame, the ancient glory, as the supreme public recognition of a virtuous prince

¹¹² See Panaitescu, 204.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 205.

The contrast is very clear and truly attractive, but it does not leave any room for nuances. Stephen the Great's "popular good sense" needs a clearer definition. Panaitescu seems to have used it for stylistic purposes to suggest a certain mentality that influenced the way in which this Moldavian prince carried out his diplomacy. And it is clear that this "popular good sense" is the antonym of the Renaissance *virtù*, as it was for example defined by Jean Delumeau.

This contrast is also present in Iorga's depiction of Rareș's personality as it was reflected in his diplomacy. In 1929 he wrote: "Petru Rareș deserves to be put among the sovereigns from the Renaissance epoch. When he made a plan he followed him *per fas et nefas*, by bad and good ways, by honest and criminal methods. There was a moment when two men of the Renaissance stood here, in our country, face to face: Petru Rareș and Aloisio Gritti ... These two men fought [for Transylvania], being ready to use all Renaissance methods: falsehood, treason, poison, assassination. And between these two, having the peculiar political talent of the epoch, which was called *virtù* – with another meaning than the moral one – Petru Rareș was nevertheless the strongest."¹¹⁴

Gorovei, the author of the most recent monograph on Rareș' rulership (published in 1982!) described the Moldavian ruler in almost the same terms: "With the modulations and subtleties of his style, with his liveliness of expression, with his facility to set his mind and to cover it in words according to the addressee of the letter, with his straight honesty or with the secrets imposed by the defence of certain interests above the will and the desire of the moment, Petru Rareș presents himself to us, by his words and his deeds, as a political figure of the Renaissance."¹¹⁵ This in fact is the typical depiction of the Machiavellian model of the prince, actually assumed by the author: "But if Rareș did not know, perhaps, the *letter* of the work of the great Italian thinker, historian and political man, it is certain that he acted and behaved in *its spirit*, many of his actions seems to reflect Machiavelli's precepts."¹¹⁶

It is hard to define Rareș, educated in an environment where the Renaissance influences did not manifest themselves, as a Renaissance prince.¹¹⁷ Beyond certain

¹¹⁴ I used the latest edition available Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria românilor prin călători* (History of the Romanians by Travellers), ed. Adrian Angheliescu, (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981), 133.

¹¹⁵ Gorovei *Petru Rareș*, 227.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 229 (the sentence is preceded by a rhetorical question concerning whether Rareș did not have in his hands *Il Principe*).

¹¹⁷ According to the historiography Rareș seems not to have left the Moldavian territory until he acquired the throne, even if possible contacts with neighbouring countries, such as Transylvania,

personal qualities as they appeared in his letters (mainly diplomatic correspondence and contemporary accounts), there is no other evidence supporting the idea of Rareș as a Renaissance prince. Leon Șimanschi tried a more reasonable explanation, stressing Rareș' social background and his trading activities as a possible determination of the bold style of his foreign policy. Rareș' "... enterprising and active spirit, his contempt for the narrow horizon of the traditional medieval life or the cultivation of the increasing power of money" recommends him as a personality fundamentally educated in a lay spirit, manifesting a strong individuality, ready to primarily follow his own interests prior to the general one.¹¹⁸ A mercantile spirit could be much more credibly depicted as a Renaissance man. However, Rareș appeared as a strong individuality mostly in the contemporary accounts. The strongly "personalised" style of his letters (for example, the usage of verbs in the first person) suggests a sort of voluntarism, which did not appear clearly expressed in the previous period. But, if one applies Burckhardt's model when discussing the Renaissance prince and his diplomacy, one cannot avoid the impression that arguments for considering Rareș as a Renaissance ruler are rather unconvincing.

Considering the mechanism of the diplomacy there is very little to be said here. Unfortunately, until nowadays no general monograph on the diplomacy of Moldavia and Wallachia until the modern epoch (nineteenth century) has been published. Taking Garret Mattingly's work as a guiding point, we can consider that very few elements can show Renaissance influences on Rareș' diplomacy.¹¹⁹ The procedure of ciphering diplomatic correspondence, a procedure which appeared during the Renaissance, is certified only in one letter sent to the Emperor Charles V in September 14, 1537, from Hârlău. The mailing of this letter indicates also the first known secret envoy used in Moldavian diplomacy, Dionisio della Vecchia, who was called "bishop Vasile" by Rareș.¹²⁰ The diplomacy of the Moldavian prince is based on the "traditional" medieval system of non-permanent missions periodically sent to different destinations according to the interests of the ruler. The members of these

Poland and Wallachia, cannot be rejected due to the absolute lack of data. For this discussion, see Ion Toderașcu, "Înscăunarea" (The Enthroning) in *Petru Rareș*, 47-56.

¹¹⁸ Leon Șimanschi, "Personalitatea domnului" (The Personality of the Prince), in *Petru Rareș*, 319.

¹¹⁹ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (New York: Dover Publications Inc. 1988).

¹²⁰ See an analysis of this letter in Alexandru Ciorănescu, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor culese din arhivele din Simancas* (Documents concerning the History of the Romanians collected from the Simancas Archives) in *Academia română. Memoriile secțiunii istorice*, 3rd series, vol. 17 (1936), 11-12.

missions were not permanently appointed to carry out diplomatic tasks: they took part in these missions only because they knew the necessary languages required for communication and also probably due to their acquaintances among the authorities of that countries (especially in the royal or imperial courts). Among Rareș' diplomatic envoys we can mention here the chancellor Theodor, the bishop Macarie, the superior of the Probota monastery Grigore Roșca, or the treasurer Mateiaș.¹²¹ These people obviously had no permanent and regular contact with diplomacy, but only on a temporary basis.

Nevertheless, the case of the Despot seems to be radically different, due to the particular circumstances in which this prince acquired the throne. His education strongly recommends him as a Renaissance personality. His diplomacy, however, did not bring elements of novelty. Confronted with the inevitable Ottoman domination, Despot had very few options. He seems, however, to have adapted himself to this situation. One of Belsius' accounts is highly significant in this sense. In his report from April 19, 1562, Maximilian's envoy noted: "Today I respectfully asked him what new thing I could write to My Majesties from him. He answered that nothing else except that 'the Turks want me to be enemy to Your Majesties: I will be, however ... a favourable enemy', which I do not understand even now; *he even winked at me* [emphasis mine] and still I need adroitness [to understand]."¹²² Despot's foreign policy is obviously based on dissimulation, due to the conditions in which he had to carry out his rulership.

Concerning the mechanism of his diplomacy, the same situation can be easily noticed as in the case of Rareș. There was no regular diplomatic office, due to the poor opportunities of the country and due to the fact that the Ottoman domination tended to increasingly narrow the options of Moldavian and Wallachian rulers in matters of foreign policy. There is still one striking aspect of Rareș' and Despot's diplomacy: their outstanding ambitious projects. We have already discussed in the previous chapter Rareș' dreams of acquiring the Byzantine Imperial crown or the Despot's project to realise the ancient Dacia under his sceptre. The contemporaries of the two rulers were struck by this ambition. In the case of Rareș, the complicated web

¹²¹ Concerning treasurer Mateiaș there is an interesting contemporary account in one of the letters of the bishop of Lund from 1536: "I established with this man a great friendship and we decided to write to one each other. Indeed, he is a very modest man, very kind, and beside all this, prudent and rather moderate in his affairs..." – see Șimanschi, 320.

¹²² See *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 148.

of interests and confrontations in this part of Europe forced him to adopt a flexible diplomacy, as flexible as his ability of “political dissimulation” could allow. His contemporaries characterised him mainly as a *duplicitous* prince. The depiction made by the Protestant Humanist Anton Verancsics is truly significant in this sense:

His character... was extremely mobile and nothing lacked to him more than the honest manners. His mind was changing incessantly, one intention when he was sitting, another when he was standing. Always with two thoughts and slanting in all things, even with his friends. He had broken so often the holiness of the trust that nobody, neither among his neighbours or among his allies trusted his oaths any longer, and they were more doubtful when he swore harder.¹²³

The portrait realised by the Italian Paolo Giovio in his *Historia sui temporis ab anno 1494 ad annum 1547* is similar:

*Ab hoc Dracula Petrus pronepos [Petru Rareș] qui hodie regnat, imperium accepit, vir ingenio quidem militari, sed maxime turbulendo crudelitatemque simul atque perfidia infami: nam cum finitimus belli pacisque studium, nequaquam stabili fide sed in diem occasione et commodiis metitur suaque pariter ac aliena arma nemini unquam certus hostis sed improvisus semper exercet.*¹²⁴

The diplomatic envoy of Ferdinand, Marcus Pemfflinger, sent to Rareș’ court in the summer of 1536, wrote to the Austrian archduke on July 31, 1536, warning him of the “inconstancy of the Moldavian... nevertheless there is a custom of the barbarians to turn one’s coat where the wind blows.”¹²⁵ To give an illustrative example of how this “duplicitous” policy worked, when Rareș had the military expeditions in Transylvania in 1529-1530 claiming his possessions recognised by Zápolya, according to certain contemporary opinions Petru Rareș was trying in fact to establish his own authority in the eastern and southern part of Transylvania, benefiting in a way from Zápolya’s difficulties in controlling the situation in the region. The Saxons of Brașov accused Rareș of “hypocrisy,” considering that the Moldavian prince used his claim to help Zápolya as a pretext to hide his desire to make himself “voivode of Transylvania.”¹²⁶

¹²³ See Gorovei, *Petru Rareș*, 229 (the English translation is our responsibility).

¹²⁴ See Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu, *Relațiunea lui Paul Giovio despre aventurile domnului moldovean Petru Rareș* (The Relation of Paolo Giovio on the Adventures of the Moldavian prince, Petru Rareș) in *Archiva istorică a României* (The Historical Archive of Romania), vol. 2 (Bucharest: Imprimeria Statului, 1965), 29.

¹²⁵ See *Călători străini*, vol. 1, 379 (see the Latin text in Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 112).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

Giovio's remark "... the Moldavian, being proud of the luck he had ..." is nonetheless significant.¹²⁷ This pride (*superbia*) was later to be condemned by the Moldavian boyars. Rareș's envoy, sent to the bishop of Vilno in 1531, after the defeat of the Moldavians at Obertyn, explained the failure of the Moldavian ruler by the following motivation: *Deus is dominum meum ita castigare voluit, eo quod etiam superbus fuit ...*¹²⁸ Nicolaus Gerendi, the voivode of Transylvania in 1529, urging the citizens of Bistrița to resist Rareș's pressures, manifested the hope that "the Lord will punish this barbarian for his haughtiness."¹²⁹ His ambition can be more obviously noticed in his correspondence during his temporary exile, when he was trying to regain the throne. In a letter sent from Constantinople, on June 23, 1540, to the city-magistrate of Bistrița, he wrote: "We hope, by God, that we will be what we were and much more than that..."¹³⁰

Concerning the "ambitious policy" of the Despot, Nicolae Costin recalled the episode related by Sommer concerning the appearance of the three angels crowning the prince: "He was also greatly haughty and showing a great conceit, and he dared to get the rulership of Wallachia (*Țara Muntenească*) from Mircea Vodă and Transylvania (*Țara Ardialului*) ... saying that two golden crowns [three for Sommer] descended upon him from the skies."¹³¹ Concerning the plans of the Despot to occupy Transylvania, Martin the Literate significantly noted that "he is thinking about that day and night."¹³² But the most significant testimony on the ambitions of this ruler is that of his doctor, Dionysius d'Avalos, mentioned by Graziani:

*Narravit nobis Dionysius, ejus medicus, consiliorum fere omnium maxime ejus belli particeps, Despotam in commemoranda calamitate sua fassum vindice, deo in ea se indicisse mala quod adipiscendi primum deinde propagandi regni libidine, ut quorundam potentium hominum studia sibi conciliaret, divinae religionis illusisset; atque eos qui tum aderant, in quibus fuit Dionysius, testes esse iussit se novas religionum sectas omnes rejicere atque execrari Christumque deum, sicut sacrae praescribunt litterae et majores fecerunt.*¹³³

The Despot made this declaration while he was besieged in the fortress of Suceava by the troops of Ștefan Tomșa in the autumn of 1563. Even if we can infer

¹²⁷ See Hașdeu, 29.

¹²⁸ See Ciobanu, "Apărător...", 123.

¹²⁹ See Hurmuzaki, vol. 15, part 1, 320.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 390-391.

¹³¹ See Costin, 207.

¹³² See *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 251.

that these words were uttered in special circumstances, a certain reflection of his soul's condition cannot be totally rejected. The fact that Despot regretted his "vain ambitions" for which he was ready "to sell his soul," if we may use such an expression, could serve as a favourable proof of his affiliation to a certain Renaissance spirit.

In the case of Petru Cercel, there is very little to be added in the context of this discussion. We could see in the previous chapter that the Wallachian prince could hardly count on alternatives. His most important diplomatic agent was the French ambassador in Constantinople, the most valuable support considering the changing attitude of the Ottomans towards him. Cercel used also his Genoese secretary for almost all his main diplomatic missions (to Transylvania and France), but not on a regular basis. There is still an important detail: it seems that Cercel used letters of credentials for his envoy, as Sivori mentioned in his *Memoriale*: " ... havuta la istruttione della volontà di Sua Altezza, con le solite lettere credentiali, feci partenza con doi cochij ..." ¹³⁴ There is no other mention of such credentials until Cercel, at least according to the available contemporary sources.

Speaking about "ambition," in the case of Cercel's diplomacy there is no trace of bold attitudes or utopian projects as in the case of Rareș and the Despot. Cercel was rather concerned to ensure the good will of the Ottomans for his rulership and, for purposes of personal security, if the Sultan considered him undesirable (as actually happened), to ensure the support of a third country, namely Transylvania, in order to have the necessary space of refuge. His reaction towards the official announcement of his deposition from the Wallachian throne is very significant in this sense, and left no room for other interpretations. It is clear that at least in the matter of diplomacy Petru Cercel and Caesar Borgia had nothing in common.

2.3. State administration

If we can speak about certain elements of novelty about the diplomacy of the three princes studied for our research, concerning the state administration there is hardly something to be considered as different from the previous period. The problem is that

¹³³ See Johannes Sommer Pirnensis, Antonius Maria Gratianus, *Viața lui Despot-Vodă* (The Life of the Despot), ed. and tr. Traian Diaconescu (Iași: Institutul European, 1998), 184.

¹³⁴ See Pascu, 183.

even in the case of the Italian city-states we cannot speak about a proper state administration essentially different from the medieval model.¹³⁵

Therefore, in the case of Moldavia and Wallachia, it is superfluous to make an extensive comparison with the previous period. There are, however, some elements worth mentioning here. The available primary sources seem to suggest a deeper concern towards the collection of taxes, due to the increasing needs of the princes. In the case of Rareș we do not see significant changes: the same preoccupation with obtaining satisfactory incomes from customs and with ensuring the collection of the revenues from his Transylvanian possessions were natural preoccupations of every medieval ruler. Rareș is the owner of the largest land domain in Moldavia, and the Moldavian treasury was at the same time his own treasury. The state administration represented for Rareș the administration of his properties, apart from the due taxes that the people had to pay to the princely treasury. As public offices the prince had only military and judicial duties.¹³⁶ The medieval model of rulership is fully intact.

The things are not different in the case of the Despot or Cercel. In the case of the Despot, however, the very difficult financial situation in which he found himself after the battle of Verbia forced him to make appeal to expedients such as melting down golden and silver plates from the Orthodox monasteries and churches.¹³⁷ He appointed foreigners to collect taxes from the population, such as George de Revelles sent to southern Moldavia, who was later arrested and imprisoned by Tomșa when the

¹³⁵ See a valuable critique of Burckhardt's model of the Renaissance state in John Law, 38-41.

¹³⁶ The importance of the "good justice" and of the army for a powerful prince seemed undoubted for Rareș as Peresvetov testified in his *Complaint* – see *Călători străini*, 452-463.

