

# THE RELATIONSHIPS OF STEPHEN THE GREAT WITH THE PONTIC REGION

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The economic potential of the Danubian regions and their neighborhood with the Black Sea helped some of the Pontic towns to enjoy rapid development due to their good relationships with the Italian cities of Genoa, Venice and Constantinople. Trade in agricultural products was easy and profitable both for the Pontic towns and for the great metropolitan city of Constantinople. Regarding this aspect the success gained by Genoa was quite significant in three places situated on the Western shore of the Black Sea: Vicina, Chilia and Cetatea Albă (Moncastro). Trade with the Danubian and Pontic towns excelled in the following transactions: wheat (29), beeswax (14), slaves (15), honey (8), as well as wine, tissues and salt, the latter to a lesser degree. Leather, honey, salted or smoked meat (pork or beef), salted fish (sturgeons) were present as well; a century and a half later, during the reign of Vasile Lupu (1634–1653), a colony of Raguzans settled in Moldavia in order to prepare salted fish for sale. Beeswax and honey were two products very often found as merchandise in Chilia and Cetatea Albă. Some transactions with these goods showed also the name of the merchant, for example the Armenian Sarchiz from Chilia.<sup>1</sup>

The first contacts of the Carpathian-Danubian principalities with the Ottomans took place on the battle grounds of the Balkans in the middle of the 14th century, having two distinct traits and sides: the strong determination of the principalities to defend their own independence and, on the other hand, the tendencies of expansion and even worldwide hegemony if we focus on the Ottoman policy in the South-Eastern part of Europe, developed for half a millenium in a quite similar way.

Since the 15th century, when the battle ground moved from the Balkans into the three principalities, we record the first conventions, agreements and treaties with the Ottoman Empire; in 1945, after a proper study done in the Turkish archives, there was discovered a copy of the copy of the convention (ahdname) offered by Mahomed the Conqueror (1451–1481) to Stephen the Great (1457–1504), the

<sup>1</sup> Octavian Iliescu, *Nouvelles contributions à la géographie historique de la Mer Noire*, in “La Mer Noire”, Roma, I (1994) p. 229–259.

voivode of Moldavia during the last quarter of the century.<sup>2</sup> Some years after the death of the sultan, a few words were added to this “peace convention of the sultan Mehmed... with Moldavia”, the most significant being the Persian preposition *ba* added to the principality of Moldavia (*ba Kara Bogdan*) instead of the usual preposition *be*, a fact that explicitly shows the idea of partnership within Ottoman-Moldavian relationships.

The principality of Moldavia had reached a peak of its power, having successfully resisted the campaigns led by King Mathias Corvin of Hungary (1467), Jan Olbracht of Poland and Fatih Mehmed (1467), the last one taking place after a sever defeat of the commander (beylerbey) of Rumelia in Moldavia (1475). Meanwhile, the military power of Moldavia is confirmed by contemporary sources. Filippo-Buonaccorsi-Callimachus wrote to the Pope around the year 1490 that Voivode Stephen the Great “often caused the Turks hard losses, so that they were finally obliged to call him an ally and a friend”; thus Moldavia’s voivode “subdued with certain conditions, but not forced by weapons” (*non armis, sed conditionibus cedentem*). According to the same sources, the Moldavians “agreed to these conventions, not as conquered people, but as victors” (*not ut victi, sed tamquam victores pactionibus deciderunt*).<sup>3</sup>

In the 15th–17th centuries the three Romanian principalities, could together have gathered an army of about 120,000–140,000 fighters (50,000–60,000 from Transylvania, 40,000 from Moldavia and as many from Walachia). To this we can also mention the very favorable geographical conditions to the fight of defense, namely the forests, mountains and swamps which favored a prolonged isolated resistance. An example of the military power of Moldavia can be taken from the war like expedition of Baiazid II in 1484, directed against the harbor towns of Chilia and Cetatea Albă; the sultan promised an exceptional reward, called *timar*, to any fighter who took part in the holy war (*gazza*) against Moldavia, an appeal which is very rarely found in Ottoman history because this call to arms was usually very selective, reserved only for “the sword people” (*sipahi*’s) and not normal tax payers, most of whom were peasants (*raya*).<sup>4</sup>

The *dar-ul-ahd* conventions (the capitulations) became in this period the convergent principle of the entire evolution of Romanian-Turkish relationships. The three Romanian principalities did their best to keep these conventions as “the most favorable form of agreement”; on the other hand, the Ottomans managed to get numerous political and economic gains by means of these conventions. The principalities became “buffer states”, and from the economic point of view the

<sup>2</sup> Aurel Decei, *Tratatul de pace – Sulhname – încheiat între sultanul Mehmed II și Ștefan cel Mare în 1479*, in “*Revista istorică română*”, XV (1945), p. 465–494.

