

MICHAEL THE BRAVE, THE LONG WAR AND THE “MOLDAVIAN ROAD”¹

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The paper proposes a new perspective on military actions pursued, during 1599–1600, by the Wallachian prince Michael the Brave against the “Moldavian road”, i.e. the trade road which connected the Ottoman Empire and Southern Poland. While the previous historiography considered Michael’s actions as a part of a “commercial war” directed against the Porte and his allies (Poland and Moldavia), a keen analysis of the sources suggests that logistic and financial reasons also played a part.

From 1598 onwards the Wallachian prince was always low on cash and the attacks against merchant caravans offered an easy way to win the goodwill of his troops. Furthermore, we may suppose that there was also a pragmatic calculation here; an army which was not actively fighting and was not paid, or not paid enough, constituted a potential danger for the employer, whereas it became a redoubtable weapon as soon as it was shown a target which might bring significant booty and, implicitly, its own arrears of pay.

Keywords: war, trade, Wallachia, Ottoman Empire, “Moldavian road”.

Fifteen years ago Professor Andreescu published an article on Michael the Brave’s role in trade on the Danube and the Black Sea, pointing to some episodes from the Long War (1593–1606) which seem to indicate the great importance of a trade route across Moldavia even in time of war.² His argument reached some significant conclusions:

– Despite P.P. Panaitescu’s arguments³, the Moldavian trade route was still active in the sixteenth century and formed a strategic axis not just for Moldavia but also for the Kingdom of Poland. Thus, when it seemed that Moldavian trade may be about to shift toward Transylvania, Poland intervened, first in 1595 and then again in 1600, bringing Moldavia back into the Polish-Ottoman sphere of influence.

– Michael the Brave raided in 1599 and 1600 certain commercial centres in the Oblucița-Isaccea region and some Polish merchant caravans crossing Moldavia

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² Ștefan Andreescu, *Comerțul danubiano-pontic la sfârșitul secolului al XVI-lea: Mihai Viteazul și “drumul moldovenesc”* in “Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie”, XV, 1997, pp. 41–60.

³ P.P. Panaitescu, *Interpretări românești*, ed. a II-a, prefată, note și comentarii de Ștefan S. Gorovei și Maria Magdalena Szekely, București, 1994, p. 97–98 and 105–106.

ruled by Ieremia Movilă. These actions are interpreted as a clear expression of commercial rivalry between Wallachia and Moldavia, an attempt to interrupt the flow of goods along the “Moldavian road” and redirect this in Michael’s own interest.

These conclusions are based on numerous wide-ranging sources, and argued in a way that is hard to refute. Nevertheless I hold that further analysis might lead us to other possible motives for the Wallachian prince’s actions against the so-called “Moldavian road.”

First we must review the claim that this trade route was still an important artery in the late sixteenth century. We would also need to see if Michael was the only one to launch attacks on caravans using this route, and to find one or more documents from his chancery that would shed light on the commercial rivalry between Wallachian and Moldavian trade routes at the end of the sixteenth century. Finally, we must unravel the political and military context in which Michael’s troops attacked.

1. The importance of the Moldavian route in the late sixteenth century

Ottoman expansion, the closing of the Black Sea and the shift of European trade routes from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic brought about significant changes in the European economy. East-Central Europe was no exception, but the changes did not lead to the disappearance of the old international trade routes which crossed Wallachia and Moldavia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and continued to function, albeit with some important differences. The Ottoman Empire played a major role in this process as the new dominant power in South-East Europe and the Black Sea region.

Ottoman hegemony in the region created a system which concentrated trade routes and the flow of goods on Constantinople.⁴ The Genoese and Venetian merchants which had once dominated the region were replaced by merchants from East-Central Europe, but the change in actors did not lead to any great changes in the nature of goods bought and sold, merely in the volumes traded. Thus, we should not be surprised that the “Moldavian road” continued to function, and that in the late sixteenth century there were even signs that Western actors were becoming interested in the route once more. Andreescu’s article draws on a number of sources to prove this and a few more important documents may be mentioned here.

In 1591 the Venetian *bailo* at Constantinople, Lorenzo Bernardo, informed his superiors of a project suggested by Krzysztof Dzierzek, Polish ambassador at the Porte, who had argued the necessity of building up a permanent Polish-Venetian

⁴ See e.g. the observation by Leonardo Donà in 1596 on the provinces around the Black Sea: “Tutte si può dire che servano al comodo di quella gran città(=Istanbul)” cf. *Relazioni di ambasciatori veneti al Senato Tratte dalle migliori edizioni disponibili e ordinate cronologicamente*, ed. Luigi Firpo, vol. XIII Constantinopoli (1590–1793), Turin, 1984, p. 350.

fleet in the Black Sea. According to this plan two or three ships were necessary to bring from the mouths of the Dniester grain, honey, wax, meat and hides and to transport them towards West. Although sceptical that such a proposal was realistic, suspecting that the Porte would do everything it could to oppose it, the *bailo* nevertheless passed on the suggestion to his superiors.⁵ Even if the project led to nothing, it reflects the importance of the route linking the Kingdom of Poland to the Black Sea and reveals Poland's wish to restore trade to the route by appealing to the maritime power which had been one of the most important actors in the Black Sea trade in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Polish ambition for a Black Sea policy is also echoed in Cardinal Enrico Caetani's instructions when he was sent to negotiate an agreement between the Habsburgs and Poland as a Papal envoy in 1596. He was to persuade the Poles to drop some of their claims, since the kingdom could reach as far as the Black Sea and could become "*gl'Emporii celebri di quello*."⁶ Granted, in this case we are dealing with a Papal project, but we may suppose that Clement VIII was doing no more than anticipate Polish plans to extend their influence in the Black Sea region.