¹³⁷ See Berciu-Drăghicescu, 96. This information is taken from the chronicles. Azarie, wrote about the Despot's decision: "... he collected for him, the swindler, all the golden and silver vessels and all precious stones adorned with pearls from the holy icons from all monasteries ..." See Bogdan, 143. Also Ureche wrote: "... he stripped the churches, took the silver objects to mint money ..." See Ureche, 175 (the same chronicler affirmed that Ștefan Tomșa, who killed the Despot at Suceava in 1563 in order to take the Moldavian throne for himself, accused the Despot of having "stripped the churches" – *ibid.*, 178). There is an English report sent from Trent (Italy) on August 31, 1563, relating the rebellion against the Despot, whom it explained: "... The cause of the peoples' rebellion was for that he had taken greate quantities of Gold and Sylver out of the churches..." See Edward D. Tappe, *Documents concerning Rumanian History (1427-1601) Collected from British Archives* (London: Mouton & Co, 1964), 36. Despite the resentments of the chroniclers concerning the impieties of the Despot in the case of "stripping the churches," Berciu-Drăghicescu considered the economic reason as primary, as the Despot incurred large expenses to get the throne and the Turkish confirmation (paying the usual bribes to the Turkish officials). the Despot did not have many options to recover this money as the treasury of the country (in fact of Lăpușneanu) was partially carried away by the former prince and partially taken by one of the Despot's mercenaries, Jean de Villey (the two crowns and the princely jewels). The lack of cash was so great that the Despot was forced to pay some of his debts in kind, such as the debts to Francis Zay, one of his creditors, which the Despot paid partially in oxen. See Berciu-Drăghicescu, 89-96.

uprising against the Despot began.¹³⁸ But the most important economic measure that the Despot took was to mint new Moldavian coins. Belsius informed Maximilian that the Despot intended to melt down a “Moldavian *florin*,” equivalent to 12 aspers, as well as coins of 2, 3 and 4 *florini* and also smaller coins such as *masgueros* (*mangâri*).¹³⁹ Finally, five types of coins were melted down (as far as is known from the available archaeological evidence): golden ducats, *tallers*, *ortsi* (a quarter of a ducat), silver *dinari* and copper *oboli* (*mangâri*).¹⁴⁰ A remarkable initiative that shows not only a certain claim of sovereignty of the rulership (coining was the exclusive right of the medieval ruler) but also expressed the authority of the Despot in the country. The heraldic composition is certainly based on the typical Renaissance model, and we can infer that it is highly possible that the Despot realised it by himself. Thus, the coins not only became means of payment but carried out also a clear propagandistic message.¹⁴¹

In the case of Cercel’s rulership, the shortness of his reign leaves more room for speculations than for concrete statements. We can notice only the fact that, in order to show his gratitude to Sivori, the prince gave him the right to benefit from all tithes of the province of Buzău for a period of four years.¹⁴² A significant raising of taxes can be traced during his reign due to his continuous financial difficulties.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹³⁹ See *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 147. These coins were minted by a Saxon craftsman, Wolfgang, brought by the Despot from Transylvania, as in Moldavia there was nobody able to perform this work – see Berciu-Drăghicescu, 96.

¹⁴⁰ For an extensive description and comments concerning these coins, see Ioan Țabrea, “Monedele lui Despot-Vodă în lumina ultimelor cercetări” (The Coins of the Despot in the Light of the Most Recent Researches), *Studii și Cercetări Numismatice*, vol. 5 (1971): 161-177. The representations which can be seen on the ducats and *tallers* recall pure Renaissance patterns (such as the antique Greek symbols): on the obverse the Despot is represented with a crown on his head; on the reverse we can see a two-headed eagle (the emblem of the Habsburgs), a tower (which could signify the temple of Hera from the island of Samos or the temple of Apollos Tropios from the ancient Dorida region), a lion, a tree (with or without a snake wound around it) or the fish with a ring in its snout (symbols of Apollon, a god highly venerated on the islands of Samos and Paros). Besides these, we can also notice the Moldavian aurochs and a crown with two rosettes symbolising the claim of Despot to reign over Moldavia and Wallachia – *ibid.*

¹⁴¹ The legend of the coins is also significant (Belsius noted it also in his report from June 7, 1562, sent from Iași): *ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΔΗΣ “ΙΑΚΟΒΟΣ ΒΑΣΥΛΕΥΣ ΔΕΣΠΟΤΗΣ ΣΑΜΟΥ ΜΟΛΛΑΒΙΕΣ ΒΑΣΥΛΕΥΣ*. Besides this there was another legend that copied a significant verse from Homer: *ἐκ ἀγαδον ἡλνκοῖρα νῆ εἰς ἡοῖρανος ἐ’στω*. The Renaissance pattern is more visible here. See *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 192.

¹⁴² See Pascu, 172 (later in the seventeenth and especially in the eighteenth century this will turn into a well-spread system of mortgage for the increasing debts of the princes and also a means of getting extra-revenues by auctioning them for fix sums).

¹⁴³ Some information from the available contemporary sources suggest that Cercel decided to impose extraordinary taxes on the boyars in order to cover the deficits, but according to Cristian Luca this should be taken into consideration with great prudence, as most of the sources quoted complaints of the boyars faithful to Mihnea Turcitul, the adversary of Cercel. See Luca, 78-79.

To conclude this we should stress the idea that generally speaking there are no significant changes in the state administration. The historiography could only agree that the role of the princely offices increased and became more specialised, but rather for a better administration of the princely revenues than for state reasons. The concept of state is still identified with the property of the prince. Significant new elements appear only concerning the army (the Despot was one of the first rulers who used only mercenaries instead of “land-troops”) and the administration of justice (Despot was the first ruler who tried to have control over “civil” judicial matters such as divorce).¹⁴⁴

2.4. Cultural initiatives

The cultural activity of the three princes is one of the most spectacular, and recommends them to the highest degree as personalities who bore significant Renaissance influences. The Romanian historiography tended sometimes, however, to exaggerate these Renaissance influences. For Alexandru Alexianu Rareș, the Despot or Cercel could be compared with significant Italian Renaissance princes: “[Petru Rareș] behaved as a Florentine Mecena, protecting the arts and the philosophy, being himself a philosopher and a lover of arts like the Medici, as he is proved to be by so many churches, built and painted, supporting at his court painters as *familiares*, such as Toma Cehan or chroniclers, such as Macarie, and ordering some gifts to be sent to Mount Athos to some Cretan painters, such as Zorzi, and to others like him.”¹⁴⁵ Despot Vodă is a “distinguished and complex Renaissance Romanian figure,” “a refined man, educated, a polyglot, a skilled mathematician, a proficient strategist, well versed in theology, loving poetry and crowning poets, a man of spirit and sociable, intelligent and handsome, as Leonclavius depicted him.”¹⁴⁶ Finally, Petru Cercel, the

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter 3 for extensive details concerning this issue.

¹⁴⁵ Alexandru Alexianu, *Acest ev mediu românesc. Insemnari de iconografie și artă veche pământeană* (These Romanian Middle Ages. Notices on the Autochthonous Old Art and Iconography) (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1987), 122. The affirmation that Petru Rareș is a philosopher was taken from Ivan Peresvetov.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 133; see also Berciu Drăghicescu for detailed information concerning these aspects. The German Humanist Johannes Leonclavius wrote about Despot: “a handsome man, not too tall, vigorous and with devils in his body. Black hair, lively tongue” (*Ibid.*, 34).

Catholic prince of Wallachia, is the exponent of a “late Romanian Renaissance,” “the first *voivode* - poet following the model of the Florentine tyrants.”¹⁴⁷

Discussing Rareș’s case, the most striking aspect is his foundation activity. During Petru Rareș’s reign 12 churches were built and/or painted under his direct supervision and with his material support: Dobrovăț (1529), the church of Saint George in Hârlău (1530), Probotă (1532 – where his grave was placed), the church of Saint George of Suceava (1534), Humor (1535), Baia (1535-1538), Moldovița (1537), Bălinești (1535-1538), the church of Saint Dimitrie from Suceava (1537-1538), Coșula (1536-1538), Arbure (1541) and Voroneț (painted after his death, in 1547).¹⁴⁸

We shall not discuss here the theory of Dan Horia Mazilu, who asserted that the painted churches from Northern Moldavia represent an original and unique model of “vernacular religious art,” a Renaissance feature in itself.¹⁴⁹ This theory is disputable for a simple reason: the “vernacular” character is very vague, seeming to be a metaphor rather than a concept in itself. Moreover, typical Renaissance patterns are totally absent in painting. Ion Solcanu identified only one element, the composition of the Moldavian emblem (the head of an aurochs), painted on the southern façade of the church of Saint Dumitru from Suceava. In this composition, the emblem is framed by a wreath that is supported by two *putti*, depicted in a clear and typical Renaissance style.¹⁵⁰ This is an unique example in medieval Moldavian architecture and heraldry. Other Renaissance features can be noticed in the particular Gothic style of the jambs of the windows and doors, as in the case of Probotă and Humor; this is obviously proof that the craftsmen who took part in the building of these churches came from an environment where such stylistic patterns were already in fashion.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ See Alexianu, 138-139. The author defined this “late Romanian Renaissance” as “a Western Renaissance with local reflections, being in its twilight, but not less significant for the destiny of our culture.”

¹⁴⁸ For general and statistical aspects, see Ulea, “Originea...” *passim*; also Ion Solcanu, “Realizări artistice” (Artistic Realisations), 292-317, in *Petru Rareș*.

¹⁴⁹ Dan Horia Mazilu, *Literatura română în epoca Renașterii* (The Romanian Literature in the Renaissance Epoch). (Bucharest: Editura Minerva, 1984), 269.

¹⁵⁰ See Solcanu, 315. The author recalled the model of emblems of Pope Sixtus IV, realised by Mino da Fiesole on a banister in the Sixtine chapel.

¹⁵¹ Solcanu considered that most probably these craftsmen came from Transylvania, although Poland is also a valuable hypothesis. His supposition is based on the fact that the princely houses from Probotă have their frames decorated in a style strongly recalling the model used at the houses from the region of the city of Bistrița (Northern Transylvania) – see *ibid.*, 301-302.

The artistic preoccupations of Rareș concerning the church foundations recall a medieval pattern rather than a typical attitude of a “Florentine tyrant.” It is true that some compositions depicted on the walls of these churches concentrate a subtle ideological message, as in the case of Jesse’s Tree or the Celestial Hierarchy (interpreted by Solcanu as allegories of the princely authority over the society. A religious iconographical programme where the prince is rarely present, let alone his “glorious” deeds or his “mythical ascendance” (which are totally absent) could hardly be considered as a Renaissance moment in the Moldavian art.¹⁵²

There is no strong evidence concerning the existence of a princely court as a real cultural centre in the style of the Renaissance courts. Mazilu pointed out some interesting aspects, such as the fact that Toma of Suceava, who painted at Humor, was one of the officials at Rareș’ court.¹⁵³ If Toma might have been Rareș’s courtly painter, there is no proof that the painters Marcu (who painted at Voronets) or Dragoș Coman (who painted at Arbore) were awarded the same dignity.¹⁵⁴ Toma’s case is

¹⁵² The interpretation of Mazilu is somehow ambiguous in this sense: his argument is based on the idea that this “Moldavian Renaissance” is a particular phenomenon, which could be assumed as a part of the general phenomenon not by the presence of Western patterns (as that can be hardly noticed), but only in the sense of innovation, radically different from the medieval art. This type of Renaissance represented for Mazilu *stricto sensu* a renewal. For the idea of “Romanian Renaissance” as an original phenomenon in the Romanian history (totally different from the Western European phenomenon), see Zoe Dumitrescu-Busulenga’s works, *Renașterea. Umanismul și dialogul artelor* (The Renaissance. The Humanism and the Dialogue of Arts), (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1971) and also *Valori și echivalențe umanistice. Excurs critic și comparatist* (Humanist Values and Equivalences. Critical and Comparative Discourse) (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1973); also Alexandru Tănase, *O istorie umanistă a culturii române* (A Humanist History of Romanian Culture), vol.2 (Iași: Editura Moldova, 1995). For a considerably more moderate view on the Romanian Renaissance and Humanism see Virgil Căndea, *Rățiunea dominantă. Contribuții la istoria umanismului românesc* (The Dominant Reason. Contributions to the History of the Romanian Humanism) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1979), also Răzvan Theodorescu, *Civilizația românilor între medieval și modern. Orizontul imaginii 1550-1800* (The Civilization of the Romanians between Medieval and Modern. The Horizon of the Image 1550-1800), vol.1 (Bucharest: Editura Meridiane, 1987).

¹⁵³ In a letter sent in 1541 to the city of Bistrița, Toma recommended himself as “Toma, painter from Suceava, courtier of the Glorious and Great Moldavian prince, Petru Voivode” – see Hurmuzaki, vol. 15, part.1, 400. Sorin Ulea identified Toma’s portrait in the scene of the Siege of Constantinople (a horseman stabbing an Ottoman commander) as the first self-portrait in Moldavian art – see Ulea, “Originea...”, 73.

¹⁵⁴ Mazilu significantly cited the art historian Paul Philippot who called Dragoș Coman “a Pisanello of Moldavia” and “the greatest artist of the Orthodox East from the sixteenth century” (see Mazilu, 404, footnote 19), but provides no argument for considering Dragoș Coman a courtly painter.

still interesting in itself: he is the first example of a courtly artist. Unfortunately we do not have enough information for a further development. Thus, we are unable to compare Toma's case with the general situation of the court artist in Western Europe.

Alexianu's affirmation that Rareș was a "philosopher" brings to our attention Peresvetov's curious and controversial testimony. Peresvetov did not call Rareș a "philosopher"; however, he put the Moldavian ruler on the same level as the "wise philosophers", but this does not tell us very much. In a paragraph Peresvetov quoted Rareș saying: "It is written in the books of the philosophers, the philosophers and the doctors write ..." ¹⁵⁵. The reader could infer (as Alexianu did) that Rareș was reading from these philosophers (although we cannot know who these philosophers were). ¹⁵⁶ The text actually raised and is still raising serious question marks concerning the accuracy of Peresvetov's "quotations" from Rareș.

The figure of the Despot recalls more obviously the model of the Italian Renaissance prince as patron of the arts. Briefly enumerating, his initiatives were the establishment of a *collegium* and of a library and a project for a Platonic Academy. These are sufficient arguments to consider the Despot as a Renaissance prince.

The problem of the *collegium* from Cotnari consists a separate issue in the third chapter. Some considerations, however, should be added in the context of this discussion. Beside its confessional character, purely educational purposes were also present in the structure of the curriculum. In his *Elegia decima* (entitled *De bibliotheca et schola instituta*) Sommer provides some information on this issue:

*Interea pueris operam praestare fidelem
perque humiles una me decet ire vias
dum latinae tandem jaciant fundamina linguae
ausonioque sciant certius ore loqui* ¹⁵⁷

The fact that Latin was to be studied at Cotnari is a remarkable initiative in itself, as the official language used in the princely chancellery as well as in the church was Slavonic. Besides Latin, Greek was also to be studied, as it was one of the most studied languages in the Renaissance. The Serbian Protestant deacon Demetrius was appointed to teach Greek at Cotnari. Both Sommer and Demetrius can be considered as typical Renaissance intellectuals. The Despot invited also other professors to teach

¹⁵⁵ See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 1, 456.

¹⁵⁶ Maria Holban asserted that these "philosophers" that Peresvetov mentioned were rather astrologers who pretended to guess the future from the "signs of the sky" – see *ibid.*, 455, footnote 4.