<sup>3</sup> Șerban Papacostea, *Tratatele Țării Românești și Moldovei cu Imperiul Otoman în secolele XIV–XVI*, in *Stat, societate, națiune. Interpretări istorice*, Cluj-Napoca, 1982, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> Mihai Maxim, *Țările Române și Înalta Poartă* (The Romanian Principalities and the Sublime Porte), Bucharest, 1993, p. 118–119.

Ottomans acquired tributes, gifts and other products. The annual tribute (*harac*), as well the numerous gifts (*peskes*) were considerable burdens for the Carpathian-Danubian principalities, but they were at the same time efficient means of preserving their fundamental interests, both against this pressure of Ottoman expansion, and with regard to the aggressive tendencies of neighboring Christian states (Poland and Hungary).<sup>5</sup>

In their relationship with Walachia, Moldavia and Transylvania (only for the period 1541–1687), the Ottomans preserved the local financial and administrative system, different in terms of structure from the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the *dar-ul-ahd* agreement generated significant commercial privileges for all the merchants from the three principalities (freedom to travel and to trade within the entire Ottoman Empire, lower customs taxes, security, etc.). Merchants from the Romanian regions enjoyed preferential tariffs both for Ottoman goods (at the level of the local custom taxes) and reduced custom taxes for Romanian products exported to Ottoman territories, that is 3–4% of their value, compared to 5–5.5% *ad valorem* paid by merchants from outside the Ottoman Empire (*dar-ul-ahd*), from the war regions (*dar al-harb*).

Both Walachia and Moldavia had been integrated since the 14th century within a larger economic region between Europe and Asia, by two major commercial roads running East-West and North-South. The roads crossing Moldavia and Walachia were parts of the wider trading zone which developed after the so-called “Mongolian peace”, especially due to the proximity to the Danube and the Black Sea. Pontic trade became, in the term used by Gheorghe Brătianu a “turn-table” for the international trade of the three Principalities and greater political powers, such as the Kingdoms of Hungary and Poland, and Italians from Genoa and Venice, whose presence in the Pontic region had become traditional.<sup>6</sup>

The Pontic policy of the two continental Kingdoms had significant and long-lasting influences upon the Romanian territories in this period of time. The Hungarian Kingdom had an indirect link with the Lower Danube and the Pontic regions through the Transylvanian Saxon town of Braşov (Kronstadt) situated north of the border with Walachia; merchants from Braşov had freedom of movement in Walachia ever since January 1368 and, by means of this, they had also obtained the right to take part in the international trade between Europe and the regions of the Black Sea basin. Thus, “the Moldovian road” linked the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea through the Polish town of Lwow. Lwow represented for Moldavia what Braşov meant for Walachia in interregional and Pontic trade, although the merchants from

<sup>5</sup> Tahsin Gemil, *România și Otomanii în secolele XIV–XVI*, Bucureşti, 1991, p. 211–218.

<sup>6</sup> Georges I. Brătianu, *La mer Noire. Des origines à la conquête ottomane*, Monachii, 1969, p. 225–252; Şerban Papacostea, *Începuturile politicii comerciale a Țării Românești și Moldovei (XIV–XVI)*, in “Studii și materiale de istorie medie”, X (1983), p. 9–56.