The importance of trade with Poland is also shown in a report which Pietro Duodo, Venetian ambassador at the court of the Polish king Sigismund III Wasa, sent in 1592. Noting the large amounts of grain in the kingdom and the absence of wine, the Serenissima's envoy argues for an intensification of Venetian-Polish trade. Duodo notes the importance of the Moldavian route through to the Black Sea and onward to Constantinople, but unlike Krzysztof Dzierzek, he proposes to set up a rival trade route which would link Venice to Krakow via Bolzano, Innsbruck and Vienna. Duodo argues that this route would be much quicker and would have the advantage of avoiding the difficulties of crossing "Wallachia and parts of Moldavia and Bessarabia before it reaches the territory of the kingdom." Although he opposed the sea routes from the mouths of the Danube and the Dniester to the Ottoman capital, Duodo concedes that in case of war, a fleet hostile to the Ottomans sailing these waters "could do great harm to the Turks, disrupting the arms and provisions which they have from these parts."⁷

⁵ Józef Garbacik, *Le relazioni turco-polacche tra XVIo e XVIIo secolo alla luce dei rapporti e dei dispacchi dei baili veneziani a Costantinopoli*, in *Italia, Venezia e Polonia tra Umanesimo e Rinascimento*, ed. Mieczysław Brahmer, Wrocław-Warsaw-Kraków, 1967, p. 220.

⁶ Jan Władysław Woś, *Istruzione al cardinale Enrico Caetani per la sua missione in Polonia negli anni 1596–1597*, in "Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa", s. III, vol. VI, 1976, 3, p. 946; Ștefan Andreescu, *O reactualizare a tratatului de la Lublau în 1596*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie A.D. Xenopol", 20, 1983, p. 113.

⁷ *Le Relazioni degli Ambasciatori Veneti al Senato durante il secolo decimosesto*, ed. Eugenio Alberi, serie I, vol. 6, Florence, 1862, p. 330: discussing the trade routes bringing goods into Poland, Duodo remarks "via d'Inghilterra e di Danzica, per la quale strada ne va però poca quantità, l'altra per via di Costantinopoli, del Mar Maggiore e del Danubio. Sarebbe però facile il deviar questa strada con grandissimo beneficio di questa Repubblica perchè andando per via di Costantinopoli, prima si arricchisce chi non dovrebbe, e poi, in occasione di rotture quei vascelli che fanno questo viaggio, insieme con quella marinarezza, sarebbero perduti; onde si potria farli condurre a Venezia, e di qua per acqua sino a Bolzano, da Bolzano in Inspruch per terra, da Inspruch a Vienna per acqua, e da

Clearly we must take care to distinguish between such projections⁸ and the realities of trade at the time, but even so the Venetian reports show that there was at least theoretical interest in reviving trade between the West and the Black Sea region. Quantitative analysis of the number of shipments and amount of goods along the “Moldavian road” might offer us a more differentiated picture, but in the absence of customs records we must turn to other sources to form an image of trade along this route.⁹

A letter from Sigismund III Wasa to Sultan Murad III, dating from the beginning of the Long War, asks that there should be no increase in the taxes paid by merchants from either realm. At the same time the Polish king stresses the importance of guaranteeing safety on the roads, stating that the normal flow of trade depends upon the certainty that goods and persons may travel unharmed. The letter recommends that merchants not use routes that take them into unknown, dangerous territory, an allusion to the side-roads that sought to evade customs stations.¹⁰ The remark was intended to absolve the ruler on whose territory an attack may happen from the obligation to punish the brigands. However, the obligation held as far as commerce along the established roads was concerned, with reference to complaints from both sides about Cossack and Tatar raids. The text also contains further references to the normal state of trade between Poland and the Ottoman Empire, when the Polish king asks that his subjects’ horses not be drafted for military use while they are in the Sultan’s lands. Losses of any kind would be settled upon submission of evidence.¹¹

Viena in Cracovia per terra, e tutto questo in quindici giornate; dove che quelli che li conducono per il mar Maggiore, dopo averli condotti gran pezzo a contrario per il Danubio per moltissime giornate, sono sforzati di attraversare la Valacchia, e parte della Moldavia e Bessarabia, prima che entrino nei confini del regno. Alcuni di quei principali signori Poloni mi riferirono inoltre, che in tempo di sospetto de’ Turchi saria forse bene mandar buona quantità di questi vascelli, sotto pretesto d’andar a portar merci alla bocca del Danubio, nel mar Maggiore, dove potrebb’ apportar gran danno a’ Turchi turbando tutte le provvisioni d’armate e di vettovaglie che sogliono far i Turchi per quelle parti.”

⁸ Another trade project at the time envisaged the creation of a route between Transylvania and the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Cf. here the documents published by Andrei Oțetea, *Știri italiene privitoare la Țările Românești*, “Cercetări Istorice”, IV, 1928, 1, especially doc. V, p. 62–65.

⁹ A study of the Sibiu/Hermannstadt spice trade has noted some details here. Thus in 1593 the quantity of Oriental goods passing through the Sibiu customs doubled. However, the quantity of goods in general was larger than in other years. Cf. Maria Pakucs, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt Oriental trade in sixteenth century Transylvania*, Cologne-Weimar-Vienna, 2007, p. 127. The author points out the risks of drawing any firm conclusion here: “Whether this was just an accident because of better control of the customs registration or a truly ‘good’ trade year cannot be decided on the basis of the available information.”

¹⁰ Some examples of how these side-roads could affect the collection of excise in Maria Pakucs, *Sibiu-Hermannstadt*, p. 28 n. 133, p. 31 and p. 143.