¹⁵⁷ See Legrand, 105.

at Cotnari, such as Gaspar Peucer (mathematician, the rector of Wittenberg University), Joachim Rhaeticus (astronomer, professor in Cracow) and Justus Jonas (professor at Wittenberg University). None of them managed to come to Moldavia.¹⁵⁸

The leading monographer of the cultural and educational initiatives of the Despot, Ștefan Bârsănescu, considered that the *collegium* of the Cotnari followed the classical type of *schola latina* that emerged especially during Renaissance.¹⁵⁹ But the most important aspect is that the Despot himself took the initiative of this cultural establishment and also financially supported it from his own revenues.¹⁶⁰ This proves his firm and undoubted Renaissance background, formed during his adventurous career in Europe.¹⁶¹

The library established by the Despot at his court was the first establishment of this kind in Moldavia. This initiative was praised by Sommer in his *Elegia decima*:

*Hoc erat eximiis quod posses addere coeptis
Unde magis clario notus honore fores
Omnigenos complexa libros, doctissime Princeps
Si tibi structa recens bibliotheca foret
Exciperent profugas si splendida tecta camoenas
Jactaretque novum Phoebus Apollo decus (...)
Maxima laudati pars est superata laboris
Et tibi jam varios servat Apollo libros
Et facili largo reliquum confeceris aere
cui dives magnas aula ministrat opes*¹⁶²

Interpreting the passage from Nicolae Costin concerning the establishment of the school and library in Cotnari, Bârsănescu considered that this library was a separate institution, probably constituted as a private library at the court of the prince

¹⁵⁸ See Berciu-Drăghicescu: 111-112. Among these, Peucer did not answer, while Rhaeticus refused. Jonas accepted the offer of the Despot, but he could not arrive in Moldavia.

¹⁵⁹ See Bârsănescu, 70. Besides the curriculum, his argument was that only in these schools “dies virgidemia” (mentioned by Sommer) was celebrated.

¹⁶⁰ See Belsius’ report from April 8, 1562, sent to Maximilian from Hârlău, the town where a Slavonic school was founded by Lăpușneanu before the initiative of the Despot – see *Călători străini*, vol. 2, 134. See also Sommer’s mention: “Scholam item in oppido Cottanar, quod ferme a Saxonibus et Hungaris habitatur, erigere coeperat, collectis passim ex provincia pueris quos docere, ali, vestiri ex suo curabat aerario, constituto satis liberali magistris, pro ea discentium paucitate, stipendio quo tempore...” – see Legrand, 34. See also Nicolae Costin: “And in Cotnari, being at that time many Saxons, he built for them a church and a school and collected a library (*vivliotichi*)” – see Costin 206. Bârsănescu argued fact that it would have been a nonsense to establish a library 100 km away from the court of Suceava, in a town where there were no princely houses.

¹⁶¹ For extensive details concerning the Despot’s career until becoming prince of Moldavia, see Berciu-Drăghicescu, 31-56.

¹⁶² See Legrand, 103. There is also another interesting annotation concerning the establishment of the library: “Nec bibliothecae construendae cogitationem abjecerat quod principibus viris eam rem plurimum ornamenti et dignitatis adferre haberet persuasissimum” – *ibid.*, 34

in Suceava.¹⁶³ Costin's text however is relevant in the sense that just as in the case of the *collegium* the Despot proved to be the founder of this library. According to Berciu-Drăghicescu, this courtly library followed the model of the Renaissance libraries, based on an encyclopaedic format.¹⁶⁴ Sommer's notes on the peculiar interest of the Despot concerning the books are very significant in this context: ... *plurimum enim studiis illis delectabatur et instrumenta artis magno undique pretio conquirebat*.¹⁶⁵

The most important project for Despot was to realise an Academy, following the Italian type, which was trying to revive the concept of a Platonic academy as free groups of scholars and scientists or reunions of men of letters, philosophers, and so on. This Moldavian academy was planned to be formed from various scholars, namely those who were called by the Despot to come and teach at Cotnari.¹⁶⁶ Unfortunately, this initiative remained only at the planning stage of an ambitious project.¹⁶⁷

The princely court turned also into a propaganda space of the prince. After the battle of Verbia (where Lăpuşneanu was defeated by the troops of the Despot), the new Moldavian ruler ordered his victory to be depicted on the walls of the princely palace from Iaşi. Nicolae Costin and Johannes Sommer are the only available sources speaking about such giant painting.¹⁶⁸ Unfortunately, there is no possibility of reconstructing the pattern of this painting, but its propagandistic function is evident.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ See Bârsănescu, 123. (There is another testimony on the library from Cotnari at the Hungarian chronicler Istvánffy, who asserted that "the Despot established in the town of Cotnari a gymnasium and a library – *ibid.*, 122)

¹⁶⁴ The historian inferred that Despot might have taken the model of the court libraries from Vienna or Rome – see Berciu-Drăghicescu, 115, see also Ştefan Bârsănescu, 126. See also the study of Radu Manolescu, "Cultura orăşenească în Moldova în secolul XVI" (The Urban Culture in Sixteenth-Century Moldavia), *Analele Universităţii Bucureşti*, series History, vol. 20 1(1971): 74.

¹⁶⁵ See Legrand, 34.

¹⁶⁶ To those mentioned previously we have to add the Greek Humanist scholar Hermodorus Lestarchus, who, according to some sources, seems to have been one of the professors of the prince during his stage in Rome. See Berciu-Drăghicescu, 112.

¹⁶⁷ Bârsănescu considered that for the Despot the most important priority was the Academy, which prevailed over the other two initiatives, the *collegium* and the court library.

¹⁶⁸ Nicolae Costin wrote that "he ordered to be painted on the walls, in the street called *Uliţa tătarască*, the war of the Despot with Alexandru Vodă, the faces of the captains differentiated from the princes, depicted with great skill, the faces of the *hatmans* ... this painting later fell and was erased." See Costin, 200. Sommer, however, has a version with a small difference: "Commissa est pugna haec die ante divi Martini ferias proximo anno a Christo nato millesimo quingentesimo sexagesimo primo et pictura satis evidenti Despotae jussu deinde repraesentata in aula oppidi Jas, rursum tum obsidionis tempore, ut alia illius monumenta omnia, penitus erasa et expuncta." See Legrand, 24. In the case of Sommer's account we can see that the cause of the painting destruction was the uprising against the prince and not the time erosion.

¹⁶⁹ Alexianu considered that this painting might have resembled the famous painting of Leonardo da Vinci depicting the battle of Anghiari, or perhaps it might have recalled the painted panels of Paolo Uccello, depicting the battle from San Romano – see Alexianu, 103. Mazilu asserted that Costin's

The Renaissance features of Cercel's cultural initiatives are concentrated in the court environment. Cercel transformed his court into a cultural centre in the style of the Renaissance. As Cristian Luca stressed in his monograph dedicated to the Wallachian prince seen as a "Humanist prince," Cercel himself was by his refined education a Renaissance spirit.¹⁷⁰ Polyglot, with elegant manners (remarked upon by Sivori and Stefano Guazzo when Cercel was just a pretender in Genoa), the Wallachian prince manifested also a special interest in poetry.¹⁷¹ Cercel's court from Wallachia suggests a highly cultivated and refined milieu: the prince is surrounded by French and Italian courtiers such as Mellier de la Constance, François Ponthus de la Planche, Dominique Perot, Berthier from Lyon (used especially as diplomatic envoys and couriers), the Tuscan poet, Francesco Pugiella (the partner of Stefano Guazzo in his *Dialoghi*) and Franco Sivori, a skilled man of letters and diplomat.¹⁷² Unfortunately we do not know very much about these personages, except the fact that they were used for diplomatic purposes. It is possible also that a court painter had resided and performed at Cercel's court, as the prince could send his portrait as a gift to the French ambassador, Jacques de Germigny in Constantinople.¹⁷³

The only significant and relevant aspect of Cercel's cultural Renaissance is the architectural complex represented by the princely palace from Târgoviște. Sivori noted in his *Memoriale*:

Il Palazzo del Principe è di molta grandezza e conveniente architettura, edificato da suoi antichi, che assai presto fu ampliato da Sua Altezza di belle e nobili stancie, e fece condurre sopra la piazza una fontana con gran fatica e spesa, havendo preso la origine da una fonte lontano ben quatro miglia dalla

"neutral tone" when he described the painting suggested that such representations were usual for that period – see Mazilu, 274.

¹⁷⁰ See Luca, 115.

¹⁷¹ Sivori mentioned in his *Memoriale*: "... di bella e real presenza, la quale non si poteva, benchè sotto humili panni, ricoprire" – see Ștefan Pascu, 140. Stefano Guazzo in his *Dialoghi piacevoli* (published in 1586 in Venice) depicted in very praiseworthy terms Cercel's portrait as the perfect *gentiluomo*: "piena di grazia et d'amore, accompagnata da una tale liberalità d'aspetto che non potete giudicare onde riceviate maggior soddisfazione: o dalla lingua o dagli occhi suoi, coi quali non altrimenti che con catene lega et stringe in perpetua servitù i cuori altrui..." (see George Lăzărescu, Nicolae Stoicescu. *Țările Române și Italia până la 1600* (Romanian Countries and Italy until 1600) (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1972), 127). Concerning Cercel's interest for poetry a poem has been preserved written in Italian entitled "The Hymn to the Creator" and which recalls Saint Francis of Assisi's "The Song of the Creatures" (see the text of the poem in *ibid.*, 126).

¹⁷² See Luca, 114.

¹⁷³ See *ibid.*, 82 (de Germigny wrote on February 10, 1584, to the royal councillor, Montholon, "... l'Excellence m'avoit envoye ... son portraict avec deux timbres de zebelline."

città, condotta sotto terra con canoni grossi di legno di pino. (...) Fece poi fare bellissimi e grandissimi seragli da metter salvaticine e belli giardini alla italiana, che restavano situati sotto il suo palazzo.¹⁷⁴

It is interesting that Cercel's initiative was to be followed by the boyars who moved with the princely court from Bucharest to Târgoviște: "Ogn'uno puoi delli baroni principali ad imitazione del principe si diede a fare qualche fabrica, di maniera che presto, presto aumento assai la città .."¹⁷⁵ The court tended to become a model for the elite, concentrating a great part of the nobility around it. And it is also more interesting that the mechanism would have been the same as in the case of the Western European courts: the simple imitation for reasons of fashion leading to a perpetuation of the presence of the nobility around its prince.¹⁷⁶ Unfortunately, Cercel's short reign left no room for such a development.

¹⁷⁴ See Pascu, 175. For a detailed description of the architectural plan of the palace from Târgoviște, see Luca, 117-118.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ For this issue, see the study of Ellery Schalk, *The Court as "Civilizer" of the Nobility: Noble Attitudes and the Court in France in the Late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries*, 245-264, in *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility. The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Age 1450-1650*, eds. Ronald G. Asch and Adolf M. Birke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Chapter Three

Religious Affiliation and Rulership in Sixteenth-Century Moldavia and Wallachia: A Comparative Analysis

Foreword

The aim of this chapter is to present a comparative overview of the influence of personal religious affiliation on rulership as it was manifested in the particular cases of the three rulers considered in this research. In other words, I want to analyse the impact of the personal religious affiliations of these rulers on the way they governed and conducted state affairs, both domestic and foreign. Also, aspects such as cultural initiatives will be taken into consideration whenever they seem to carry a political message and to bear the influence of the religious factor. The purpose of this chapter is to support my hypothesis that in sixteenth-century Moldavia and Wallachia, religion became one of the main coordinates of rulership in the sense of the “confessionalisation” of the act of governing, if not the “confessionalisation” of the state (as in Moldavia).

3.1. Petru Rareș: when Orthodoxy became political ideology

3.1.1. Rareș' relation with the Orthodox Church

Although Rareș was elected by the boyars as prince, he based his rulership, with the support of the Church, on the authoritarian idea developed by his predecessor, Stephen the Great, as opposed to the tendencies of the boyars to control the princely power.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, he appealed to the Church as a strong ideological support of his position almost in the same manner as Stephen the Great did. Consequently, the Church benefited

¹⁷⁷ See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 45-46. Crăciun has suggested that at the beginning of the sixteenth century there was a confrontation between the “traditional” authoritarian rulership (based on the Byzantine model and ideology) and the “temptation” of the Polish model (manifested among the boyars more significantly after the death of Stephen the Great), which envisaged a monarchy controlled by the estates. See also Mihail M. Andreescu, *Puterea domniei în Țara Românească și Moldova în secolele XIV-XVI* (The Power of the *Domnia* in Wallachia and Moldavia from the Fourteenth until the Fifteenth Century), Ph.D. Thesis (Bucharest: University of Bucharest, Faculty of History, 1997). For a comparison with the East-Central Europe see the collection of articles *Crown, Church and Estates. Central European Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. R. J. W. Evans and T. V. Thomas (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991)

from his founding zeal, and supported his authoritarian tendencies. It is not by chance that the space used exclusively for displaying political iconographical messages was the church, either in a monastic complex (most often) or in a town (such as Suceava). The church was the most important public space in the Middle Ages, and therefore it ensured the highest degree of diffusion for any kind of official message.

It is significant to mention here the fact that Rareș was not the only church-founder during his reign.¹⁷⁸ Grigore Roșca, the superior of the monastery of Probota, planned and supervised the iconographical programme. We can assume that a certain collaboration existed between Roșca and the prince: in 1547, a year after Rareș' death, Grigore Roșca supervised the painting of the Voroneț church (whose building began before 1546), following the same iconographical programme.¹⁷⁹ The main aspect is that there was a precise and clear-cut ideology in this programme, supported by both the prince and the superior. Unlike Stephen the Great, Rareș defined and supported this programme with a precise purpose approved by the Moldavian Orthodox Church. The systematic character of the princely political ideology developed and displayed with the help of the Church seems to be an innovation similar only to the earlier initiatives of the Wallachian ruler, Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521).

The existence of a "privileged" relation between the Church and Rareș is suggested also by the fact that the prince decided to continue the old Moldavian chronicle, *Letopisețul Moldovei*, started during the reign of Stephen the Great. More than the desire for continuity, the purpose of such an initiative seems to have been slightly different. First of all, the style of the chronicler is totally new among the Slavonic chronicles written in the Romanian territories up to that time. The so-called panegyric as a literary genre was experimented in the Slavonic-Romanian literature for the first time by Macarie, bishop of Roman and the author of Rareș' chronicle, who was strongly

¹⁷⁸ Beside the ruler and the Orthodox metropolitan also one of the princely officials, Toader Bubuioag, great chancellor (*mare logofăt*) between 1525-1557, who was the founder of the Humor monastery (1535). See Nicolae Stoicescu, *Dicționar al marilor dregători din Țara Românească și Moldova (secolele XIV-XVII)* (Dictionary of the Great Officials from Wallachia and Moldavia from the Fourteenth until the Seventeenth Century) (Bucharest: Editura enciclopedică română, 1971), 330-331.

¹⁷⁹ It is also worth stressing another significant detail: the monastery of Probota was to be Rareș' necropolis.

influenced by the twelfth-century Byzantine chronicler, Constantine Manasses.¹⁸⁰ Macarie was the one who wrote the first official chronicle in the history of Moldavia, recording Rareș' deeds starting from 1530. A year earlier, he had supervised the painting programme at Dobrovăț, which was designed to legitimise Rareș' reign and to consecrate the main features of his political ideology.¹⁸¹ Thus, the decision of the Moldavian prince to ask Macarie to write his official chronicle seems entirely logical. The chronicler registered the deeds of "Peter the Wonderful" (*Petru cel minunat*) as "following the imperial order of Peter, the chosen, the terrible for his enemies, the son of Stephen voivode the Brave..."¹⁸² Also, the imperial idea derived directly from the Byzantine political and theological heritage is present in this chronicle.¹⁸³

3.1.2. *Petru Rareș and His Confessional Policy*

The confessional policy of Rareș towards the non-Orthodox communities in Moldavia did not have a violent component. According to Georg Reichersdorffer's report from 1527, there were several religious communities in Moldavia that could freely profess their cult:

... istic diversae sectae et diversa quoque religionum et nationum genera haberitur utpote Ruthenorum, Sarmatorum, Rascianorum, Armeniorum, Bulgarorum et Tartharorum, non minor denique pars Saxonum Transylvanorum hanc terram passim inhabitantes, imperio Moldavi waywodae obnoxii, varietate tamen ceremoniarum et dogmatum sine contentione utuntur et qualibet secta sive natio solitis suis ritibus et legibus pro suo fermitur libitu. Eodem quoque modo et ordine monachi christianam religionem illic profitentes sacris suis ceremoniis et officiis iuxta monasterii et ordinis sui consuetudinem sive regulam utuntur.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ This influence is proved by the extensive passages directly copied from Manasses' work. See Bogdan, 74.