Lwow did not enjoy the same level of liberty in their transactions as their Transylvanian contemporaries and rivals.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, the Ottoman merchants were well placed on “the silk road” linking the cities of Tabriz, Bursa and Constantinople. As well as the main route passing through Anatolia from East to West, there were also lesser roads, a Northern one linking the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea, and another (thanks to the Italian merchants) towards the Lower Danube. Safety on trade routes became a problem after the Mongol invasion; of all the silk roads, Pegolotti mentions the Pontic one as being the safest.<sup>8</sup> There were also other directions of trade linking the Pontic coast to the closest seas, the Aegean and the Mediterranean. After 1453, the Ottomans managed to replace in a short period of time the Italian merchants from the commerce developed between the basin of the Black Sea and that of the Aegean Sea, as well as in the economical Balkan-Anatolian exchanges. They were replaced by local Greek, Raguzan and Jewish merchants, and (although in far fewer numbers) by Muslim traders (Turks, Arabs, Iranians) or traders from the Balkans (Serbs, Bulgarians and Albanians).

Mahomed II offered trading privileges to the merchants from Cetatea Albă in June 1456, placing them under the sultan's protection; this privilege was conditional on payment of tribute. As the Ottomans knew the importance of the town Cetatea Albă as a linking bridge between the Baltic Sea and the Pontic or Levantine trade, such a convention shows the importance of this commercial junction and at the same time a greater attention paid to this place within Ottoman geopolitics; only Ragusa enjoyed a similar status at that period. Under such circumstances, the Moldavian voivode Petru Aron (1454–1457) offered similar terms to the merchants of Lwow (1456) to increase trading between the Baltic and Pontic regions.<sup>9</sup>

Cetatea Albă and Chilia were prosperous even during this period, linking Pontic commercial trading with the steppes from the Northern part of the Black Sea which were under Tartar domination, well known for trade in animal livestock and to a lesser degree agricultural products.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Radu Manolescu, *Comerțul Țării Românești și Moldovei cu Brașovul (secolele XIV–XV)*, București, 1965, p. 26; P.P. Panaitescu, *Drumul comercial al Poloniei la Marea Neagră în evul mediu*, în *Interpretări românești*, București, 1947, p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Mustafa Mehmed, *Documente turcești privind istoria României*, vol. I, București, 1976, p. 1–2; F. Babinger, *Maometto il Conquistatore e il suo tempo*, Torino, 1957, p. 213; N. Iorga, *Negoțul la români*, București, 1908, p. 99. For the silk way in Byzantium, see R.S. Lopez, *Silk Industry in the Byzantine Empire*, in “*Speculum*”, 20 (1945), p. 1–42 and H.W. Haussig, *Die Geschichte Zentralasiens und der Seidenstrasse in vorislamischer Zeit*, Darmstadt, 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Mustafa Mehmed, *Documente turcești...*, vol. I, p. 1–2; F. Babinger, *Maometto il Conquistatore...*, p. 213.

<sup>10</sup> Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire*, in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, III (Leiden, 1971), p. 1180–1181; Youssouf Kemal, *Monumenta Cartographica Africae et Aegypti*, t. IV, fasc. 1, Cairo, 1936, f. 1205, where the Tartar heraldic symbol of the crescent moon is noticed, since 1327, related to

## Cetatea Albă

The first documentary record of this medieval town, also known in the documents as Murokastron, Monocastro or Moncastro, occurs in a Greek portulane from the end of the 14th century. According to this document, at the river mouth there is “a white castle” – εἷς πύργος ἄσπρος, the castle of Asprokastron, Cetatea Albă.<sup>11</sup> It is not known exactly since when a Genovese colony came into being within this town, but it is supposed that after the settlement of Genoa’s population in Caffa (1266), were also the Italian settlements of Moncastro – Cetatea Albă founded. Thus, in 1290, it is noted that a Genovese craft leaves Caffa “ad partes Malvo castrī (Mavrocastrī) et deinde in Constantinopolim”, and in 1294, another craft leaves Caffa for Cetatea Albă (“ad Maurocastrum”).<sup>12</sup>

This substantial settlement of Italians in Cetatea Albă is also confirmed by the presence of the Catholic missionary monks by the Italian merchants. In 1314 a Franciscan missionary<sup>13</sup> is killed and among the 18 monasteries of the minorite monks found “Tartaria’s” territories between 1314–1330 the monastery from “Maurocastro” is also noted. This monastery is mentioned in 1334, but there is no more information about it after 1390. There is a monk, too, who offers us information about a certain man called Marin Zane, on April, 19, 1435, Romanian by origin and former leader of Cetatea Albă.<sup>14</sup>

It was natural that the majority population here should have more than one monastery: Cetatea Albă even had an episcopal see. The episcopal lists during the reign of Andronic Paleologul (1282–1328) include besides the 12 dioceses subject to Kiev, several other dioceses in “Little Russia”, the Russia situated near Lithuania “Litvorussia”, the last of these being the diocese of Cetatea Albă (Asprokastron).<sup>15</sup> One of the first bishops is Chiril of Asprokastron, participant in

Cetatea Albă. “The Life of John the New Martyr” also testifies with the same respect of the Tartar presence for the same period of time, the year of the martyrdom being 1330; see ed. Ep. Melchisedec (Ștefănescu), p. 166.