¹¹ A. Veress, *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești*, București, 1932, IV, doc. 3, pp. 4 ff.: “Li datii soliti pagarsi dalli mercanti d’ambe parti, non siano cresciuti, o allargati et quelli che vorranno dall’imperio del Ser^{mo} Re nell’imperio nostro venir ad essercitar la mercantia, come anco possono far li nostri nelli regni et giurisdittioni di Sua Maestà, non venghino per luoghi incogniti o pericolosi. In somma per la via, che sollevano andar anticamente, vadino per quella medesima, che è publica, et in questo modo, se sarà fatto danno alle facultà et persone

The letter, preserved in a Venetian copy, is significant since it reveals an interest in the good functioning of the trade route across Moldavia, and equally shows that there were problems which beset the normal run of things. Ilie Corfus edited a letter from the Sultan to the Polish king which he dates to March or June of the same year, 1593, complaining of Polish and Cossack attacks on Ottoman trading posts.¹² The sultan writes that "Several brigands from among your Poles and the Cossacks gathered and came into our lands that border upon yours, where they plundered and burned the villages and towns, taking more than a thousand prisoners. As well as this, they fell upon our town, the port called Tulcea, where they killed our customs officer and twelve janissaries with him, taking three bags of our coin from the customs house, 4,500 thalers."¹³ The sultan saw these deeds as a clear breach of the treaty, especially since in his letter he accuses the king of treating the law-breakers mildly: "You have not punished them and you have taken no action to stop them from doing harm in our lands."¹⁴

The smooth flow of trade continued to be problematic for relations between Poland and the Ottoman Empire after 1593 as well. Thus in 1597 the Polish ambassador in Istanbul, Stanislaw Golski, received instructions to ask that "the Emperor (= Sultan) should place good men, Christians whom he trusts, who may mediate friendship between us and **keep the roads open and safe for envoys and for merchants**" (my emphasis)¹⁵. Golski was also charged with asking that Poles rather than Tatars should be stationed at Tighina and Akkerman, "since when they are in place the Sultan will draw more income from trade between Poland and the Ottomans."¹⁶ The same concern for trade is revealed in negotiations about the town of Ismail, which Aron the Tyrant destroyed at the start of the Long War. The Polish envoy is instructed to ask that Ismail be returned to Moldavia, along with the surrounding land and its inhabitants. Otherwise, refugees around Ismail "would continue to prey upon merchants and cause harm in Moldavia."¹⁷ Certainly, this

d'alcuno, li scelerati saranno trovati et castigati. Non sia fatta violenza alli mercanti, che veniranno con simplicità et realtà et siino pigliati li datii da loro, secondo l'uso antico. Ni un mercante sii travagliato per li debiti altrui. Li Azamogliani, Spai et Gianizzari non toglino per viaggio li cavalli de'nostri sudditi. Se li mercanti vorrano comprar et liberar delli sudditi nostri schiavi nell'imperio de'Turchi, li giudici non contradicano nè possino levar dalli man d'essi mercanti quelli schiavi che haveranno liberato con l'esborso del dovuto danaro; etc. Nella giurisdittione del Ser^{mo} Imperator non sia riscosso dalli sudditi nostri maggior datio di quello, che si soleva pagar et riscuoter anticamente. Se nell'avvenire d'alcun luoco de'Christiani sarà fatto accrescimento al regno nostro, o alle provincie congiunte con quello non sia condredito dal Ser^{mo} Imperator, ma tutto sia in nostro potere."

¹² The ambiguity is not on the part of the editor but rather of the author, who names both months.

¹³ Ilie Corfus, *Documente privitoare la istoria României culese din arhivele polone. Secolul al XVI-lea (=Documente XVI)*, Bucharest, 1979, doc. 195, p. 371.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Corfus, *Documente XVI*, doc. 199, p. 383.

¹⁶ Corfus, *Intervenția polonă în Moldova și consecințele ei asupra războiului lui Mihai Viteazul cu turcii*, „Revista de Istorie”, 28, 1975, nr. 4, pp. 533–534.

¹⁷ Corfus, *Intervenția polonă*, p. 534.

document represents only the Polish point of view, and the kingdom's attempt to consolidate its position after it intervened in Moldavia in 1595. In 1597 the Porte ignored the Polish requests, and the Sultan's reply insisted that these territories had been in Muslim hands for a long time. Nevertheless Mehmed III's letter repeats the main themes of maintaining friendship with Sigismund III Wasa and punishing law-breakers.¹⁸

Finally, the list of requests which the Polish envoy Jan Felix Herburt was instructed to present to the Porte in 1598 included the wish that Polish merchants accompanying ambassadors sent to the Ottoman Empire should not have to pay customs duties, and that those who had collected these dues should return the money.¹⁹

These projects, plans and negotiations were all meant to ensure good order on the trade route. Another very valuable source, giving the perspective of a merchant who frequently travelled between L'viv and Constantinople, is the testimony of Martin Grüneweg.²⁰ As well as giving information about routes, the goods transported, coinage in use and customs taxes, Grüneweg also warns about dangers on the road ("Since there are many spies everywhere, especially in Wallachia ... you are not safe in any part")²¹, and also mentions how merchants adapt to the situation. For example, in 1582 a caravan made its way along the Bessarabian bank of the river Prut since the ford had been washed away by floods. The next year, the presence of a large number of troops near Kamenitza led merchants to choose a detour, while in 1584, on the way back to Istanbul, they chose to cross Wallachia from Floci to Râmnicul Sărat and onward via Focșani–Tecuci–Bârlad–Vaslui to avoid Ottoman forces.²²

All these sources support the idea that there was an interest in good order on the Moldavian road at the end of the sixteenth century. The Ottoman Empire and Poland, rivals for control over Moldavia, were equally interested in adopting measures to ensure a normal flow of trade. Thus as soon as Michael the Brave threatened the security of goods and merchants on this route, retribution was not

¹⁸ Petre P. Panaitescu, *Documente privitoare la istoria lui Mihai Viteazul*, Bucharest, 1936, doc. 11, p. 35–36. As Corfus, *Documente XVI*, p. 385 n. 30, remarks, Panaitescu's proposed date should be corrected from 1596 to 1597.