¹⁸¹ See for more details Sorin Ulea, "O surprinzătoare personalitate a Evului Mediu românesc: cronicarul Macarie" (A Surprising Personality of the Romanian Middle Ages: Macarie the chronicler). *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei*, vol. 32 (1985): 14-43.

¹⁸² See Bogdan, 90.

¹⁸³ Concerning the fact that Macarie, like the Moldavian metropolitans Teoctist I and Teoctist II, promoted the Byzantine imperial ideology in the variant of Matthew Blastares is proved also by the fact that the bishop of Roman realised himself a personal variant of the *Syntagma* between 1556 and 1558, entitled "The Great Canon of the Holy Ecumenical Fathers" (*Pravila sfinților părinți ecumenici*). See for details Mureșan, 4.

¹⁸⁴ See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 44. Georg Reichersdorffer was the Habsburgs' envoy in Moldavia, having the mission to make a report on the general situation of the country. He wrote a work entitled *Chorographia Moldaviae*, one of the most important sources on sixteenth-century Moldavian history.

According to Crăciun, for Reichersdorffer the words *sectae* and *diversa genera religionum* also signified the various branches of the Reformation that were manifest in Moldavia beside other confessions. I consider Reichersdorffer's testimony as valuable inasmuch as he was a Protestant himself and an eyewitness of Moldavian realities. Moreover, we do not have strong evidence concerning Rareș' initiatives against non-Orthodox communities. Reicherstorffer's estimation seems to apply to the whole period of the prince's rulership. Crăciun appreciated the fact, however, that Rareș developed a certain confessional policy, considering mainly the specific circumstances of his rulership.¹⁸⁵ Still, Rareș' extensive collaboration with the Orthodox ecclesiastical authorities may have influenced to a certain degree his position towards the communities who shared a different confession.

A somewhat hostile attitude may have existed in the relations between the prince and the Catholic and Armenian communities. The external painting of Northern Moldavian churches represents the most significant evidence for this, especially the scenes of the Judgement Day.¹⁸⁶ Although the prince did not found all these churches, the iconographical programme certainly expressed in religious terms an official policy. It is highly significant that this programme was repeated with very few variations, and that the scene of the Judgement Day was painted following the same pattern to even the smallest detail. In these scenes the group of the damned includes, near the Jews, the Turks and the Tartars, and elsewhere also the Armenians and the Catholics (the Latins).¹⁸⁷ The presence of the first three groups is somehow natural, non-Christians being *a priori* sinners in the biblical conception. The Catholics and the Armenians were special cases. These people were Christian, but they did not share the same confession as the Orthodox. Therefore to

¹⁸⁵ See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 55: "Actually, the anti-heretical policy of Petru Rareș lacked only the violent dimension."

¹⁸⁶ For a detailed and most up-to-date description of the Judgement-Day scenes in the external paintings from the sixteenth-century Moldavian monasteries see Ileana Stănculescu, *Il Giudizio Universale nella Pittura Murale Esterna del Nord della Moldavia* (The Last Judgement. External Mural Paintings from the Northern Part of Moldavia), bilingual edition, (Bologna: Edizioni Aspasia, 2001).

¹⁸⁷ See a detailed description and analysis in Ulea, *Originea, passim*. The only sign by which these particular groups can be recognised is the habit. According to Ulea, the most numerous and easily recognisable groups are the Turks and the Tartars, depicted in more vivid colours. The significance is clear: these two peoples represented at that time the most menacing powers for Moldavia. See *ibid.*, 77-78. The Catholics for example can be recognised at the Voroneț church because there is also a personage who carries the inscription "papa" in Slavonic characters; at Moldovița they are preceded by their priests wearing the specific habit and also the mitre.

put them near the non-Christians could not signify anything but that they were considered enemies of Moldavia, like the Turks or the Tartars. Moreover, the Armenians and the Catholics did not threaten Moldavia with military force as the Turks and Tartars did. Therefore, a single conclusion can be inferred from these data: the two non-Orthodox groups were “damned” just because they were non-Orthodox.

This conclusion is surprising for two reasons. Firstly, there is no documentary evidence concerning decisions carried out by Rareș against Armenians or Catholics. Secondly, according to Reichersdorffer, there were several other religious groups such as the Protestants.¹⁸⁸ The question comes naturally: why are they not present in the group of the damned in the scene of the Judgement Day? A possible answer was proposed by Crăciun: the painter could not at that time represent the Protestants, because they could not be depicted with specific dress in order to be easily differentiated for the onlookers.¹⁸⁹ The historian also (indirectly) suggested another reason: matters of foreign policy required a more tolerant attitude towards the Protestants. Rareș several times manifested his desire to free Moldavia from Ottoman control, and the Protestants seemed to be one of the most important European force willing to organise anti-Ottoman campaigns.¹⁹⁰ Also, the prince’s visible interest concerning the towns may have significantly determined his religious tolerance in this case.¹⁹¹

Still, the presence of the Judgement Day scene in the external church painting is interesting as a leitmotif. A possible explanation must be linked with the fact that Rareș had special relations with the Church. It is highly likely that the iconographical programme was mainly promoted by Grigore Roșca, Rareș’ involvement being little and

¹⁸⁸ The problem of the existence of significant Protestant communities in Moldavia before Jacob Heraclides Despot was solved by Șerban Papacostea, who proved with several other data that we could speak about Moldavian Protestants at least since the reign of Petru Rareș. See Șerban Papacostea, *Moldova în epoca Reformei. Contribuții la istoria societății moldovenești în veacul al XVI-lea* (Moldavia in the Epoch of the Reformation. Contributions to the History of Sixteenth-century Moldavian Society), 287-315. In *Evul mediu românesc. Realități politice și curente spirituale* (The Romanian Middle Ages. Political Realities and Spiritual Trends) (Bucharest: Editura Corint, 2001).

¹⁸⁹ See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 52.

¹⁹⁰ Concerning the importance of the German Protestants for Petru Rareș, Crăciun developed an interesting analysis, showing that the Moldavian ruler had at that time three main options: 1) total subordination to the Ottomans; 2) following the Polish model of rulership in his desire to become an European prince; 3) trying to make the German Protestants his military allies against the Turks. Each option requested a tolerant attitude of Petru Rareș towards the Protestant communities from Moldavia (the Ottomans showed themselves to be very favourable towards the Protestant communities from Hungary). See Crăciun, 48.

almost passive. Therefore, the programme would express the conception of the Church, rather than the prince's policy. The general character of this programme, however, prevents such a conclusion. The presence of the scene showing the siege of Constantinople is significant in this context. The clear opposition between the besieged and the besiegers strongly suggests the conflict between the Christian Orthodox world (the Byzantines) and the Ottomans.¹⁹² Thus, the Ottomans were not just pagans who rejected Christianity, but also people who violently attacked Christianity, menacing the Christians with their military force. We can consider that these two main scenes, the Judgement Day and the Siege of Constantinople, are connected in a logical sequence. Even if the theological dimension of this iconography is far more evident for the onlooker, the political significance cannot be denied.

Our argument can be developed further by a document: the "Great Complaint to the Tsar" (*Jalba cea mare către țar*) written by Peresvetov, in 1549. The main aspect of interest here is one of Rareș' affirmations "quoted" by Peresvetov: the fact that the Greeks' fall into "heresy" caused their ruin.¹⁹³ This "heresy" to which Rareș referred cannot be other than Catholicism (memories of the Florence union from 1449 were still vivid for the Orthodox world). Unfortunately we do not have much more than Peresvetov's "quotations" and the pictorial allusions from the church frescoes. Lacking relevant documents, we can speak only of effective tolerance and "virtual" intolerance during Rareș' reign.

3.1.3. *The Religious Argument and Petru Rareș's International Relations*

¹⁹¹ For Rareș the towns were important because they could potentially offer skilled people such as craftsmen but also educated people, very useful for state administration and diplomacy. See *ibid.*

¹⁹² There are several interesting elements in the composition of the scene of the Siege of Constantinople. According to Sorin Ulea the painter depicted the Persian siege of the Byzantine capital that took place in 626. Instead of Persians, however, the painter depicted soldiers inhabited in Ottoman dress. Moreover, an interesting personage appears also in the scene: the painter himself (recognisable after a little inscription put next to it, in Slavonic characters, composing the name *Toma*, and also after his specific Moldavian dress). The painter is depicted hitting an Ottoman soldier with a spear. For Ulea, the signification is very clear: the Persians are obviously Turks while the city of Constantinople represents Moldavia besieged by the Ottomans. The meaning of this allegory can be deciphered in the sense that just as the Persians were defeated in 626 also the Turks would be defeated by Moldavians. The identification of the scene as the siege of 626 was proved by Ulea with the fact that under this composition (which is repeated in every church painted during Rareș' reign) depicted in the church of Arbure (1541) the painter put an explanatory inscription. The reason was found by the author in the more prudent policy of the prince towards the increased susceptibilities of the Turks after 1538. See Ulea, *Originea*, 69-76.

Our interest in this chapter is to decipher the religious influence in the international relations carried out by Rareș during his reign, whether these relations were diplomatic or not. First we will investigate the relations between Moldavia and Poland, one of the most spectacular and violent aspects during Rareș' rule.

The conflict over Pocutsia dominated the diplomatic relations between Petru Rareș and the Polish king, Sigismund I the Old. Petre P. Panaitescu, in his study on the relations between Rareș and Moscow, considered that the Moldavian policy towards Pocutsia followed the Muscovite model that the Russians applied in their policy towards the Ruthenian territories controlled by Poland.¹⁹⁴ This model was based on the religious solidarity between Russians and Ruthenians, both people sharing the same confession. The Muscovite Great *Kenez*, Vasile III Ivanovici, used it in his attempts to conquer the Ruthenian territories (today Belarus) from Poland more easily. For Panaitescu it was probable that Rareș later appealed to the same Orthodox solidarity between Ruthenians and Moldavians in order to acquire Pocutsia, a region inhabited by a large Orthodox Ruthenian majority. He supported his opinion with several documents issued by the Polish authorities.

The most important document is a report that the Polish vice-chancellor sent to the king in December, 1530.¹⁹⁵ In his report the vice-chancellor noted that when Rareș' troops invaded Pocutsia "almost all Ruthenians run to him [Rareș] and obey him gladly, and he welcomes them and treats them well, while he orders to be killed all those who are Catholics."¹⁹⁶ This document stresses the strong confessional argument used by Rareș in his policy towards Poland. Ruthenian solidarity with Moldavians, actively manifested in 1530-1531, caused the repressive reaction of Sigismund I, who decided to confiscate some of the lands owned by Ruthenian noblemen who supported Rareș during his campaign in Pocutsia. The Polish army was victorious against Rareș at Obertyn, on January 1531. The diploma, issued by the king at Piotrkow for the benefit of Jan Tarnowski (who was to be the victorious commander of the Polish army at Obertyn in August 1531), granted him several villages and parts of the villages owned by the

¹⁹³ *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 1, 460.

¹⁹⁴ See Petre P. Panaitescu, *Petru Rareș*.

¹⁹⁵ See Hurmuzaki, vol. 11, 8.

Ruthenian noblemen Ivașco Zahosdzki, Fedossa, Hrehor, Ivașco, Vașco, Gost, Stolpcza Czkiz and others. These villages “and all hereditary lands that exist in that province of Pocutsia” were confiscated by the king from the noblemen *qui sunt ritus Ruthenici* [Orthodox] ... *propterea quod haeredes et possessores illorum praedicti a nobis defecerunt et voyvodae Moldaviensi, hosti nostro qui foederibus violatis et iure iurando suo districtum Pokucziae praefatum occupavit se adiunxerunt et adhaeserunt.*¹⁹⁷

Panaiteescu also stressed the collaboration between Rareș and Moscow, a collaboration based on religious solidarity as well as political interest. Peresvetov’s letter can be considered as a later echo of this collaboration. Peresvetov recalled to Muscovite memory the favourable attitude of the Moldavian prince towards Russia, knowing that his message would be understood more easily. When Rareș said (according to Peresvetov): “So strong was the faith of the Greeks [Byzantines] that we were proud of that, and now we are proud of the Empire of Russia,” he could suggest that his sentiment towards Russia was based mainly on the strength of the Russian Orthodox faith.¹⁹⁸ Consequently, I consider that for Moscow at that time Rareș must have been perceived as “an Orthodox friend of the Tsar,” and it can be inferred that the Moldavian prince concurred in the formation of this perception.¹⁹⁹

Rareș also seems to have developed a certain “pan-Orthodox” programme, beyond the Moldavian boundaries. In the case of Poland, we do not know whether Rareș was the first ruler who developed relations between the Moldavian Orthodox Church and the Ruthenian Orthodox communities from Pocutsia. He may have supported such relations, although we do not have direct documentary evidence. The document issued by the King Sigismund I in 1539, appointing Macarie Tuczapiski as the first Orthodox bishop of the Polish Ruthenians, suggests at least a certain influence of the Moldavian Orthodox Church over the Ruthenian communities.²⁰⁰ The motivation of the decision was explained

¹⁹⁶ Quoted from Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 51 (the English translation from the Romanian version is provided by the author).

¹⁹⁷ See Panaiteescu, 12-13. The diploma is entirely published. It is also significant the fact that some of the confiscated villages recall Romanian toponymy such as “Drohomirczani” (a possible Romanian variant: Drohomirceni, the ending “czani” being originally Romanian).

¹⁹⁸ See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 1, 455.

¹⁹⁹ For details concerning the diplomatic relations carried by Petru Rareș with Moscow, see the above mentioned study of Panaiteescu.

²⁰⁰ See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 50. The new bishopric was established in Lwow.

by the king: “so that the Orthodox priests from Podolia and Russia will no longer be forced to go to Moldavia and other foreign countries to be ordained and for their religious offices.” Another interesting document is the letter issued by Rareș on July 19, 1546, addressed to the city of Bistrița (northern Transylvania). In this letter the prince informed the magistrates of the city that

*Elegimus hunc episcopum nostrum nomine Tharasi ad episcopatum Wadiensem. Igitur rogamus vestram dominacionem prudenciam quatenus teneatis honorifice et in pertinenciis vestris ubique fuerint presbyteri Walacorum ex mandato Dominacionis Vestrae ipsum audire et ei obedire velint qualiter fuit et antea. Et quidquid nomine nostro dixerit ut eidem fidem credere et adhibere velitis.*²⁰¹

These two documents suggest that the prince was active in controlling the Orthodox communities in the neighbouring region. However, while the bishopric of Vad had jurisdiction over the Orthodox villages from Rareș’ Transylvanian possessions (Ciceu, Cetatea de Baltă, Ungurașul, Rodna and Bistrița), the Ruthenians from Podolia were outside the direct control of the prince. Despite this, we do not have strong reasons to reject the idea that Rareș manifested similar preoccupations towards the Ruthenians.

Rareș’ remarkable concern for Orthodoxy is also proved by his special relations with the archbishopric of Ohrid and his donations made to Mount Athos. Macarie, the superior of the Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos, received in 1533 from Rareș a generous donation to his monastery.

3.1.4. Culture and Religion during Petru Rareș’ Reign

Treating the religious culture during Rareș’ reign, the most important and obvious sign of his policy is represented by the painted churches from northern Moldavia. From the existing state of documentation it is unknown to what extent Rareș involved himself in this remarkable artistic creation. As mentioned earlier, however, due to the evident political message of the iconography his participation cannot be denied.