<sup>11</sup> N. Bănescu, *Maurocastron-Mo(n)castro-Cetatea Albă*, “Academia Română. Memoriile secțiunii istorice”, seria III, t. XXII (1939), mem. 6, p. 165–178; P.S. Năsturel, *Le littoral roumain de la Mer Noire d’après le portulan grec de Leyde*, in “Revue des études roumaines”, XIII–XIV, Paris, 1973, p. 124; A. Delatte, *Les portulans grecs*, Liège-Paris, 1947, p. 232, p. 291; Idem, *Les portulans grecs II Compléments*, Bruxelles, 1958, p. 5, 28, 44.

<sup>12</sup> G.I. Brătianu, *Vicina II. Nouvelles recherches sur l’histoire et la topographie médiévales du littoral roumain de la mer Noire*, București, 1940, p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> C. Andreescu, *Așezări franciscane la Dunăre și Marea Neagră în sec. XIII–XIV*, in “Cercetări istorice”, VIII–IX (1932–1933), no. 2, p. 160. The killing of the minorite brother Angelo de Spoleto, as well as that of St. John from Trapezunt (+1330) shows the influence of the Tartar dominion in the religions policy of the town.

<sup>14</sup> G. Fedalto, *La chiesa latina in Oriente*, vol. III, Verona, 1978, doc. 576, p. 222; *Ibidem*, vol. I, 2nd ed., 1981, p. 546.

<sup>15</sup> *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanae*, vol. IV, București, 1982, p. 271, translated by prof. T. Teoteoi.

the Synod that elected the bishop of Smolensk (1435). Since 1303, Cetatea Albă entered under the jurisdiction of Haliciu and the appointment and ordination of the controversial Iosif “princely bone” as its bishop took place some time between 1371–1375<sup>16</sup>, during the reign of Petru Mușat (1375–1391), also related to the chair of Halicia. Owing to this old character of the ordainment there must be observed the statement made by the ecumenical patriarch Antony IV (1389–1390, 1391–1397) that “he is an old man and fearless of death”.<sup>17</sup> Joseph’s age of ordination, in spite of the controversy with Constantinople, led to his promotion as a Metropolitan bishop of Moldavia, appointment finally confirmed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in 1401. The successor of Petru Mușat, Roman of Mușat (1391–1394) called himself “the only great ruler and voivode with God’s mercy, ruling over the country of Moldavia from the mountains to the sea”;<sup>18</sup> this title shows that he was also ruler of Cetatea Albă, which justified him to promote Iosif as metropolitan bishop as well, and Moldavia was no longer divided into two: the Upper Country and the Lower Country. The situation of the country’s treasury was healthy as he could offer 3,000 rubles as a loan to the King of Poland, an act to which there substantially contributed the customs from Cetatea Albă as well.<sup>19</sup> The same returns were made by Alexandru cel Bun (1400–1432) as well, a voivode who repaired the citadel by means of the great prince of Lithuania in 1421,<sup>20</sup> after repelling a naval assault by the Turks (1420).

As to the demographical situation of Cetatea Albă, this was quite diversified as in all great medieval towns, especially. Besides the autochthonous element and the colony of Italian merchants, often called Latins (“Latini”) or „French” (Franks – n.n), there also existed Tartars, Greeks, Armenians and Jews. All these are mentioned in “The Life of Saint John the New Martyr”.<sup>21</sup> The Greeks, naturally, kept good relationships with all the towns from the basin of the Black Sea, especially with Trabizond, where most of them came from. A similar relationship was kept with the Armenians, further confirmed by archeological diggings made within the medieval town, where there have been found Armenian inscriptions, as well as silver and bronze coins belonging to the Armenian Kings.<sup>22</sup> The Armenian

<sup>16</sup> Șt. Andreescu, *The metropolitanate of Halicz and the Bishopric of Asprokastron. A few considerations*, in *Études byzantines et post-byzantines*, vol. IV, Iași, 2001, p. 141–151. The metropolitan Antonie of Halicz (1371–1375) was forced to quit his chair in 1375, according to J. Fenell, *A History of the Russian Church to 1448*, London, 1995, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> *FHDR*, IV, p. 249

<sup>18</sup> M. Costăchescu, *Documentele moldovenești...*, I, p. 7–8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 603–604.