¹⁹ Corfus, *Documente XVI*, doc. 200, p. 389. In the light of this Polish request, the episode which took place when Andrei Bzickiá's embassy returned from the Ottoman Empire via Moldavia in 1557 is interesting. Erasm Otwinowski records an incident between Alexandru Lăpușneanu's excisemen and the Armenian merchants accompanying the ambassador, who refused to pay tax on their wares, arguing that "they had never paid customs duties before whenever they were travelling with an envoy" – cf. Panaitescu, *Călători poloni în Țările Române*, Bucharest, 1930, p. 8.

²⁰ For a biography cf. Alexandru Ciocîltan, *Martin Grüneweg prin Moldova, Țara Românească și Dobrogea*, „Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie”, XXVII, 2009, pp. 209–248 with comprehensive bibliography.

²¹ *Călători străini. Supliment I*, Bucharest, 2011, p. 75.

²² A. Ciocîltan, *Martin Grüneweg*, p. 224. The Austrian traveller Georg Christoph Fernberger offers similar information much more concisely, remarking that the roads are unsafe because of the war; Virgil Ciocîltan, *Georg Christoph Fernberger, un călător austriac prin Dobrogea și Moldova în anul 1592*, „Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie”, XX, 2002, pp. 285–287.

slow in coming.²³ However, was the Prince of Wallachia the only one who harried merchants on the Moldavian road?

2. The merchant as favoured prey

It seems not. Even a partial analysis of sixteenth-century documents shows that Michael the Brave's attacks on caravans followed similar actions by Cossacks, Tatars and Moldavians. The *bailo* Lorenzo Bernardo's report to the Venetian Senate in 1590²⁴ mentions tensions in Polish-Ottoman relations (*pace ... molto sospetta e turbata*) due to Cossack raids into Ottoman territory.²⁵

The *bailo*'s account deserves attention for the details he offers as well as for the exactness of his observations. He emphasises that although they were theoretically Polish subjects, the Cossacks were impossible to keep under control, their bands were made up of outlaws of varying origins. Bernardo compares them to the uskoks, and this comparison indicates the principal problem in combating this scourge. The Cossacks, like the uskoks, launched lightning raids and then retreated before their victims could respond. They were not tied down to any particular territory where they could be tracked down and punished, so that the only meaningful response was similar Tatar raids into Polish territory.²⁶ As Ieremia Movilă remarked in

²³ The Polish response was not motivated only by economic considerations; this demands further study.

²⁴ *Relazioni di Ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, vol. XIV *Costantinopoli relazioni inedite (1512–1789)*, a cura di Maria Pia Pedani-Fabris, Padua, 1996, p. 372. Another interesting viewpoint in Lazaro Soranzo, *L'Ottomano*, quarta edizione, Napoli, 1600, pp. 97–98.

²⁵ The critical moment in the strained relations between Poland and the Porte seems to have been 1589 when, according to reports reaching Venice, the beylerbey of Rumelia was ordered to march on Poland; cf. A. Ciorănescu, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor culese din arhivele din Simancas*, Bucharest, 1940, doc. CXCVI, p. 94; reports of an imminent Polish-Ottoman clash continued to circulate over the next few years (*ibidem*, doc. CCI, p. 95). A letter from Murad III to Elisabeth I of England in 1592 presents war with Poland as a *fait accompli*. After putting Poland to fire and the sword, the Sultan writes, he was persuaded to make peace by the English ambassador (*Calendar of State Papers and manuscripts relating to English Affairs existing in the archives and collections of Venice and in other libraries of Northern Italy*, vol. IX, 1592–1603, ed. by Horatio F. Brown, London, 1897, doc. 20, p. 8). Another echo of the extreme tensions in Polish-Ottoman relations comes in a letter from Peter the Lame, refusing to accept a messenger from the Polish ambassador at the Porte, Pawel Ucranski, for fear of arousing Turkish suspicion. Cf. Ilie Corfus, *Documente privitoare la istoria României culese din arhivele polone. Secolele al XVI-lea și al XVII-lea*, ed. Vasile Matei, Bucharest, 2001, doc. 39, p. 76–78. For the context of 1589 and the resolution of the Polish-Ottoman crisis cf. Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate and Poland-Lithuania. International Diplomacy on the European Periphery (15–18 century). A Study of Peace Treaties followed by annotated documents*, Leiden-Boston, 2011, p. 109. For a Romanian account of the Cossack problem in Polish-Ottoman relations, cf. Andrei Pippidi, *Cazacii navigatori, Moldova și Marea Neagră la începutul secolului al XVII-lea*, in *Marea Neagră. Puteri maritime – puteri terestre (sec. XIII–XVIII)*, ed. Ovidiu Cristea, Bucharest, 2006, especially pp. 266–273.

²⁶ Kołodziejczyk, *The Crimean Khanate*, p. 109; argument from a *yarlık* of Gazi Ghirai from 1592, which mentions that up until the end of Sigismund II Augustus' reign, both sides were breaking the peace.

a letter of December 1596, for every Cossack raid there was another by the Nogai Tatars. Under these circumstances, the border zone between Poland and the Ottoman Empire became hazardous, with Moldavia often suffering “collateral damage” as Ieremia Movilă’s letter suggests.²⁷

In addition to this Polish-Ottoman proxy war, there were also clashes between the Poles and Moldavians in certain situations. Thus a letter of 18th January 1593 from the Polish chancellor Jan Zamoyski to Aron Vodă gives the impression that robbery of Polish merchants setting out from Szarogród was normal practice in Moldavia. Zamoyski’s letter was unambiguous and imperious; such abuses had to stop, and the victims had to receive justice. The letter closes with the phrase “I too shall order my loyal servants and subjects to behave in the same way with the men and the subjects of your gracious majesty,” raising the suspicion that the Moldavian prince’s actions were in response to similar acts in Poland, whether or not Zamoyski spelled it out that if his requests were ignored, this would have direct repercussions for Moldavian merchants.²⁸

Another case is illustrated by a document of 7th December, when the Moldavians were again accused of attacks on Polish subjects and raids into Polish territory. Among the complaints is that some Polish merchants and noblemen were detained in Moldavia by order of the castellan of Hotin, Oprea.²⁹

A year later, the Polish chancellor considered an attack on Moldavia by the Dniepr Cossacks a critical event which could cause new tensions in relations with the Ottoman Empire.³⁰ The raid struck the Moldavian town of Iurghiov, not far from Akkerman and Tighina, and a number of Ottoman subjects were among the victims.³¹ Substantial plunder was taken, and in a letter to the bishop of Kujawy, Hieronim Doliwa Rozrazewski, Zamoyski expresses concern that the Sultan may see this as breaking the treaties.