Foundation activity can also be considered a cultural act in a period when the church *qua* building represented the most significant – if not unique – form of artistic creation. The impressive number of churches founded during Rareș’ reign, however, suggest rather a strong relation between art, church and policy, especially since these

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

foundations share a united iconographical perspective. Monastery churches were not the exclusive preference of princely foundation activity. The urban areas also knew the preoccupation of the ruler to provide the Orthodox communities in Moldavian towns with parish churches. This preoccupation may have been determined by the need to protect the Orthodox from the possible influence of the non-Orthodox communities (Saxons, Hungarians, or Armenians, important ethnic and social components of the town population).²⁰² For example, Rareș and his family (especially his wife, Elena Branković) supported the foundation or restoration of the Orthodox parish churches from the towns of Hârlău, Baia (inhabited by a large non-Orthodox community), Roman or Piatra Neamț. In Suceava, the capital of the country, the great church dedicated to Saint Dimitri was built in a similar style to the princely necropolis of Probota.²⁰³

The iconographical programme of the painted churches is a clear example of what we may call an “official artistic product.” The entire elaboration and the strong political significance of some of the compositions, beside their dominant theological message, lead us to this conclusion. Of course, in the Middle Ages art never represented a purpose in itself, always carrying a more or less clear theological, moral or political message. This message can also be found in the sixteenth-century Moldavian external church paintings. As noted above, the Judgement Day is an evident allusion to the supremacy of Orthodoxy over other confessions or religions (Catholicism, Armenian Monophysitism or Islam). This supremacy is presented visually in terms of clear oppositions between good and evil, the pure and sinners, the blessed and damned. Between the Pope or Mohammed there was no difference: they were as much damned before God as the ancient heretics such as Arius and Nestorius or the pagan Roman Emperors such as Julian or Maximilian.²⁰⁴

²⁰² See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 53.

²⁰³ See Solcanu, 297-298.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 308. The representation of all these figures burning in the eternal fire of Hell can be seen on the frescos from Voroneț and Humor. The author considered that the sixteenth-century Moldavian Judgement Day scenes represent an important change in the Eastern European Orthodox iconography due to the fact that in similar scenes depicted on Orthodox churches from Balkan region (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) the only ethnic group included among the damned is represented by Jews. *Ibid.*, 307.

Crăciun suggested a possible interpretation concerning the astonishing abundance of painting, which covers entirely the external and internal walls of these churches. This “excess of image” could be also a reaction to Protestant austerity in church decoration.²⁰⁵

3.2. Jacob Heraclides Despot: the Dilemma of a Protestant Prince

3.2.1. *The relation carried by the Despot with the Moldavian Orthodox Church – between indifference and hostility*

In the case of Jacob Heraclides Despot, whose confession was not Orthodox but Protestant, things became more complicated. For this ruler the main difficulty was how to maintain the legitimacy of his power over a large Orthodox majority and at the same time not to be forced to abandon his personal religion. A convenient solution seemed to be collaboration with the Church. He had to accept the coronation carried out according to the tradition of the country by Metropolitan Grigore II and two bishops, Eftimie of Rădăuți and Anastasie of Roman, with the Orthodox ritual of anointing as the first step of legitimising his reign.²⁰⁶ The political reckoning is obvious and easy to decipher. We can also infer another interpretation related to the personal religious affiliation of the Despot, an interpretation proposed and sustained by Crăciun. In her opinion, the Despot could accept and practise the Orthodox rituals because his religious background allowed such sort of dissimulation.²⁰⁷ He was able to keep his faith in secret in order to avoid rejection

²⁰⁵ See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 51. The author, however, admitted that for the Protestants the religious image was not really a very important issue and rather controversial.

²⁰⁶ The chronicler Grigore Ureche related the episode of the Despot’s anointing as prince of Moldavia: “Despot ... came to Iași, where he called the bishops (*vlădicii*), Grigorie, the metropolitan, and Anastasie, the bishop of Roman, and the bishop Eftimie of Rădăuți and all the boyars of the country and they read the “prince’s prayer” (*molitva de domnie*) and they called him Ion Vodă Despot.” See Grigore Ureche, 174.

²⁰⁷ See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 111. She develops the argument in a convincing manner, analysing the influence of the Italian Protestant Lelio Sozzini in the Polish environment (who determined the religious evolution of the Despot) and corroborating this with some information from the internal chronicles. Sozzini was the main Protestant theologian who legitimised dissimulation as an acceptable and convenient means of self-defence in order to avoid religious persecution (see Perez Zagorin, *Ways of Lying. Dissimulation, Persecution and Conformity in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). A further argument for the existence of a certain religious conformity (a so-called “socinianism”) in the Despot’s public behaviour could be also inferred from Grigore Ureche’s chronicle, *Letopisețul Moldovei*: “Despot joined several evangelicals because he was not Orthodox, but in fact was *secretly a heretic* [emphasis mine].” See *ibid.*, 172. The adverb “secretly” strongly suggests the idea of dissimulation. The chronicler repeated it in another sentence: “Despot – Vodă, when he saw that he got the reign and the investiture flag from the Empire and he sat on the throne, showed to everybody pious, gentle and truly Orthodox and secretly heretic and he had his counsellors who shared the same confession.” See

on a confessional basis, although some of his decisions did affect the Orthodox church.²⁰⁸ One of these decisions was to take the gold and silver objects from churches and monasteries in order to get raw material to mint money to pay his mercenaries.²⁰⁹ We cannot assume for certain that this measure was determined by religious reasons, besides the purely economic ones, even if the chroniclers always equated the Despot's confession and his decisions. The economic reasons seem to be in this case much more convincing.

The general attitude of the Despot towards the Orthodox Church was at least prudent if not too friendly; however, it was not prudent enough to truly ensure its support for his rulership. Berciu-Drăghicescu considered that the coronation of Jacob Despot on the Romanian Orthodox feast of Saint George, April 23, 1562, was designed to reconcile the Orthodox authorities and the people with the prince and to erase the resentments generated by the Despot's confiscations. This public reconciliation was preceded by the Despot's solemn visit to Roman, where, as Belsius noted with great astonishment in his report from April 13, 1562: "... a new thing happened. In the eleventh day of this month, the Despot came here [to Roman] on horseback ... and first he went to church, where he kissed the Gospels according to tradition, and then he was welcomed by the metropolitan and the boyars with great honour and they led him to the court."²¹⁰ He made also a donation to the Orthodox monastery of Humor of two villages, Feredeiani and Strahotin, in March 1562.²¹¹ The coronation on April 23 did not lead, however, to a real

ibid., 175. The theory of the Despot's Socinianism was rejected by Hans Petri who considered that the prince died as Calvinist, although he affirmed that "it is very much possible that if he [Jacob Despot] had lived longer he would have been also Socinian." See Hans Petri, *Relațiunile lui Iacobus Basilikus Heraclides zis Despot-Vodă cu capii reformațiunii atât în Germania cât și în Polonia precum și propria activitate reformatoare în principatul Moldovei* (Jacob Basilius Heraclides' Relations with the Reformation Leaders from both Germany and Poland and His Own Reformatory Activity in the Principality of Moldavia). (Bucharest: Cultura Națională, 1927), 41.

²⁰⁸ However, as the same chronicler wrote, the Despot's true confession could not be kept secret forever: "Then, later, his unfaithfulness got to be known." See Ureche, 175. Also, the sixteenth-century monk Azarie, the official chronicler of the Moldavian prince, Petru Șchiopul (1574-1577, 1578-1579, 1582-1591), confirmed the fact: "When he got the full power, at the beginning he seemed gentle, hating injustice; later he began to show the secret and bad poison that he had in his heart ... and he hated the Orthodox traditions." See Bogdan, 143.

²⁰⁹ See Berciu-Drăghicescu, 96.

²¹⁰ See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 2, 141. The report, which was sent from Roman, mentioned also the fact that the Despot intended to change the Metropolitan Grigore II whom he suspected of being supporter of Lăpușneanu.

²¹¹ See *Documente privind istoria românilor* (Documents concerning the history of the Romanians), series A (Moldavia), Sixteenth-Century Collection, vol. 2, ed. Mihail Roller, (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1951), 159. The Despot confiscated these villages from one of Lăpușneanu's supporters, boyar Andreica.

reconciliation, but rather to a peace for an indefinite period. Another concession made by the Despot was to participate in one of the main Romanian Orthodox feasts, the Epiphany (*Boboteaza*), on January 6, 1563, described by Martin the Literate as a true coronation.²¹²

However, the decision to use the plates of the Orthodox churches and monasteries to mint money for his own purposes seems to have been unforgettable for the ecclesiastical authorities and for the people, as all the chronicles mentioned it.²¹³ Also, the fact that the Despot was not Orthodox determined *a priori* a reserved attitude of the churchmen. The Despot's religious conformity was not sufficient to save face: he was accused of despising the "law" (the Orthodox faith).²¹⁴ Grigore Ureche mentioned in a brief account the causes that led to the formation of the opposition against the Despot, in which the ecclesiastical authorities, for the first time in Moldavian history, took an active part and assumed a political role justified by an exceptional situation: "At that time the boyars of the country were consulting with the bishops what to do with that law-infringer, who not only infringes the customs of the country and commits robberies, but also mocks the law."²¹⁵ Beside melting down the valuable objects of the church for coining, also the "mockery of the law" represented a grave accusation against the Despot.

We can conclude that the Despot did not succeed in controlling the Moldavian Church, and in fact he could not have achieved this, because his confession proved to be a great disadvantage. Even if his Socinianism allowed a certain religious dissimulation in public behaviour, this was eventually overtaken by his direct and public support of Protestantism in Moldavia and his general attitude towards Orthodoxy, combined with some unpopular decisions. The alliance between the boyars loyal to the former ruler and the ecclesiastical authorities against the Despot was, therefore, natural and predictable.

²¹² See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 2, 227-228 (the report was dated January 8, 1563, from Suceava).

²¹³ Petri Hans considered the Despot's decision to be a "fatal step," accusing the prince of having proven "an absolute lack of psychological sense" in his efforts to introduce the Reformation in Moldavia. See Hans Petri, 43.

²¹⁴ According to Ureche, Ștefan Tomșa, before killing the Despot, accused him of "having mocked the law." See Ureche, 187.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

3.2.2. Jacob Heraclides Despot and His Confessional Policy

Analysing Jacob Heraclides the Despot's confessional policy, one sees easily the "natural" preference of the prince towards the Protestant minorities. Even before acceding to the Moldavian throne, the Despot expressed his intention of supporting a confessional policy strongly oriented towards Protestantism. In a letter addressed to the Austrian archduke, Maximilian of Habsburg, on May 24, 1560, he accused Alexandru Lăpușneanu of religious persecution: "he [Lăpușneanu] destroys the churches built a long time ago by faithful people, kills the priests against the Christian right, without defrocking them first, as happened recently with seven priests whom he impaled, without judgement and even without listening to the witnesses."²¹⁶ Accusing Lăpușneanu of intolerance, the Despot presented himself to the Habsburgs as the right man in the right place, ready to be tolerant to the religious minorities in Moldavia.

The Despot's intentions were not limited to a passive tolerant confessional policy; he showed a strong predilection for the Protestant communities. One of his first decisions after he defeated Lăpușneanu was to contact some Protestant clerics in order to establish an organised church for the Protestant communities in Moldavia. He succeeded in bringing one of the well-known Reformed theologians from Poland, Johannes Lusinius (Jan Lusinski), whom he appointed "bishop of the Saxons and Hungarians" in April 1562.²¹⁷ The significance of this decision was clear, according to the Habsburg envoy, Belsius, who noted in his report from April 13, 1562, the following:

... because Alexander the Moldavian [Lăpușneanu] forced all nations [*nationes* in the medieval sense of the word] without any differentiation to baptise again and to follow the religion of the Moldavians depriving of their own religion he [the Despot] appointed a bishop of the Saxon and Hungarian nations who should restore the churches that had been taken away from them and to strengthen their souls in faith.²¹⁸

Lusinski was in fact the first Protestant bishop in Moldavia (at least according to the documentary sources), and, as a most spectacular occurrence, he was appointed by the

²¹⁶ See Hurmuzaki, vol. 2, part 1, 374. Lăpușneanu carried extensive and harsh persecutions against the Protestant and Armenian communities – see Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 65-87.

²¹⁷ Jan Lusinski was formerly a Catholic priest at Juranowicze (near Cracow). He was recognised in Poland as one of the best Reformat theologians (in 1558 he was in Switzerland and had several theological discussions with Calvin). See Bârsănescu, 145.

²¹⁸ See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 2, 140-141.

Protestant prince of an Orthodox country. Jacob Despot seems to have decided to radically change the situation of the Protestant minorities in Moldavia. Lusinski's appointment was an important measure but not the only one. According to the archbishop of Lwow, Jan Demetrius Solikowski, *Heraclides ... pulsus Catholicis sacerdotibus lutheranos ministros introduxerat*.²¹⁹ Protestant clerics were not coming to a virgin land; the Saxons and Hungarians had Catholic priests, probably after their former Protestant parishioners were baptised by force during Lăpușneanu's reign. Concerning the "Lutheran ministers" that the Despot brought to Moldavia to replace the Catholic priests, we do not have any names except those mentioned in the letter of appeal sent by the prince from Vaslui on December 11, 1561, to the Polish Protestant priests, Lasocki and Philipowski, asking them to come to Moldavia.²²⁰

Lusinski tried to achieve the restoration of the Protestant faith according to the Despot's project. However, the difficulties that arose seem to have been greater than expected. Lusinski strove to discourage "superstitions" and especially the widespread practice of divorce. According to Sommer, the Despot appointed Lusinski primarily to solve the "problem" of multiple marriages.²²¹ We can infer that the Despot might have tried to impose the abolition of divorce on his all subjects, not only the Protestants.²²²

²¹⁹ See the letter sent to Cardinal Montalto on April 9, 1584, in Hurmuzaki, vol. 3, part 1, 123.

²²⁰ See Veress, vol. 1, 201-202. In the same letter the Despot made a general appeal to all Protestants "ex Gallia, Hispania, Germania et aliis locis" to come in Moldavia, guaranteeing them the right of living and the freedom of faith with the condition of recognising his authority. For Crăciun the fact that the Despot called in Moldavia the two Polish Protestants is a strong argument that proves the Socinian orientation of the Despot. See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 120. Also Nicolae Costin mentioned in his chronicle the fact that the Despot "gathered teachers from Germany (*Țara Nemțască*) and from Poland (*Țara Leșască*), Catholics (*papistași*). Since that time remained here, in our country, the Jesuits (*ezoviți*) and other priests of the Western Church, Catholics." See Costin, 206. For Costin the distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism was almost non-existent as during his time the ethnic notion of Saxons was synonym with the religious notion of Catholics.