<sup>20</sup> N. Iorga, *Studii istorice asupra Chiliei și Cetății Albe*, București, 1891, p. 57.

<sup>21</sup> *Viața Sf. Ioan cel Nou...*, p. 165.

<sup>22</sup> Gr. Avakian, *Inscripțiile armenesti din Cetatea Albă*, in “*Revista istorică*”, nos. 7–9, p. 123–136. Considered by centuries, most of them are from the 18th century (28); Idem, *Trei monete ale regilor armeni găsite la Cetatea Albă*, in “*Buletinul Societății Numismatice Române*”, 29 (1924),

community of Cetatea Albă had relationships with the mother land, through Trebizond, and also with the Crimea through the town-port of Caffa and other centres of the region, like Sugdaia (Soldaia, Sudak) and Solhat (Sorbat), where there was an ecclesiastical structure for the Armenian communities with a local bishop.<sup>23</sup> All these three towns were under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox diocese of Sugdaia dependent on Constantinople in its turn. Between these two dioceses from Sugdaia there occurred a serious controversy regarding the date of celebrating Easter day.<sup>24</sup> The Armenian community of Cetatea Albă was smaller than that in the Crimea, but it was still significant in the 15th century. The account of the French traveller Guillebert of Lannoy in 1421 is informative on for the ethnic mix of Cetatea Albă. This traveller, on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, goes first on “the Moldavian route” from Lwow (Lemberg) to Bellegard or Mavrocastro, a town described by him as being inhabited by “Genovese, Romanians and Armenians”.<sup>25</sup> He was left robbed near the walls of the town. From Cetatea Albă he went overland for 18 days up to Caffa, his remaining baggage and one of his companions travelling by sea to the Crimea.

The Jews are also mentioned in Cetatea Albă for the year 1330, the presumed date of Sain John the New’s martyrdom; there are mentioned the dwellings of the Jews from this town.<sup>26</sup> Their presence is related to the important rôle played by Cetatea Albă in the economic and political life of Moldavia. In the period of time when Lannoy lived there is no report concerning the Venetians<sup>27</sup>, but it is known that about the year 1435 there were attempts to establish a Venetian presence in Moncastro. Thus, in 1435, the Venetians did not negotiate with Moldavia’s voivode, but with the ruler of Cetatea Albă (*dominus maurocastri*), the son of a monk, a ruler whose name is unknown (*pater illius qui dominatur Moncastro qui caloierus est*).<sup>28</sup> The resolution of the Senate of Venice which has the date of

p. 10–14; E. Nadel-Golobić, *Armenians and Jews in medieval Lvov. Their role in oriental trade, 1400–1600*, in “Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique”, 20 (1979), p. 345–388.

<sup>23</sup> M. Ormanian, *The Church of Armenia*, ed. 2000, Montreal, p. 59; P.P. Panaitescu, *Hrisovul lui Alexandru cel Bun pentru episcopia armeană din Suceava (30 iulie 1401)*, in “Revista istorică română”, IV (1934), p. 44–56; *DRH*, A. Moldova, I, 14, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> F. Solomon, *Dominație politică și structuri confesionale în Moldova de Jos la vremea întemeierii statului*, in “Anuarul Institutului de istorie A.D. Xenopol”, XXX (1993), p. 244–245.

<sup>25</sup> Guillebert de Lannoy, *Voyages et ambassades, 1399–1450*, Mons, 1840, p. 38–43.

<sup>26</sup> *Viața Sf. Ioan cel Nou*, ed. ep. Melchisedec, p. 172.