In an attempt to disown Polish responsibility for the attacks, the chancellor sought to win the Moldavian prince’s goodwill using an argument which is also encapsulated in the *bailo* Lorenzo Bernardo’s report. The culprits were not Polish subjects, but a mixture of outlaws of varying origins (Poles, Muscovites, Moldavians, Tatars) who “having nothing with which to feed themselves and their wives and children (...) go out into the wilderness, and attack not just the neighbouring states but also cause harm and loss in the lands of the Crown.”³² We do not know how far

²⁷ Panaitescu, *Documente*, doc. 12, p. 38, dated 24th December 1596; Ieremia complains of the fate of some of his subjects, enslaved by the Tatars.

²⁸ Corfus, *Documente XVI*, doc. 194, p. 367: “He gave me news of my subjects, townfolks, who were seized by Your Highness’ men when they came into Moldavia, their goods plundered and their possessions, and many other offences done. Thus I ask Your Highness to order and ordain that your castellans and other men see that justice is done without delay for my subjects who have been robbed in Moldavia, and forbid all in future from such theft and robbery and not allow such things to happen.”

²⁹ Corfus, *Documente XVI*, doc. 196, p. 372–375.

³⁰ Corfus, *Documente XVI*, doc. 197, p. 376.

³¹ Andrei Pippidi, *Cazacii navigatori*, p. 271, identifies this as Orhei.

³² Corfus, *Documente XVI*, doc. 197, p. 376.

Aron Vodă accepted Polish explanations. It seems likely that he ordered reprisals against neighbouring parts of the kingdom, since on 2nd February 1594 the nobles of Podolia asked Zamoyski to take steps against raids from Moldavia which had the prince's tacit approval.³³ It seemed that there would be no end to this series of attack and counter-attack which included raids into border estates as well as robbery of merchants. Although under the Polish-Ottoman treaty of 1598 the prince of Moldavia was obliged "to allow envoys and merchants free passage and to do them no harm,"³⁴ the attacks continued into the first decades of the seventeenth century.

In the case of the Cossacks, we can observe a change of direction toward the Western shores of the Black Sea with the intent of capturing shipping and merchants set sail from the mouths of the Danube for the Ottoman capital.³⁵ Such raids led to protest from the Porte in 1613 in an episode which Andreescu has examined and which was far from unique in the seventeenth century.³⁶ When a similar raid hit Varna in 1620, the merchant Marco di Giovanni was among the victims; all his wares were seized and his life was only spared at the intervention of Michael the Brave's bastard son.³⁷

We must ask whether we can strictly compare the Cossack, Tatar or Moldavian raids with the attacks that Michael the Brave's troops launched against caravans crossing Moldavia. Although these are all apparently alike in being robbery with violence, the motives behind the various actions seemed to have been qualitatively different. The raids in the vast border zone between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire seem to have been of the sort that Dominique Barthélemy – discussing another time and another place – calls *faide chevaleresque*, "*un type de guerre revendicatrice de biens (et revendication a la même racine que vengeance) et portant atteinte à des biens de l'autre*."³⁸ Since there was no diplomatic way to avenge thefts in a border zone, the situation favoured local initiatives to redress losses by raiding in turn the lands of those considered guilty.

This motive does not apply in the case of Michael the Brave, so that we must look elsewhere for the reason for his actions. As mentioned, Andreescu saw the

³³ Corfus, *Documente XVI*, doc. 198, pp. 376–378. There seem to have been similar incidents between Moldavia and Transylvania. Cf. for example the document in which Dimitrie Barnovschi asks the council of Bistrița for justice in the matter of cattle belonging to Moldavian merchants, confiscated as warranty on purchase of sheep. Barnovschi claims that the sheep have been paid for, and that if the Bistrițers continue to mistreat Moldavian subjects they can expect repercussions. Cf. Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. XV *Acte și scrisori din arhivele orașelor ardelene (Bistrița, Brașov, Sibiu)* publicate de N. Iorga, part I (1358–1600), doc. MCCCXVII, p. 710–711.

³⁴ Ilie Corfus, *Documente XVI*, doc. 201, p. 390.

³⁵ Andrei Pippidi, *Cazacii navigatori*, pp. 273–274.

³⁶ Ștefan Andreescu, *Comerțul danubiano-pontic*, pp. 186–187.

³⁷ Pippidi, *Cazacii navigatori*, p. 279.

³⁸ Dominique Barthélemy, *Chevaliers et miracles. La violence et le sacré dans la société féodale*, Paris, 2004, p. 13.

attacks on Polish caravans as part of a trade war which the Wallachian prince had launched against Moldavia. His survey of the documentary evidence includes negative reactions from the Polish court and from Constantinople, where the English merchant John Sanderson considered the years 1599–1600 most unfavourable to commerce.³⁹

3. The sinews of war

Our first observation here must be that such a commercial war would be very much against the spirit of the times, with a few notable exceptions. Historiographical surveys from the last few decades on the causes of conflict in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have emphasised that in this context “economic considerations came low on the agenda.”⁴⁰ Even if we suppose that in this case we are dealing with an exception, we should note that the war was started by the prince of Transylvania, Sigismund Báthory. A letter from Stanislaw Karnkowski, primate archbishop of Poland, shows what followed when a prince hostile to Poland took the throne in Moldavia.⁴¹ Thus Michael the Brave did nothing more than take up the idea a few years later and carry it forward.