²²¹ Divorce was common in the Orthodox communities, where a married woman had the right – according to unwritten customs – to divorce her husband even if she was only cursed or lightly hit. The only condition for the divorce to be recognised was the obligation of the woman to pay a fee of 1/3 of a *taller*. See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 2, 260 (from Sommer, the Romanian translation). The non-Orthodox communities, especially the Saxons and the Hungarians, also adopted this custom. Lusinski had a case in the town of Troțuș with a man who had had several wives who all married again after divorcing him and he himself was married at that time to another woman. Treating this case, Lusinski proved to be an adept of non-violent methods: he eventually confirmed – at the request of the whole community – the last marriage of that man, after a long deliberation. Unlike the bishop, the Despot – who seemed to have a special interest in this issue – tried to suppress the practice by using violent coercive measures. See *Ibid.* Crăciun interpreted the Despot's obsession for this issue as a strong evidence for his Socinianism. See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 132. It is quite unusual for a ruler at that time to imply actively in matters of morality of his own subjects and thus, it seems that Crăciun's argument can be considered as the

The general goal of the Despot, to restore religious tolerance in Moldavia, seems, however, to have been fulfilled. Belsius informed Maximilian that “he [the Despot] gave to everyone his own right, returning to the Hungarians their churches and preachers, carrying out publicly the Eucharistic mass ...”²²³ Moreover, the prince materially supported a Protestant church foundation in the town of Cotnari, eastern Moldavia, inhabited mainly by Saxons and Hungarians, who seem to have constituted a compact Protestant community.²²⁴ The prince showed himself also to be an active supporter of Protestantism, against the general opinion of the Orthodox majority. The chronicler Azarie wrote with hard feelings that “he brought together with him counsellors of another religion, Lutherans unpleasant for the Lord, because he himself shared the same religion with them” and finished the passages on the Despot’s reign with a significant sentence: “Since that time [the return of Lăpușneanu after the death of the Despot] the waving storm stopped and everyone floated with no trouble on the sea of life because the Godly zephyr of the Orthodox faith was blowing.”²²⁵ Later, the chronicler Ureche noted that the Despot “had his own counsellors who shared the same faith with him.”²²⁶ Nicolae Costin remarked that “The country hated him very much also due to the Orthodox faith that the Despot did not respect.”²²⁷

most valuable in this circumstances. On the other hand the Moldavian chronicler, Nicolae Costin suggested that the Despot carried these measures being urged by Lusinski (or Lusenie as the chronicler transcribed the name of the Protestant bishop). Sommer related the fact the he himself witnessed the execution of six men at the order of the Despot, the men being accused of having divorced. See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 2, 260. We do not know whether these men were Protestants or not, but Sommer suggested that everybody (including also the non-Protestants) feared such punishment We quote: “Incussit id terrorem nobilibus Valachis gravissimum, qui incredibilem in ea re usurparant licentiam ac consternabantur admodum, cum dejeraret nequaquam se passurum eam conjugiorum illusionem in sua provincia usurpari diutius, et quod in alios fieri videbant, in se quoque animadversum iri pro se quisque timebat unde hac quoque barbaris animis ut defectione inirent consilia celerius, vehementes stimulos subiecisse admodum probabile est.” See Johannes Sommer Pirnensis, Antonius Maria Gratianus, 44.

²²² Crăciun proposed the hypothesis that the Despot’s position and acts concerning this issue may suggest his attempt to accustom the Orthodox majority with a Protestant morality as a preamble to a possible future conversion. See Maria Crăciun, *Protestantism and Orthodoxy in Sixteenth-Century Moldavia*, 126-135, in *The Reformation in Eastern and Central Europe*, ed. Karin Haag (Hampshire: Scholar Press, 1997), 130.

²²³ See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 2, 192 (the report from June 7, 1562, sent from Iași).

²²⁴ This foundation was mentioned by the Moldavian chronicler, Nicolae Costin: “And in Cotnari, being many Saxons there at that time, he made for them a church and school and collected a library. Probably he made for them the ruined church from Cotnari, belonging to the Catholics, if not the big one which stands until nowadays with the Saxons.” See Costin, 206.

²²⁵ See Bogdan, 143.

²²⁶ See Ureche, 175.

²²⁷ See Costin, 206.

A tolerant attitude was shown also towards the Armenian community. The Despot considered that promoting religious freedom of the minorities in Moldavia would ensure the strengthening of his authority. His “gentleness,” to use Ureche’s word, was meant to meet popular expectations after Lăpușneanu’s harsh persecutions, and in this way to gain a large social support for his reign. The Armenians themselves did not forget the Despot’s goodwill. In the Armenian chronicle of Camenitsa, the chronicler Hovhannes wrote with a “sympathetic” tone on the Despot’s reign in contrast with the vehemence against Lăpușneanu, named “Julian” (recalling Julian the Apostate, the anti-Christian Roman Emperor from Late Antiquity).²²⁸ The chronicler mentioned the Despot’s protection of the Armenian community, and it is significant that in this chronicle (at least in the part registering the events concerning Moldavia from 1430 until 1611), the information on the Despot’s reign occupies the largest space in the text compared with the other events, which were very briefly recorded. Contemporaries of the Despot’s reign remarked upon the Armenians’ response to the Despot’s tolerant attitude at that time. During the conflict between the Despot and Ștefan Tomșa in the summer of 1563, the Armenians took the Despot’s side. We do not know how far they went in their support, but contemporary sources suggested at least a strong emotional participation that did not remain “unobserved” by the Despot’s enemies.²²⁹

The Despot seems to have acted differently towards the Orthodox confession in Moldavia. Contemporary testimonies suggest an indifferent, if not a hostile, attitude, but, besides the episode of melting down the plates from Orthodox churches and monasteries, historians do not have other strong evidence. The available sources do not always “agree” or, at least, do not provide sufficient data for a complete historical evaluation of this

²²⁸ The chronicler considered Lăpușneanu to be “ten times more cruel than the Emperor Julian.” See H. Dj. Siruni, “Mărturii armenesti despre România extrase din cronică armenilor de la Camenița” (Armenian Testimonies on Romania selected from the Armenian Chronicle from Camenitsa), part 1 (1430-1611). *Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, 3rd series, vol. 17 (Bucharest, 1936), 271.

²²⁹ Vlad Bănățeanu affirmed that the only political activity of the Armenians in their Moldavian history was their implication in the conflict from 1563. See Vlad Bănățeanu, *Armenii în istoria și în viața românească* (Armenians in the Romanian History and Life) (Bucharest: Țăranu & Co S.A., 1938), 39-40. Sommer noted that “In Armenias mulieres prae aliis immaniter debacchatum est, quod pro salute Despotae vota facere illarum quaedam deprehensae essent.” See Johannes Sommer Pirnensis, Antonius Maria Gratianus, 72. Hovhannes mentioned the brutality carried by Ștefan Tomșa against Armenians: “And that accursed Tomșa, he was a filthy and bad man: he caused a lot of innocent people to be killed in the greatest pains: he ordered that a peaceful and innocent man, a monk, John, nicknamed Zur-Cădag (*Căciulă strâmbă* –

issue. For instance, Johannes Sommer considered that the Despot tried to accustom himself to the Orthodox tradition of Moldavia in spite of his own religious background.²³⁰ Unlike Sommer, the Catholic Graziani (who was the secretary of the papal nuncio in Poland, Giovanni Commendone, when the Despot was the prince of Moldavia) wrote harshly about the prince's attitude towards Orthodoxy, claiming that the Despot really did want to change the religion of the Moldavians. Graziani drew on the obvious contempt and hostility manifested by the Despot publicly on various occasions, and also from his declarations concerning the Orthodox religion:

*Id Despota, ut ratione ab se fieri non cupidine videretur, primo perraro adire templa, abstinere eorum sacrificiis, mox etiam irridere, et per jocum objectare principibus indignam viris, credulitatem, qui tantum tribuerent invederatae vulgi opinioni, ut se paterentur anilibus superstitionibus obligari. Pia mente sensuque non inani ceremonia et versorum praestigiis, rite coli placarique deum: cetera ex hominum commentis esse. Ad hoc saepe in sacerdotes jocans dictat cum aculeis contumeliarum jacere monachos adversari maxima, perinde ac si eorum aspectu laederetur. Post liberius sacrum (quod Missam appellamus) detestari et acerbe insectari male dictis: opiniones de deo falsas esse arguere, disserere ipse de diviniis praeceptionibus, suam sententiam confirmare sacrorum librorum auctoritate: denique non obscure ferre daturum se operam esse ut vana abrogarentur sacra ritusque et infixus eorum mentibus error evelleretur.*²³¹

According to Graziani, the Despot clearly declared his intention of converting the Orthodox majority to Protestantism. More interestingly, the prince himself seems to have interfered in theological controversies against the Orthodox priests, described by Graziani as *aculeis contumeliarum*. The Despot's violent anti-Orthodox discourse was extensively presented by Commendone's private secretary:

... paratos aculeos et maledicta in sacerdotes contorquens, inscitiam, ignaviam, mores, totam denique vitam eorum criminibus exagitare, per illorum maxime turpitudinem sacris religionique odium struens. ... quod per se indignum Valachi eo ferebant acerbius quod se insuper derideri putabant praedicante Despota ea se religionis studio incoepisse quo sublata superstitione in cuius usum illa comparata essent veram pietatem cultumque ad eam diem sive neglectum sive

'Slanting Cap'), to be hanged from a beam; he also ordered the *voit* of the Armenians, Hacires, a good and kind man, to be hanged together with three Armenian women with their little children ... " See Siruni, 276.

²³⁰ We quote from Sommer: "Accessit ad hoc religionis, quam graecam hodie observant Valachi, non usque adeo seria Despotae veneratio. Etsi etiam ritus quosdam imitaretur, eorumque pertinaci superstitioni multum sane largitur, suspecta tamen cumprimis erat..." See Johannes Sommer Pirnensis, Antonius Maria Gratianus, 46. As we can observe, Sommer suggested that the Despot made extensive efforts to dissimulate his own confession, but without success.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 142-144.

*ignoratum restitueret: daemonum esse mancipia qui secus sentirent ... Sic enim intelligebant et imminere eius cupiditatem universis sacerdotum fortunis, qui, dictitaret iniquum esse tam iners et ventri deditum genus tam bonis praediis saginari et nimirum cuius libido rebus sacris non parceret iis absumptis multo minus a privatorum facultatibus temperaturum. Flagrantem iam harum rerum infamia, in maximum invidiae incendium, coniecit novum et sane a christiana consuetudine et religione abhorrens facinus.*²³²

The Moldavian chroniclers presented a generally negative picture of the relations between the Despot and Orthodoxy, stressing the disrespectful attitude of the prince towards the religion of the majority of his subjects. Lăpușneanu's official chronicler, Azarie, mentioned that "he did not love the monks and the monasteries."²³³ Ureche considered that opposition against the Despot formed because "the law [the Orthodox faith] fell into a derisory state," and mentioned Tomșa's accusation against the Despot, who "mocked the law."²³⁴ Nicolae Costin wrote that "the Despot did not follow the Orthodox faith," but did not provide details on Jacob Despot's confessional policy.²³⁵

For the Transylvanian Martin Siglerius, familiar with the events from 1561 to 1563, Jacob Despot's intentions concerning the status of religion in Moldavia were clear: *Despota ... religionis statum in Moldavia mutare ... occipit.*²³⁶ Also, an English spy from Trent, Italy, wrote in his report of August 31, 1563, that "he went about to alter [Orthodox] religion."²³⁷

A further argument for the Despot's active involvement in a possible significant change of the confessional map of Moldavia is to be seen in the hostile and violent reactions of the Moldavian nobility and people against him. Besides the extraordinary

²³² *Ibid.*, 146.

²³³ Bogdan, 143.

²³⁴ Ureche, 180, 187. For Tomșa's discourse against the Despot's confessional policy see also Graziani, according to whom Tomșa labelled the Despot as "dei totiusque religionis contemptorem." See Johannes Sommer Pirnensis, Antonius Maria Gratianus, 160. For the papal nuncio in Poland, Giovanni Commendone, the Despot was "rapace et dispregiatore della religione." Commendone thus related the scene of the Despot's capitulation to Tomșa in November 1563: "s'inginocchiò et li posse la mazza pregandolo che lo lassassè vivo et concedesse ch'e fosse sacerdote; a cui esso [Tomșa] rispose: Come voi tu esser prete, se non sei cristiano?." See Nicolae Iorga, *Nouveaux matériaux pour servir à l'histoire de Jacques Basilikos l'Héraclide dit le Despote prince de Moldavie* (Bucharest: Carol Göbl, 1900), 17-18.

²³⁵ See Costin, 206.

²³⁶ See Alexandru Lapedatu, "Știri privitoare la istoria țărilor române din cronologia lui Siglerius" (Information concerning the History of the Romanian Countries from Siglerius' Chronology), *Anuarul Institutului de istorie națională*, 2 (1923) (Bucharest: Cartea Românească S.A., 1924): 369. Siglerius' *Chronologia universalis* was written between 1563-1572, the year 1563 being the chronological final limit of this work.

(and onerous) taxes imposed by the prince in order to cover state expenses, his religious policy seems to have contributed to the formation of one of the largest opposition trends in Moldavian medieval history. As we mentioned before, almost all sources, contemporary and later, seem to agree on this issue. Sommer noted in his *Vita*:

Etsi etiam ritus quosdam imitaretur, eorumque pertinaci superstitioni multum sane largiretur, suspecta tamen cum primis erat extraneorum hominum familiaritas qua ita utebatur Despota ut plurimum inde voluptatis capere non obscure fateretur et quanquam callido esset et versatili ingenio, non tamen ita illos sibi devincire plurima vafre simulando potuit ut non suae gentis hominem quam ipsum rerum potiri mallent et in angulis mussitarent sacrilegium eum esse et hostem religionis, quando augusti monasterii, cuius supra facta est αναθημα conflarit ut peregrina militi redderentur stipendia; ex ea re de animo illius fieri posse iudicium. ... Haec aliaque id genus multa clam querebatur.²³⁸

For Graziani this was obvious to the same degree as for Sommer:

His rebus languescere primum, deinde prorsus extinguere hominum in illum studia, post offensam animis etiam accendit odium. ... Id [the melting down of some holy crosses] vero ita indignum omnibus visum est tantumque inde odii ac doloris exarsit ut prorsus constet id factum Despotae exitium attulisse.²³⁹

Siglerius and the English spy from Trent considered the Despot's religious policy as the main cause of the failure of his reign and also of his death. Of course, this conclusion was not the result of their own analysis, but an echo of the events themselves. The fact that later sources entirely assumed this perception shows the strong emotional impact of the religious issue over the public memory of the contemporaries.

3.2.3. Jacob Heraclides Despot and His Relations with the European Protestants

The confessional dimension of the Despot's diplomacy is difficult to detect. He was involved in the Habsburgs' plan to conquer Transylvania, an important step in their project designed to lead to the defeat and expulsion of the Ottomans from Central Europe. The Despot could not call on religious solidarity, besides a general Christian solidarity, as was noted by the Polish king, Sigismund II Augustus, in a letter to the

²³⁷ See Tappe, 36.

²³⁸ See Johannes Sommer Pirnensis, Antonius Maria Gratianus, 58.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

Moldavian prince in 1563.²⁴⁰ The only episode when confession interfered with politics was the so-called “Wolff Schreiber episode.”²⁴¹

Wolff Schreiber was sent in October 1562 to Moldavia by Baron Hans Ungnad with the mission to convince the Despot to support the project of printing the Gospels in vernacular for the use of the Moldavians. In order to be more convincing, Ungnad provided Schreiber with several volumes of the Gospels translated into Slavonic languages from Central and Eastern Europe.²⁴² On his way to Moldavia, however, Schreiber passed through Transylvania, where he spent several days at the court of Prince Ioan Sigismund, an adept of Protestantism, but an adversary of the Habsburgs and the Despot. The fact that Schreiber came to Moldavia from Transylvania seemed suspect to the Despot. The discovery of a cipher used by Schreiber in his correspondence with the Transylvanian chancellor, Mihaly Csàki, strengthened his suspicions concerning a possible conspiracy against him organised by Ioan Sigismund and Schreiber in order to compromise him before the Ottoman Porte. Although Schreiber tried to explain his real purpose – which would have helped Moldavian Protestantism to a notable degree – the Despot decided to arrest him and send him in chains to Constantinople.²⁴³

Schreiber proved to be innocent, although both the Despot and also Belsius were almost convinced that he was the spy of the Transylvanian prince. But, beside the undoubted political implications, there was also a religious component, more difficult to notice. According to Crăciun, the fact that Schreiber was Lutheran determined to an important degree his failure to convince the Despot.²⁴⁴ The Despot was not much interested in Schreiber’s proposal, presumably because he was a Socinian. A certain “misunderstanding” can be detected here, and it is strange that the Despot sent Schreiber

²⁴⁰ See Corfus, 204-205. We quote: “Equidem curae semper nobis fuit, iam inde ab eo tempore, quo regni nostri gubernacula ad nos sunt delata, ut pacem cum omnibus hominibus, cum ys vero inprimis, qui nos et religione communi et vicinitatis iurae et foederum ac pactorum religiose contingunt ...”.