<sup>27</sup> The finding out of Venetian coins and imitations of these ones is due to the activity of the Genovese people, in the opinion of O. Iliescu, *La monnaie vénitienne dans les pays roumains aux XIII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, in “RESEE”, XV (1977), p. 360–361. The circulation of the Venetian coins in Moldavia continued until the 18th century, see Em. Condurachi, *Monete veneziane battute in Moldavia*, “RESEE”, 20 (1943), p. 231–232.

<sup>28</sup> *Archivio di stato di Venezia Misti*, t. 59, 105 v; Reg. No. 2381, apud S. Papacostea, *Venise et les pays roumains au moyen âge*, in *Venezia e il Levante*, II, Florence, 1973, p. 589–624.

April, 19, 1435 shows that the Venetians were proposed, by their messenger from Constantinople to come with one of their ships to Cetatea Albă and there would be offered certain commercial privileges and residence in the town, as well as a custom-rates and reasonable taxes. Thus, the Venetians Senate decided that the ship of Zaharia Donato should sail to Cetatea Albă and stay there for 15 days. As to the merchandise shipped from Constantinople to Cetatea Albă, they were taxed to 0.5% *ad valorem*, while for those charged from Cetatea Albă to Constantinople there were subduced to the taxes existing in Tana too, where the Venetian merchants were well established in Pontic trade.<sup>29</sup>

Next year, on March 15, 1436, the Venetian Senate ordered a merchant, Francesco Duodo to visit Cetatea Albă and to remain there as a viceconsul in order to safeguard the interests of Venetian merchants and their privileges as in the previous year. Three ships sailed to Cetatea Albă, one to Tana and another one to Trebizond.<sup>30</sup> From 1443 on the Venetian Senate maintained a consul or viceconsul in territories which were not under Venetians dominion, but which had numerous Venetian residents. Next year it again sent a transport to Cetatea Albă (1437), after which this destination does not recur in the deliberations of the Senate. N. Iorga draws attention to an exception in a contemporary chronicle (1439) where one destination does seem to refer to Cetatea Albă.<sup>31</sup> It is believed that the autonomy or the semi-autonomy of Cetatea Albă must have ceased during the reign of the righteous and holy voivode Stephen the Great (1457–1504) who took over this important town. Recently, Professor Halil Inalcik pointed out that the Genovese lost control of the Pontic basin long before the fall of Caffa (1475), their place being taken by Ottoman subjects, especially Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Moldavians. The seizure of the castle of Lerici by the Moldavians in 1455 and the departure of the Genovese from this fortress were, in Iorga's view, a consequence of Constantinople's conquest by the Turks in 1453.<sup>32</sup> Stephen the Great not only extended his authority in the Pontic basin from the mouth of Dnieper across to the Danube delta, but he also consolidated it by his marriage to Maria of Mangop, thus managing to inpose his hegemony upon the principality of Mangop in the southern part of the Crimea. Turkish interference with his Pontic policy, once the Crimea

R. Manolescu, *L'importance économique et militaire des villes portuaires de la Valachie et la Moldavie aux XI<sup>e</sup>–XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, in Mollat, *Pouvoir central*, p. 171–180.

<sup>29</sup> M. E. Martin, *Venetian Tana in the later Fourteenth and Early Fifteen centuries*, "Byzantinische Forschungen", 11 (1987) p. 375–379; C. Maltézou, 'Ο Θεσμο:ς τοῦ ἐν Κωνσταντινωπόλει Βενέτου Βαῖου, Athens, 1970, p. 123.

<sup>30</sup> N. Iorga, *Studii istorice asupra Chilieii și Cetății Albe*, București, 1891, p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> Idem, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des croisades au XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. I, Paris, 1899, p. 573, n. 3.

<sup>32</sup> H. Inalcik, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire (1300–1914)*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 278–287; Ș. Papacostea, *Moldova lui Ștefan cel Mare și genezeii din Marea Neagră*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie A.D. Xenopol", XXIX (1992), p. 70.



was invaded, led him to break peace with Sultan Mehmet II and participate in the "Otranto crusade" by means of which Genoa wanted to recuperate its old possessions from the Black Sea. Moldavian merchants from this region, such as "Teodorache from Telicha", (Telița at the mouth of the Dniester, became prosperous businessmen, just as in Caffa.<sup>33</sup> The son of this Theodore, "Demetrius of Telica", was considered one of the richest local merchants (1461).<sup>34</sup>