The main difficulty of such an interpretation is that to the best of my knowledge, there is not one document from Michael’s Wallachian chancery that shows the existence of a well-defined trade policy. The only documents which the prince issued referring to trade restrict themselves to merchants’ rights to travel freely in the lands of diplomatic partners.⁴²

³⁹ *The Travels of John Sanderson in the Levant 1584–1602. With his Autobiography and selections from his Correspondence*, ed. by Sir William Foster, London, 1931, p. 210. Some comments in Andreescu, *Comerțul danubiano-pontic*, p. 175 and note 3.

⁴⁰ Frank Tallett, *War and Society in Early-Modern Europe 1495–1719*, London-New York, 1992, p. 16. “Colbert may have thought of war against the Dutch in terms of the establishment of French economic dominance in Europe, but there is little to suggest that his royal master viewed the matter in the same light.” Tallett is not dogmatic here, and shows that rulers could not be entirely uninterested in economic matters. Thus Swedish expansion in the Baltic was the result of attempts to control trade in the region.

⁴¹ Corfuz, *Documente privitoare la istoria României culese din arhivele polone. Secolele al XVI-lea și al XVII-lea*, Bucharest, 2001, doc. 47, p. 102: “From that time on, cattle being driven to Germany were also taken on another road. Customs were levied on Malvasia wine, on saffron and other goods. May God protect us from such neighbours. The Transylvanian prince is hungry. The Grand Turk is rich, and does not care for such small profits.”

⁴² The text of the treaty with the Habsburgs allows Wallachian merchants to trade in Transylvania as long as they do not infringe upon towns’ rights and have paid customs dues; likewise, Hungarian and German merchants may trade in Wallachia, paying the customary taxes („Mihai Viteazul în Conștiința Europeană”= MVCE, I, doc. 59, p. 192). Negotiations with the Ottomans in 1597–1598 seem to have included a trade component as well. A Venetian source records that Michael asked the Porte that “tutte le sue scale sotto bona fede et sigurtà, per li mercanti et sudditi d’ambe parti, che possano andare et venire a trafficare, come già havevano cominciato” (Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XII, doc. DCVI, p. 395).

By contrast, I have found no text giving any indication of an intention to launch a trade war. This would require the creation of an over-arching plan, in which attacks on the rival trade route were accompanied by a set of measures to attract merchants, secure alternative trade routes and entrepôts bringing together an abundance of wares in large quantities. Rather, it seems to me that Sigismund Báthory's attacks, and later Michael the Brave's, were simply a matter of expedience, short-term solutions whereby the princes sought to get hold of large sums of money quickly.

Here the exact moment when Michael began to target the merchants is revealing. An analysis of the kinds of merchants affected and the goods which they were carrying may also reveal more about the attacks.

As Andreescu's article showed, the first episode for which we have significant documentary evidence came in spring 1599, during the build-up to Michael's invasion of Transylvania. On 23rd April 1599, Ieremia Movilă wrote to the king of Poland that although Michael's actions were aimed against the infidel, they did more harm to fellow Christians. The Moldavian prince reported that the raids had caused enormous losses to merchants including Poles from L'viv, Moldavians and an Englishman.⁴³ The letter is not a model of precision; the Polish caravan was “large,” there were “more than just a few” Moldavian merchants, the losses were invaluable. The lack of detail is probably due to Ieremia Movilă's wish to spread the news quickly, and to persuade Sigismund III to intervene as soon as possible.

In July 1600 the Armenian merchant Flabarik, who had set out from Iași with a cargo of sable fur, had his wares confiscated on Michael's orders. The prince sent him on to Craiova to collect his money but sent secret orders to the ban of Craiova to have him hanged. However, the ban was a friend of the merchant and let him go free, although without giving him any money.⁴⁴ At the same time, Michael's men were attacking other Polish and Moldavian merchants, according to Alexander Chodkiewicz's account.⁴⁵

The circumstances of the raids would suggest that Michael the Brave was in urgent need of large sums of money to pay his troops.⁴⁶ After the “phony peace” 1597–1598⁴⁷ the recruitment of large numbers of mercenaries caused considerable costs and logistical problems for Wallachia's war against the Ottomans.⁴⁸ Based on

⁴³ Panaitescu, *Documente*, doc. 31, p. 77–79; cf. an analysis in Andreescu, *Comerțul danubiano-pontic*, pp. 178–179.

⁴⁴ Corfus, *Corespondență inedită asupra relațiilor dintre Mihai Viteazul și Polonia*, Cernăuți, 1935 doc. V, p. 35.

⁴⁵ Panaitescu, *Documente*, doc. 50, p. 121; *Călători străini*, IV, Bucharest, 1972, pp. 198–200; Andreescu, *Comerțul danubiano-pontic*, pp. 182–183.

⁴⁶ Nicolae Stoicescu, *Oastea lui Mihai Viteazul*, in *Mihai Viteazul. Culegere de studii*, ed. Paul Cernovodeanu and Constantin Rezachevici, Bucharest, 1975, p. 75–112, especially pp. 86–89 on the size of the army.

⁴⁷ Ștefan Andreescu, *O “pace prefăcută” la Dunărea de Jos: tratativele transilvano-muntene cu Poarta din anii 1597–1598*, in *Idem, Restitutio Daciae. Studii cu privire la Mihai Viteazul (1593–1601)*, pp. 175–226.