²⁴¹ See Maria Holban, “En marge de la croisade protestante du groupe de Urach pour la diffusion de l’Evangile dans les langues nationales du sud-est européens. L’épisode Wolff Schreiber,” *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européens* 1-2 (1964): 127-152.

²⁴² Those Gospels were translated by the so-called “group of Urach” patronised by Ungnad. The purpose of such translation project was to distribute the Protestant version of the Gospel among the Orthodox peoples from Central and Eastern Europe in an attempt to convert them to Protestantism. It is perhaps interesting to mention the fact that these Gospels were printed with Cyrillic characters.

²⁴³ For this episode, see also Belsius’ and Schreiber’s reports and letters in *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 2: 224-225, 228-229, 273, 277-279, 280-281, 287, 289-290.

²⁴⁴ See Crăciun, *Protestantism și ortodoxie*, 112-113.

to Constantinople with his books and did not try to apply Ungnad's idea. Moreover, the Despot may also have intended to sacrifice Schreiber for political purposes, trying to prove to his subjects his fidelity to Orthodoxy.

The confessional dimension is much more present in the Despot's relations with the Polish and German Protestants. These relations were intended mainly to support the development of Protestantism in Moldavia. The letter sent to the two Protestant priests, Lasocki and Phillipowski, on December 11, 1561, expressed the Despot's goal of transforming Moldavia into a hospitable place for all Protestant refugees. An important detail is worthy of mention here: both priests were the adepts of the anti-Trinitarian doctrine.²⁴⁵ Thus, the interdiction of the Polish king against their wish to preach in Lithuania was entirely logical.²⁴⁶ The Despot seems to have preferred the anti-Trinitarians. Jan Lusinski, bishop of the Saxons and Hungarians in Moldavia, and Johannes Sommer were also anti-Trinitarians. The Moldavian chroniclers, however, did not make this difference: for them the main point was that the Despot was not Orthodox and that he gathered at his court many non-Orthodox servants.²⁴⁷

The Despot also contacted Francis Lismanin, a well-known follower of Socinianism.²⁴⁸ The insistence of the prince, who invited Lismanin *ternis litteris honorificentissimis*, shows his keen interest and desire to have the Socinian theologian in his entourage.²⁴⁹ We may assume that the Despot hoped to use Lismanin for his plans concerning the development of Protestantism in Moldavia. Lismanin seems to have been

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁴⁶ See Veress, vol. 1: 202.

²⁴⁷ Azarie considered the Despot's servants to be "Lutherans hated by the Lord," and stressed the connection between this fact and the Despot's own confession: "because he shared the same confession." See Bogdan: 143. For Ureche, the Despot was simply "a heretic" who "had councillors of the same law [confession]." See Ureche: 175. Nicolae Costin considered the Despot to be a Catholic who "gathered teachers from Germany [*Țara Nemțască*] and from Poland [*Țara Leșască*], Catholics [*papistași*]. Since then Jesuits [*ezoviți*] and other priests of the Western Church, Catholics, remained here, in our country." See Costin, 206.

²⁴⁸ Lismanin was formerly the Catholic preacher of the Polish queen, Buona Sforza, from 1546 until 1550 when it is considered that he became Protestant. Between 1550 and 1556 he left Poland, being later condemned by the Polish king and the Polish ecclesiastical authorities. Since 1556 (when he came back surreptitiously at the invitation made by the first Protestant synod held in Poland) he resided in Poland until his death in the autumn of 1563.

²⁴⁹ See Iorga, *Nouveaux matériaux*: 59. (the letter of Enoc Baumgartner, sent from Kowno, on July 5, 1563, which informed the Despot that the Socinian theologian would come to Moldavia, but he was still busy in Kowno waiting to receive the approval of the Polish king). See the Romanian translation at Bârsănescu, 37-38.

favourable to the Despot's invitation, but the prince could not longer wait for the expected arrival of the theologian, being attacked by the soldiers of Ștefan Tomșa and besieged in Suceava.²⁵⁰

The Despot invited other Protestants to teach at the Latin *collegium* in Cotnari, such as Gaspar Peucer (mathematician, the rector of Wittenberg University, adept of Melanchthon's religious conception) and Justus Jonas (professor at Wittenberg University, a friend of Luther).

Marriage was also used by Jacob Despot to strengthen his relations with the European Protestant community. According to Graziani and the Protestant pastor Thomas Frölich from Košice, Jacob Despot asked to marry Cristina, the daughter of Martin Zborowski, castellan of Cracow.²⁵¹ Zborowski was one of the Protestant high officials from Poland. Beside the political implications, the religious argument was also important in this case. This intended marriage (which did not take place in the end) caused harsh opposition on the part of the boyars, who "could hardly bear a foreign lady" and therefore were "machinating and deliberating how to prevent the marriage of the Despot and to take his power."²⁵² Graziani's report on this issue is much more significant: the boyars feared *nec integrum posthac* [the marriage with Zborowski's daughter] *amplius fore deum accepto a maioribus ritu colere*.²⁵³

The boyars and the ecclesiastical authorities considered the Despot's relations with Protestants as serious threats against Orthodoxy. The assassination of Lusinski (apparently poisoned) in May 1563 is strong evidence in this sense.²⁵⁴ The assassinations committed in the Armenian communities or among the Saxons (such as the Saxon community from Cotnari) are other suggestive examples for what could be called "a violent religious reaction" towards an active anti-Orthodox confessional policy.

²⁵⁰ Lismanino died before the Despot, in October 1563 at Königsberg, while the Despot survived until November.

²⁵¹ See Adolf Armbruster, "O relatare inedită a morții lui Despot-Vodă" (An Unpublished Relation on the Despot's Death), *Studii și materiale de istorie medie*, vol. 7, 1974: 324 (for Frölich's testimony); Johannes Sommer Pirmensis, Antonius Maria Gratianus: 155-157.

²⁵² See Armbruster, "O relatare...", 324.

²⁵³ See Johannes Sommer Pirmensis, Antonius Maria Gratianus, 156. The English report sent from Trent seems to agree that the Despot's intention of marrying Cristina was one of the causes of the uprising against the Despot: "The cause of the peoples rebellion was ... for that he meant to marry a stranger." See Tappe: 36.

²⁵⁴ Berciu-Drăghicescu: 104. The widow of the bishop was also strangled (*ibid.*, 126).

3.2.4. Religion and Culture during Jacob Heraclides Despot's Reign

Unlike Rareș or every other Moldavian ruler of the Middle Ages, the Despot did not found any Orthodox churches during his rulership (not including those princes who ruled too briefly to have taken such initiatives). Knowing the zeal of the prince towards the development of Protestantism in Moldavia, this is not surprising at all. The most significant ecclesiastical foundation (and probably the only one, according to the documentary sources) supported by the prince was not Orthodox, but Protestant. This foundation is the ruined church mentioned by Nicolae Costin in his chronicle.²⁵⁵ This is the single source for this foundation. Sommer informs us that when he heard about the rebellion against the Despot he was going to the “holy church” together with his pupils.²⁵⁶ Even if we cannot precisely know whether that church was founded by the Despot, it is sure that it was Protestant (it is difficult to imagine Sommer, a harsh opponent of both Catholicism and Orthodoxy, using the adjective “holy” for a non-Protestant church). Moreover, this church could be only in Cotnari, where the school was established. We can also infer that, even if the Despot did not built there a church, at least he ordered that the former Catholic church of the Saxons from Cotnari be transformed into a Protestant place of worship.

The other cultural foundation established by the Despot was the school of Cotnari, the most important cultural foundation in sixteenth-century Moldavia. Berciu-Drăghicescu noted that “the purpose of the education carried by Sommer was not religious but lay”: his intention was to teach his pupils the Latin language and literature.²⁵⁷ Crăciun's opinion is different: the historian considered that the school of Cotnari was not established only for educational purposes, but also for the conversion of non-Orthodox pupils. Sommer did not intend to keep the school only for the Germans and Hungarians from Cotnari, but also for Orthodox Moldavians as future proselytes of Protestantism.²⁵⁸ Crăciun based her opinion on Sommer's information:

²⁵⁵ See Costin, 206. See above for full quote.

²⁵⁶ See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 2, 265.

²⁵⁷ See Berciu-Drăghicescu, 114. Sommer did not mention in his *Elegiae* anything about a religious purpose of his educational programme.

²⁵⁸ See Crăciun, *Protestantism and Orthodoxy*, 131.

*Scholam item in oppido Cottanar, quod ferme a Saxonibus et Hungaris habitatur, erigere coeperat, collectis passim ex provincia pueris quos docere, ali, vestiri ex suo curabat aerario, constituto satis liberali magistris, pro ea discentium paucitate, stipendio quo tempore et nos ad docendum illuc misi sumus.*²⁵⁹

If the school was only for education – which is difficult to believe in an epoch when education was increasingly dominated by confessionalisation – Jacob Despot’s gathering of children from the whole country to be Sommer’s disciples seems strange; it is hard to imagine a princely project of mass education developed in sixteenth-century Moldavia. According to Bârsănescu, the pupils from Cotnari were probably poor or from modest origins, as the Despot decided to provide them with food and clothes.²⁶⁰ To assume this would also be a further argument for a confessional purpose in the Despot’s establishment of a school.

That only Protestant teachers taught at Cotnari is significant in itself. Even if the primary purpose of the school was purely educational, a confessional corollary was inevitable. We can infer such a conclusion because the Despot himself – according to Graziani – declared several times that he was going to change the religious status of Moldavia. In these circumstances the school would have been the ideal place for proselytising: poor children, who were far from their home and thus represented a fertile field for Protestantism. The Despot’s “innocence” in this case is far from being credible.

A significant item can be added to this argument: the *collegium* of Cotnari was founded by transferring the former Orthodox school of Hârlău, established by Lăpuşneanu.²⁶¹ Transferring this school from an Orthodox to a Protestant town and not leaving it in the original environment strongly suggests the Despot’s intention of changing the confessional character of the educational process in Lăpuşneanu’s former college. We can assume that Sommer and deacon Demetrius did not use Orthodox religious books for the instruction of their pupils as educational tools to accustom them to the Latin language and literature. We do not know what sort of handbooks Sommer used, but it is highly possible that some of those handbooks (which may have been provided by

²⁵⁹ See Legrand, 34.

²⁶⁰ See Bârsănescu, 74.

²⁶¹ See the report of Belsius sent from the town of Roman to Archduke Maximilian on April 13, 1562, in which it is mentioned that “after the fire from Hârlău, he intend to move the college to the town of Cotnari, in the house of Solvy.” See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 2, 141.

the Despot) were edited by Protestants. Therefore, it is both highly possible and probable that the school in Cotnari was intended from the beginning to become a Protestant educational institution designed to support the strengthening and spreading of Protestant ideas in Moldavia.

The reactions of the Moldavian boyars and ecclesiastical authorities justify such a conclusion. Sommer noted that for these boyars: *Nunc scholam ab ipso recens institui coepisse ubi iam religionis patriae perniciem doceantur peregrinae litterae.*²⁶² This passage is very significant in the context of our discussion. Just exchanging the Slavonic for Latin was enough for the Orthodox majority to perceive a possible danger of this school for its faith and tradition.

3.2. Petru Cercel and the Counter-Reformation

3.3.1. Petru Cercel and His Attitude towards Orthodoxy – Continuing the Tradition

This prince carried on a different relation with the Wallachian Orthodox Church. Unlike the Despot, the Catholic confession of the prince did not prevent a smooth and friendly attitude towards the Orthodox ecclesiastical authorities. From this point of view, Petru Cercel considered the reasons of state much more important than the problem of Catholic proselytism in Wallachia, a country where the Catholic communities were very small and unimportant in the large Orthodox population.²⁶³ Towns, which offered a fertile field for the propagation of other confessions, were few and small, lacking great economic importance and extensive commercial connections with non-Orthodox areas, except in Transylvania. In these circumstances there were not too many available options for Cercel, a Catholic prince enthroned with the strong support of the Ottoman Porte, ruling an Orthodox country with a low urban social representation. However, the fact that his reign did not last long prevents us from asserting firm conclusions in this matter.

Although he was invested and crowned under the auspices of the Ottoman Porte, the suzerain power, Cercel also tried to ensure the support of the boyars and of the

²⁶² See Johannes Sommer Pirnensis, Antonius Maria Gratianus, 48.

²⁶³ A valuable source for a statistic of the Catholic communities in Wallachia at the beginning of the seventeenth century is the report made for the papal curia by the Franciscan monk Andrea Bogoslavac in

Orthodox Church in order to strengthen his legitimacy. Despite his religious confession, he did not change the “traditional” relations with the ecclesiastical authorities of the country, following the policy of his Orthodox predecessors. In these circumstances the generous donation policy of the prince, for example, seemed entirely natural. The Church was granted significant land donations, and also several other properties were confirmed for it.²⁶⁴ Consequently, he was actively involved in the restoration of several Orthodox churches and developed a remarkable foundation activity during his short reign.²⁶⁵ Besides these initiatives, he also supported the printing of Orthodox religious books, such as the Slavonic *Evangeliiar*, printed in 1583 by Coresi, the deacon, and Mănăilă, the chancellor of the prince.²⁶⁶ Cristian Luca has interpreted this initiative as a proof of Cercel’s desire to endow some of the Wallachian churches and monasteries with religious books necessary for the rituals.²⁶⁷ The clerics themselves were also used by the prince in administering judicial causes, thus taking part actively in the regulation of state domestic affairs.²⁶⁸

Certainly, the favourable attitude of Cercel towards the Orthodox Church was determined by the special circumstances in which he acceded to the throne. We cannot

1623 who estimated the number of the Wallachian Catholics at about 856. See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 5, 8-10.

²⁶⁴ For example Cercel granted to the Metropolitan Seat some estates from Sârbi village and also confirmed another village and granted several other estates for the bishoprics of Râmnic and Buzău. Cristian Luca made a statistics concerning the percentage of documents issued by the prince for the Church: from a total amount of 55 documents which preserved up to nowadays, 20 were addressed to the Church, 18 to free landowners, 14 to the boyars etc. As we can note, the greatest amount of documents were issued for the Church: even if this is not really a valuable date, a significant interest of the prince for ecclesiastical matters is beyond doubt. See Luca, 76.

²⁶⁵ With his material support, the Metropolitan church from Târgoviște, whose building was begun during Neagoe Basarab’s reign (1512-1521), was finalised (Franco Sivori considered it “una bellissima chiesa lavorata a mosaico.” See Pascu, 175). Also the church of the monastery from Curtea de Argeș was repaired and granted with goods. The mural painting of the church of Glavacioc monastery was also restored with princely expenses. One of Cercel’s main Orthodox foundations was the princely church of Târgoviște (known in the chronicles as “Biserica Domnească”) dedicated to the Dormition of Mother of the Lord, built in 1584 together with the new princely palace (Franco Sivori noted “Fece nel medesimo tempo edificare una bella chiesa contigua al palazzo, a tale che per un ponte coperto potteva Sua Altezza intrarli dalle sue stanze senza esser visto.” See *ibid.*). Other foundations were the church of Botușari from Curtea de Argeș and the church of Mislea monastery. The last church was granted goods and estates. See Luca, 120.

²⁶⁶ This was actually a re-printing, the first printing of this Slavonic *Evangeliiar* being realised by the same editors in 1579 - see Luca, 116.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ See for example the letter sent to the bishop of Buzău in September 10, 1584, containing instructions for judging the causes. See *Documente privind istoria României* (Documents concerning the History of Wallachia), series B (Wallachia), Sixteenth-Century Document Collection, vol. 5, ed. Mihail Roller, (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1952), 135-136.

make firm statements concerning his future intentions if he had had the chance to rule more than two years. We certainly know that before being confirmed as the prince of Wallachia, he expressed the intention of carrying out a large and profound reform in the country, which was also going to include religious issues.²⁶⁹ As we have seen, for Cercel the Church was a very important factor for his policy.