In his correspondence with the Italian republics, Stephen the Great showed that Moldavia was "the gateway off the Christians and so far this gate which is our country has been protected by God, but here to be lost, God forbid, the whole of Christendom would be in great peril". Although the Italian republics continued their fight with the Ottoman Empire, especially in the Mediterranean, they still maintained their interests in the Danubian and Pontic region, as the relationship of Stephen the Great with Venice reveals. The Venetians were considered friends. Doctor Matteo Muriano examined Moldavia's voivode and nursed him between 1502–1503. In his description, Stephen was "a very wise man, praiseworthy, loved by his subjects because he was forgiving and righteous, always watchful and generous".<sup>35</sup> The interest of the Venetians towards the Moldavian voivode and Moldavia in general was due to area's role as a gate of Christianity, a role that would be assumed in the 16th century by the Polish and Habsburg Kingdoms. The holy and righteous voivode Stephen the Great was regarded in the same way by the principality of Mangop or Teodoro once the matrimonial alliance through Maria of Mangop (+1477) was contracted.

Finding itself under the Tartar Yoke for a long period of time, until Timur's death (+1405), this principality gained its independence again, maintaining it after the Ottoman conquest of the Crimea in 1475. The principality of Mango had a good upheaval due to Gabrades family and to the prince Alexis (1403–1444).<sup>36</sup> About 1421 were built the fortress and princely palace and at about the same time there are recorded the first relationships of Moldavia with the principality of Mangop. A later author, Theodor Spandugino Kantakuzino shows that the relationships between the principality of Theodoro and Moldavia had older roots, dating from end of the 14th century and the beginning of the 15th century, that is nearly three quarters of a century before the marriage of Stephen with Maria of

<sup>33</sup> Șt. Andreescu, *Un om de afaceri român în spațiul pontic la mijlocul veacului al XV-lea: "Teodorcha de Telicha"*, in "Studii și materiale de istorie medie", XVI (1998), p. 23–30.

<sup>34</sup> Michel Balard, *La Mer Noire et la Romanie génoise (XII<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, Variorum reprints, London, 1989, XIII, p. 230.

<sup>35</sup> Eugen Denize, *Relațiile lui Ștefan cel Mare cu Veneția*, in "Magazin istoric", 4 (1998), p. 55–59.

<sup>36</sup> Omeljan Pritsak, *Dory*, în *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 1, 1991, p. 654–655; Anthony Bryer, *A Byzantine Family: The Gabrades (c. 979–1653)*, in *The Empire of Trebizond and the Pontos*, London 1980, p. 38–45; Thierry Ganchou, Alina Minghiraș, *Un nouveau document à propos d'Alexios de Theodor-Mangoup*, in *Închinare lui Petre S. Năsturel la 80 de ani*, Brăila, 2003, p. 111–118.

Mangop.<sup>37</sup> The geopolitical and military importance of Moldavia during the reign of Stephen the Great is shown most clearly in the attempts of the Venetians and of Uzun-Hasan to free Constantinople and the whole empire from under the Ottoman yoke and to co-opt Stephen the Great and Mathias Corvin in this anti-Ottoman crusade. The Khan knew Stephen the Great very well as he knew his matrimonial alliance with Marie of Mangop since his own wife Despina, being another member of the Comnen's family from Trebizond, gave him a claim upon the Byzantine inheritance.

If Despina, the Khan's wife had plotted everything for Anatolia, Maria of Mangop, from another branch of the Comnens was interested so that the entire Northern-Pontic space, from the Danube to the Crimea should be freed from Ottoman influence. This explains why Khan Uzun-Hasan sent Isac to beg to Stephen the Great to tell him that after "the great slaughter and ruin of the enemy" since 1473 when he reached Syria, the Khan was determined to come back forcefully against the Turks in the spring of 1474. It was a focused action of Uzun-Pasha "in order to bring news to great Christian voivodes", urging them "to gather their armies and come against the Ottomans, as good friends of ours, from that part of the Europe".<sup>38</sup> Such letters had also been sent to the pope, to the King of Poland and to Mathias Corvin. As a distant relative of Uzun-Hasan, Stephen the Great belonged to the system of Comnens' alliances, whose main objective was the expulsion of the Ottomans from the Black Sea, area where only the Genovese Caffa and the Moldavian towns of Chilia and Cetatea Albă had resisted. Even since 1471, Uzun had sent a messenger to Genoa as well, according to whom the government of this Italian republic recommended to Antoniotto de Gabella, the newly appointed consul in Caffa, a better regional agreement against Turks going so far as suspension of reprisals with the principality of Theodoro (Mangop), with Cetatea Albă and especially with "the Tartars' emperor".<sup>39</sup>