⁴⁸ Precisely these logistic problems meant that the number of troops in a battle rarely exceeded 20,000 men. The Battle of Breitenfeld (17th September 1631), in which ca. 40,000 Swedish troops

contemporary sources, Nicolae Stoicescu has estimated an expenditure of between 75,000 and 145,000 thalers per month for 1599–1600.⁴⁹ Under these conditions it should be no surprise that in 1597, payment for his troops is a recurrent theme in Michael the Brave's diplomatic correspondence with the Habsburgs: "For in our service to Christendom and our fight against the pagans we have spent all our wealth and thus we have nothing left to maintain an army to confront the pagans. We ask Your Majesty to remember our great need, sending us some money in aid so that we can maintain our armies";⁵⁰ "for surely Your Majesty knows how weak and poor we are, having neither armies nor money (...) if we had men and money we would try to do greater things";⁵¹ "the enemy has ravaged and laid waste to this country so that I have no way to feed or pay my own troops";⁵² "we have no wealth left to us and are fallen into poverty."⁵³ Looking beyond the rhetorical charge of such messages, we may assume that lack of money to pay the troops really was a problem.⁵⁴ In a report to Emperor Rudolf II, Erich Lassota recommended that the promised monetary aid be sent "since this prince does not change his mind because of broken promises and delay with the money."⁵⁵ From Lassota's reports and those of his trusted lieutenant, Hans Hödl, it is evident that moneys promised to Michael sometimes arrived late, and that Prince Sigismund Báthory in Transylvania sometimes diverted the funds. On 27th August 1597 Erich Lassota established that no less than 4,500 thalers was missing from the sum destined to pay the troops in

confronted an Imperial army of ca. 30,000, is an exception. Studies on Western European sources have shown that an army of more than 10,000 – 15,000 men was difficult to maintain, and that strategy came to be dictated by logistic considerations; cf. Frank Tallett, *War and Society*, pp. 62 ff. In this context we may wonder why Michael the Brave chose to recruit more troops almost continuously, although he knew that his resources were limited.

⁴⁹ Nicolae Stoicescu, *Oastea*, p. 86; the sum of 75,500 thalers is based on Lassota's reports and the treasurer Dumitrache's accounts, published by Nicolae Iorga, *Documente nouă, în mare parte românești, relative la Petru Șchiopul și Mihai Viteazul*, Bucharest, 1899, pp. 34–36, representing the build-up to Michael's invasion of Transylvania. In 1600 a report from Habsburg agents estimated that Michael's army cost between 98,000 and 102,000 thalers (E. de Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XII, Bucharest, 1903, doc. MCXX, p. 752–757). Similarly in 1600 David Ungnad (Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XII, doc. CMXIX, p. 567) gives a figure of 145,000 thalers, which Stoicescu considers exaggerated although Ungnad had no reason to inflate the figures.

⁵⁰ Letter of Michael the Brave to Archduke Maximilian, 5th January 1597; Andrei Veress, *Documente*, V, doc. 33, p. 52; MVCE, I, doc. 40, p. 150.

⁵¹ Veress, *Documente*, V, doc. 39, p. 62: Michael the Brave to Archduke Maximilian, 1st April 1597, a letter referring to Turkish preparations to cross the Danube; cf. MVCE, I, doc. 44, p. 156–157.

⁵² Veress, *Documente*, V, doc. MVCE, I, doc. 52, p. 173. We may also adduce other sources from Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XII, doc. DC, pp. 393–394.

⁵³ Hurmuzaki XII, p. 411–412; MVCE, I, doc. 70, p. 216.

⁵⁴ Under the treaty with Rudolf II, Michael the Brave was to receive moneys to pay 5,000 soldiers and additionally, soldiers or money to recruit the same, for 5,000 (in summer) or 2,500 (in winter) v. MVCE, I, doc. 59, pp. 187–188.

⁵⁵ Veress, *Documente*, V, doc. 52 p. 82; *Călători străini*, IV, p. 65; MVCE, I, doc. 47, p. 162. Lassota's agent Hans Hödl was sent to Cluj to receive the money which Rudolf II had approved to pay 4,000 men. Hödl told Bartolomeo Pezzen that the money sent would only last a short time. Cf. Veress, *Documente*, V, doc. 53, p. 83.

Wallachia, since the Transylvanians had used the money to pay the troops of their captain, Pongracz Sennyei.⁵⁶ Lassota had to be content with the explanations of Transylvanian chancellor Istvan Jósika, but was dissatisfied with such conduct and suggested to the Imperial court that next time, the money should be sent directly.

Given the lack of money within Wallachia and the lateness of the promised Imperial subsidies, the mercenaries grew restless.⁵⁷ Any mutiny or rebellion due to lack of funds would have meant the end of Michael's political and military plans.⁵⁸ Hans Hödl records that he had planned to flee by night for fear of the Serb and Cossack mercenaries who had not been paid, and reports "great uproar" in the camp when the prince could not pay salaries in 1599.⁵⁹ This clearly shows how precarious was Michael the Brave's position when conflict broke out with the Porte once again. The only answer to these liquidity problems was to lay hands quickly on a sufficient quantity of coin. There were few easy ways to do so.

We may also mention the attempt to recover the *haraç* money sent to the Porte, mentioned by the Ottoman chronicler Mustafa Selânikî,⁶⁰ or the interception of a sum sent by the Porte as payment for 60,000 Tatars.⁶¹ Even supposing that these reports are true, such sums could hardly cover the prince's financial needs for long. Much more profitable for this purpose was to intercept merchant caravans, which brought two short-term advantages; it brought in significant quantities of coin and of wares, and troubled the usual flow of trade between the prince's enemies. In the rather longer term, this tactic proved to be a two-edge sword. As well as angering Krakow and Istanbul, insecurity on the roads would also make merchants choose to take their wares elsewhere.⁶² Even Michael seems to have been aware of the danger. A Polish merchant captured on Moldavian territory by Michael's troops wrote an account to Sigismund III: "They would not have let the other merchants leave the country, and they certainly would not have let me leave, but only did this so that they could lure more of Your Majesty's merchants, for

⁵⁶ Veress, *Documente*, V, doc. 58, p. 88–89; *Călători străini*, IV, p. 65.