3.3.2. *Petru Cercel's Confessional Policy*

For Cercel, a confessional policy in Wallachia at the end of the sixteenth century in conditions such as those in which the prince acquired the throne could not involve a strong intolerant attitude. On the contrary, as we saw above, the prince tried to respect and to spare the susceptibilities of the Orthodox Church in a country where Orthodoxy was by far the leading confession. We can assert that it was not only the special conditions of his enthroning in Wallachia that caused this tolerant and favourable attitude; the general trend of the Catholic Counter-Reformation also recommended such a policy. For the Papal Curia the real and practical problem was not how to convert the large Orthodox communities from eastern and southeastern Europe but rather how to regain the former Catholic communities from those areas that had fallen to Protestantism. It is significant that the sixteenth-century papal policy towards the Wallachian, and especially Moldavian, princes was more favourable in the case of rulers such as Alexander Lăpuşneanu or Petru Şchiopul, due to their intolerant policy towards Protestantism, although they did not manifest any intention of conversion to Catholicism.²⁷⁰

Cercel had the same main options. He did not cease, however, to support the Catholic communities such as the Franciscan convent in the town of Târgovişte, which was to be the residence of the princely court during his reign.²⁷¹ We may also infer that

²⁶⁹ See Luca, 68.

²⁷⁰ For details concerning this matter, see George Lăzărescu and Nicolae Stoicescu, 208-228.

²⁷¹ See Franco Sivori's *Memoriale*: "Fece anche redrizzare molte chiese et a tutti assegnò il vitto per li relligiosi e particolarmente diede intrade sufficienti a sei religiosi dell'ordine di San Francesco, che possedevano una bella chiesa officiata alla romana, dove si riducevamo tutti noi altri Ittaliani, Francesi e molti Ragusei, che trafficano in Valachia." See Pascu, 175.

the prince protected the small Catholic communities from Wallachia against possible Protestant propaganda.²⁷²

We have several testimonies concerning the preoccupation of the Wallachian prince for possible Catholic propaganda among his Orthodox subjects. Sivori noted in his *Memoriale*: "... l'ardentissimo desiderio che Sua Altezza haveva di ridurre il suo Regno alla vera religione, poichè, come ho detto, quei popoli vivevano alla greca."²⁷³ This "ardentissimo desiderio" determined Cercel to send six young men, sons of Wallachian boyars, to Rome "appoggiati alli Padri Gesuiti, con ricapito di ogni loro bisogno, accio apprendessero lettere et la lingua e costumi italiani et si affetionassimo ala fede catholica."²⁷⁴

The papal nuncio from Poland, Alberto Bolognetti, in a letter sent from Cracow on July 23, 1583, to Cardinal Galli, speaking of Cercel's enthroning in Wallachia, mentioned "le gran promesse ch'egli mi faceva in materia di religione." These promises were made during the private conversations carried out between Cercel and Bolognetti in Venice, in 1581.²⁷⁵ Unfortunately for the Catholic Church, these "gran promesse" could not be fulfilled only in twenty months of rulership.

3.3.3. Religion and International Relations during Cercel's Reign: Trying to Support the Counter-Reformation

²⁷² The Jesuit Ferrante Capeci in a letter sent on March 10, 1585 (probably from Cluj) to the Jesuit Girolamo Piatti mentioned a short but significant episode that took place in Wallachia at an undetermined date. Speaking on the fact that the Catholic communities from Wallachia were "unaffected by heresy" (in other words resistant to the Protestant attempts to convert them), he related that "once upon a time" some Protestants from Transylvania went to these communities to preach and began to discuss various religious issues with "some brothers of Saint Francis [from Târgoviște probably], who being simple and not able to answer immediately requested to be sent to them a more skilled brother from their order and a certain Francesco – whose memory is to be blessed [in 1585 he was already dead] – came and in front of the prince he proved them [the Protestants] to be liars and they were immediately burned at the stake and since then no heretic has dared to go there." See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 3, 111. This episode is significant because it shows the pro-Catholic position of the Wallachian princes at that time. However, it is practically impossible to determine who exactly is the prince mentioned by Capeci (who referred in his letter, some sentences before, to Cercel). It may be Cercel, although the expression "since then" ('ne dal tempo in qua') suggests rather an earlier period, before Cercel's reign.

²⁷³ See Pascu, 193.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.* These six young boyars were supposed to go together with Cercel's Genovese secretary, but they could not go as Sivori's mission to the Holy See was cancelled due to the deposition of Petru Cercel in April 1585. Among these young nobles there were two nephews of Cercel. See Luca, 117.

²⁷⁵ See Veress, vol. 2, 259.

Speaking on the presence of the confessional aspect in the international relations conducted by the prince, one cannot avoid discussing Cercel's attempts to contact the Jesuits and to bring them to Wallachia. Cercel's secretary, Franco Sivori, during his second Transylvanian diplomatic interlude (February 1585), carried out discussions with the Jesuits from Cluj. Ferrante Capeci in his letter sent from Cluj to Girolamo Piatti mentioned the meeting that he had had with Sivori:

I refrained from writing to the prince from Wallachia, whose legate came these days to the Transylvanian [Sigismund Bathory] and soon, as a good Catholic, came to our church and greeted me politely. By word of mouth I offered him everything that I could do for the benefit of his prince, but I refrained from writing, although against my own will.²⁷⁶

Franco Sivori mentioned this discussion, too, and also the promises that the Jesuits had made to Cercel.²⁷⁷

In 1583, the Papal Curia also had great hopes concerning the new reign of Cercel. It was somehow natural, as the prince was known to his contemporaries as a faithful Catholic.²⁷⁸ The papal nuncio in Poland, Alberto Bolognetti, mentioned to the papal state secretary Galli

le gran promesse ch'egli [Cercel] mi faceva in materia di religione" and continued "con dir in specie, che si il Signor Dio gli faceva gratia d'essere restituito a quel luogo [Wallachia], voleva portarsi di modo che sperava che Sua Santità da i suoi portamenti si moverebbe a mandarlo a visitare, o parole simili; si che bellissima occasione s'offerisce all'andata del Rev. Padre Possevino; al quale ho comunicato l'avviso."²⁷⁹

Galli was also contacted by Cercel, who sent him a letter of gratitude "rememorarli la mia pronta volontà in servirla."²⁸⁰

The papal project to send the Jesuit Antonio Possevino to Wallachia and Moldavia was announced by the Jesuits to Galli on July 11, 1583.²⁸¹ Meanwhile, the Ragusan Tommaso Vincentio Nadali, doctor and canon of Cracow, wrote to Possevino

²⁷⁶ See *Călători străini*, ed. Maria Holban, vol. 3, 111.

²⁷⁷ See Pascu: 193.

²⁷⁸ In a letter sent on December 22, 1583, to the French ambassador in Constantinople, Germigny, one of Cercel's companions, Francesco Vincenti, wrote that "His Excellence [Cercel] is healthy and joyous and with great care and zealous for the divine cult." See *Călători străini*, vol. 3, 73.

²⁷⁹ See Veress, vol. 2, 259 (the letter was sent on July 23, 1583, from Cracow).

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 268. (the letter was sent from Edirne on August 24, 1583.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 258. (Possevino was also in Cracow together with Bolognetti).

about the fact that the Jesuits were “introduced” in Constantinople “dove, in presentia pur di Petrasko, novo principe di Walaxia” and added that “Signor Petrasko, mio più che amico, per haverlo medicato d’una gran malatia.”²⁸² As Possevino decided to postpone his planned mission for an indefinite term, he decided to ask the pope to ordain Nadali in order to replace him in the meantime in that mission:

Finalmente suplicai N. S^{re} che extra tempora potesse il medico Raguseo [Nadali], il quale è qui, farsi sacerdote, con potestà di medicare alcuni amici, acciocchè egli sotto pretesto di medico, potesse andare a Petrasco, et a Pietro Principe di Valachia et Moldavia, et soggiornare alcun tempo appresso loro, dandogli i detti brevi, et alcuni doni che già Sua B^{ne} ha mandato; poichè il detto Raguseo ha molta intrinsechezza con l’uno et coll’altro di quei Principi, et mi si è mostrato ottimamente disposto, per attendere a questo negotio.²⁸³

The message was repeated to Cardinal Galli on August 29, 1583, from Cracow.²⁸⁴ Possevino himself was confident in the possibilities of spreading Catholicism in Wallachia or Moldavia, although the Polish king, Stephen Báthory, was more sceptical about this plan.²⁸⁵ Nadali, however, never arrived in Wallachia, and neither did Possevino.

On the other hand, Cercel did not abandon the “pan-Orthodox” policy of his predecessors. He continued to maintain good relations with the monasteries from Mount Athos and with the Orthodox communities from Transylvania. On August 29, 1584, he issued in Târgoviște a donation act for the Greek monastery of Kutlumus, which received the village of Uda and the estate of Lunca.²⁸⁶ He also supported the Orthodox Romanian school and the Orthodox church from Șcheii Brașovului; the church was dedicated to Saint Nicholas.²⁸⁷ The inscription placed by the Wallachian prince, Michael the Brave, in this church noted that “in the year 7092 [1584] the faithful *Io Petru Voevoda* Cercel saw

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 263-264. (the letter was sent on August 8, 1583, from Kielce).

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 261.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 269.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 275-276: “... ragionandomi Sua Maestà [the Polish king] intorno il modo di fare qualche effetto certo per conto della religione catolica in quelle provincie [Moldavia and Wallachia], se bene essa mi promette di nuovo ogni indirizzo et spalla (per così dire) al suo tempo: tiene però per cosa (humanamente) impossibile, che vi si possa fare cosa di momento, atteso la radicata pertinacia nello scisma loro di que’ popoli, la rudezza assai barbara; et che, con tutto che in Transilvania sia stata sì lungamente la religione catolica, et poi le heresie, senza tanto timore del Turco, et con grandissima libertà, non pure si sia convertito un Valacco” – the letter was sent from Cracow, on September 11, 1583, to Cardinal Galli.

²⁸⁶ See *Documente privind istoria României*, series B. Wallachia, the sixteenth-century collection, vol. 5: 172-173.

²⁸⁷ See Luca: 121-123.

this church obsolete and unadorned, with the desire of Lord decided, and adorning it [the church] with the divine icons of the saints, made a chapel and a porch with pillars... ”²⁸⁸

3.3.4. Religion and Culture: A Catholic Prince as Founder of Orthodox Churches

As noted above, although Cercel was Catholic, he supported several cultural projects for the benefit of Orthodoxy. His motivations were previously analysed. What we are going to stress here is the confessional component of Cercel’s cultural foundations.

In the gallery of Wallachian medieval rulers who patronised Orthodox ecclesiastical foundations, Cercel holds one of the top places: he carried out a remarkable programme of patronage. During his very short reign, as we mentioned already, several churches were built with his material support. The church in Târgoviște (dedicated to the Dormition of the Virgin Mary), known as the “princely church” (*Biserica Domnească*), was built near the new princely palace in Târgoviște. This *bella chiesa* (as Savori considered it) signified the decision of the prince to preserve Orthodoxy as one of the main legitimising bases of his reign.²⁸⁹ Besides this church, Cercel founded the churches from Mislea and Botușari (Curtea de Argeș), and restored the metropolitan church from Târgoviște, the church of Curtea de Argeș (founded by Neagoe Basarab), and the church of Glavacioc monastery.²⁹⁰

Another cultural initiative carried out for the benefit of Orthodoxy was the above-mentioned material support granted by Cercel for the reprinting of the Slavonic *Evangheliar* in 1583, just a few months after he had acceded to the throne. The fact that also one of his court officials, Mănăilă, the chancellor, supported this project shows once again Cercel’s desire to preserve the traditional religious policy of his predecessors.

Also, education seems to have been one of the main components of his princely reform project. His intention to send six young men to Italy to be educated by the Jesuit fathers in the spirit of Western Catholic civilisation marks him as a true personality of his epoch. By the end of the sixteenth century, Jesuit education had developed one of the most elaborate programmes in Europe, and Cercel was aware of the enormous advantages of the Jesuit school. Moreover, those six young noblemen were supposed to be educated

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁸⁹ For a more detailed description of this church, see Luca, 118-119.

in Rome, the capital of Catholicism. But Cercel did not only intend to send young men to Rome for their education. He also intended to bring the Jesuits to Wallachia to help his educational projects. Franco Sivori wrote in his *Memoriale*:

E già quando fui in Transilvania, fecci pratica per ordine di Sua Altezza con li padri Gesuiti che dovessino mandare doi in Valachia perchè andassino pian piano pigliando piede, et operando per servitio di nostro Signore Iddio, quello che hanno in altri regni con odore di molta santità operato; e da essi mi era statta data intencione di mandarli quanto prima potessimo, poichè fra breve aspettavano da Roma pereggi compagni.²⁹¹

We can assume that Cercel's intention was to establish a Jesuit school in Wallachia, meant to strengthen Catholicism in his country. Unfortunately, this project could not be realised: the six young noblemen did not arrive in Italy and the Jesuits postponed *sine die* their travel to Wallachia, due to the decision of the Sultan to depose the prince.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

²⁹¹ See Pascu, 193.

CONCLUSION

Within the larger frame of the rulership in the sixteenth-century Moldavia and Wallachia, the discussion of the particular cases studied in this thesis enables us to provide the future researchers with useful data and tools for a broader and more comprehensible understanding of the rulership in this particular area and period.

The argument of the thesis lay on in the idea that in sixteenth-century Moldavia and Wallachia we cannot speak about a real Renaissance model, but, rather about new tendencies in the State - Church relation. The first chapter constituted as the departure point of the demonstration. Presenting the core ideas of the diplomacy developed by the three princes, in specific circumstances, I am entitled to consider that the general picture of how these rulers managed to cope with the challenges of their epoch provided by our brief analysis was really helpful for the reader to more easily integrate in their logical sequence the further elements of our argument. The first chapter did not intend to demonstrate a certain theory or other, although a certain conclusion can be inferred. The diplomacy of the three princes enlightened particular – and one could say also, original, - approaches towards various political situations and evolutions of the region in the case of each ruler. In the case of Rareș or the Despot, a certain tension between pragmatism and utopian projects can be traced. Projects such as dreaming the Byzantine heritage or the revival of the Ancient Dacia reflected more or less possible “expectations” of the epoch, dominated by the increasing power of the Ottoman Empire.

Although such ambitious projects entitled many Romanian scholars to consider that at least in the case of Rareș or the Despot one can obviously speak about a Renaissance type of rulership, our argument, presented in the second chapter, proves this assertion to be rather an “ambitious” and “generous” attempt to integrate the rulership of the sixteenth-century Moldavia and Wallachia in what we could call a general evolution of the epoch. Issues such as legitimacy, diplomacy, state administration or cultural initiatives proved that certain Renaissance influences could be traced only in the case of cultural initiatives. The Despot or Cercel, due to their educational background, carried out cultural projects that encompass Renaissance influences. However, this is not to be a sufficient basis to construct a valuable Renaissance model of rulership.

The third chapter is the most important part of our thesis in the sense that it provides a more logical and comprehensible picture over what we consider to be the real turning point of the sixteenth-century in Moldavian and Wallachian rulership. The beginning of a certain process of state confessionalisation in the case of the three princes can be traced when analysing the new importance of the religion in princely decisions. Although the phenomenon of the confessionalisation in Central and Western Europe later took a different shape, in the case of the two Romanian states the fact the religious argument was to become one of the main means used by the prince in regulating the state affairs is an undoubted new element. A corollary of our argument is the influence of the personal religious affiliation of the ruler in this context and it stresses furthermore the signification of certain confessional policies.

The present thesis aimed just to shed a light on the directions that the scholarship should follow when researching the sixteenth-century Moldavian and Wallachian rulership. I intended to approach both the relevant scholarship and the historical sources with a critical eye. It is not the so-called Renaissance model that was present in these rulerships, but rather a model based on a strong influence of religion. A further research that would reveal the influence of religion within the complicated web of relations between the prince and society in Moldavia and Wallachia in the sixteenth and also in the seventeenth centuries will be very helpful for a better understanding of the function of rulership in this particular region.

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