Venice was not yet capable of helping Uzun-Hasan at sea, as it had been decided on March 23, 1474, because it had to face the assault of Rumelia's bey in Scutari – Albania. The same Ottoman troops from Albania passed into Moldavia, being defeated in January 1475, near Vaslui. The news that Stephen had defeated "90,000 Turks, out of whom 40,000 had perished and 4,000, among whom a pasha and one of the Sultan's sons were caught" weakened the anti-ottoman coalition, instead of strengthening it. Soon after that, during the summer of 1475, Caffa and Mangop fell to the Turks, while Chila and Cetatea Albă had been attacked,

<sup>37</sup> Ovidiu Cristea, review on Donald M. Nicol, *The Byzantine Family of Kantakouzenos (Cantacuzenus), ca 1100–1460*, Washington, 1968, in "Studii și materiale de istorie medie", XIX (2001), p. 322–323. See also *A Biographical Dictionary of the Byzantine Empire*, London, 1991, by the same author.

<sup>38</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Veneția în Marea Neagră III. Originea legăturilor cu Ștefan cel Mare și mediul politic al desvoltării lor*, in "Analele Academiei Române", t. XXXVII (1914), p. 14–16.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

remaining under Moldavia's sovereignty. The fall of Caffa had a strong negative influence upon Venice, as can be seen during the receiving of the delegates of Stephen the Great by the Venetian Senate, recorded on May 6, 1476.<sup>40</sup>

After two and a half decades, the continuity of the Venetian concern on Moldova is seen through the very presence of Matteo Muriano, "doctor in arts and medicine" as envoy of Leonardo Loredano, the *doge* of Venice. Beside his medical care offered to the Moldavian voivode, Matteo Muriano had targeted to obtain information about the state of the Moldavian principality and of his ruler and last but not least about the Ottomans and their relations with powers from the same region.<sup>41</sup> This information is present in his reporting from December 7, 1502 and January 5, 1503. The notes of Muriano also contain information about Bogdan, the future voivode, and on events from neighboring countries: Poland, Russia and the Ottoman Empire and on the Crimean Tatars. The Ottoman policy to sign an agreement with Poland was lead, according to the same source, because of fears to face in the near future a possible alliance of the Polish Kingdom with Moldavia. The mission of Matteo Muriano ended in Moldova in the summer of 1503 when he died. His long activity in Moldova showed once more the interest of Venice in the Pontic policy of Stephen the Great. The Venetian policy was consistent regarding Stephen the Great; Hieronimo da Cesena, Giorgio di Piemonte and Alessandro Veronese were proposed to travel to Moldova. Eventually, Hieronimo da Cesena went to Moldova with Theodore, the postelnic, envoy of the ruler to Venice.<sup>42</sup>

After the campaign directed against Poland (1497) although the voivode was in poor health, on September 24, 1498, six years before his departure from this earthly life, voivode Stephen the Great had his son, Bogdan, as associated ruler.<sup>43</sup> He was to fully take over the rule and policy of Moldova on June 30, 1504, just two days before the death of the righteous voivode Stephen the Great, when he was thought to become a monk.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 20–21, 34–37.

<sup>41</sup> Eugen Denize, *op.cit.*, p. 55–58; *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. I, p. 149.

<sup>42</sup> N. Vătămanu, *Voievozi și medici de curte*, București, 1972, p. 21, 36–39; I. Ursu, *Ștefan cel Mare*, București, 1925, p. 275; C. Esarcu, *Ștefan cel Mare. Documente descoperite la Veneția*, București, 1874, p. 88–100.

<sup>43</sup> Iulian Marinescu, *Bogdan al III-lea cel Orb, 1504–1517*, București, 1910, p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> Silviu N. Dragomir, *Mistere*, București, 1998, p. 183–186, 207–215.