⁵⁷ It also happened that soldiers demanded pay in advance. See for example Michael's letter to Sigismund Báthory of 11th July 1598, complaining that Hungarian soldiers would not follow him into the camp unless they were paid first. Michael emphasises that he does not have the money, and adds that "*Si quid evenerit mali mihi ne imputetur*"; Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, III/1, doc. CCXXIX, p. 295; MVCE, I, doc. 65, p. 208.

⁵⁸ Veress, *Documente*, V, doc. 69, p. 113–114.

⁵⁹ Veress, *Documente*, V, doc. 65, p. 108.

⁶⁰ Aurel Decei, *Relațiile lui Mihai Viteazul cu Imperiul Otoman*, Bucharest, 1978, p. 233.

⁶¹ Anton Mesrobeanu, *Documente din Arhiva Vaticanului referitoare la Mihai Viteazul*, in „Cercetări istorice”, IV, 1928, 2, p. 159. The news reached Venice from Vienna on 17th April 1599, although it cannot be substantiated. For the costs to the Ottomans cf. Caroline Finkel, *The Costs of Ottoman Warfare and Defense*, in „Byzantinische Forschungen”, 16, 1991, pp. 91–103.

⁶² In a letter to the Polish king of 23rd April 1599, Ieremia Movilă mentions the danger that “We do not know how merchants will dare to go to Turkey, or to come from Turkey to Your Majesty's realm, in future, since this dreadful loss has struck them in the only sure and safe staging-post that they had”. (Panaïtescu, *Documente*, doc. 32, p. 79).

several dozen had stopped on the far side of the Danube. When they heard that the others had left, then they too crossed the Danube into Moldavia.”⁶³

To be sure, such attacks did not lead to a complete cessation of trade, but we may ask whether rich merchants transporting large quantities or high-value goods may not have considered it wiser to avoid the Moldavian road. Although we cannot form a definitive conclusion, comparison between attacks on merchants in 1599 and in 1600 seems to indicate as much.

Although in April 1599 the caravans attacked seem to have been rich merchants transporting high-value goods, in 1600, after the invasion of Moldavia, the merchants robbed seem to have been of the ordinary sort (except for Flabarik the Armenian, trading in sable skins).⁶⁴ Alexander Chodkiewicz wrote to the king of Poland that “I have seen and heard the murders done to those poor merchants who are Your Majesty’s subjects, when they went to the Danube to buy fish, and others who went for other goods and were on the sea. When they came to Smil, not only was what they had taken from them, but many of them were killed by the Wallachians (...) From the L’viv merchants he took several hundred gold pieces, over and above the customs duties, and many different wares, even though those merchants had only seven wagons. Then he ordered the merchants, and myself, to go to Transylvania, though we told him that the heavily laden wagons would have great trouble on the mountain roads.”⁶⁵ Although we have few details here, it is clear enough that fish did not bring much profit; some of these merchants probably met their end because they could not pay a high ransom. Those who could do so were spared their lives. The case of Flabarik the Armenian seems an unusual one since according to our sources, even though he was left alive he was supposed to be hanged once he reached Craiova. We are likely dealing here with a merchant who enjoyed some special status – this much is suggested by his wares, since sable furs were highly sought-after at the Porte – and Michael, who at his point was prince of Wallachia, Transylvania and Moldavia together, preferred to delay decisions once his main objective was reached and the goods had been seized.

All of this persuades me that Michael the Brave’s principal motive in attacking the Moldavian road was to lay his hands on money to pay his troops, rather than to launch a concerted trade war. The king of Poland labelled the actions “banditry.”⁶⁶ We may certainly ask to what extent such measures could actually solve the prince’s financial problems. Although there have been some estimates of

⁶³ Panaitescu, *Documente*, doc. 50, p. 121.

⁶⁴ For the fur trade in the sixteenth century cf. Mihnea Berindei, *Le rôle des fourrures dans les relations commerciales entre la Russie et l'Empire Ottoman avant la conquête de la Sibérie*, in *Passé turco-tatar. Présent soviétique. Études offertes à Alexandre Bennigsen*, ed. par Chantal Lemerrier-Quelquejay, Giles Veinstein, S.E. Wimbush, Paris, 1986, pp. 89–98.

⁶⁵ Panaitescu, *Documente*, doc. 50, p. 120.

⁶⁶ Published in I. Corfus, *Mihai Viteazul și polonii. Cu documente inedite în anexe*, Bucharest, 1937, doc. doc. XXVIII, pp. 245–247. Sigismund III asked Ieremia Movilă to explain to Michael that it was not good to rob and plunder, “since he has enough trouble with others, and should not stir up the enmity of his neighbours” (p. *ibidem*, 247).

Michael's costs for his armies, it is much harder to reckon the total value of goods seized and moneys extorted from the merchants. However much they came to, we may suspect that money obtained in this manner could not solve his difficulties. All that he could do here was to win short-term goodwill from his troops, especially since multiple sources record that many officers in Michael's armies received numerous gifts alongside money.

In this context, attacks on merchant caravans offered an easy way for a prince with little money to hand to win the goodwill of his troops. Further, we may suppose that there was also a pragmatic calculation here; an army which was not actively fighting and was not paid, or not paid enough, constituted a potential danger for the employer, whereas it became a redoubtable weapon as soon as it was shown a target which might bring significant booty and, implicitly, its own arrears of pay.⁶⁷ It would follow that Michael the Brave sought to use warfare to solve the financial and logistical problems involved in a long-haul conflict. In this epoch, his enemies too used just such a strategy. His successes in the period 1595–1600 seemed to justify the scheme, but the price to be paid was enormous, both internally and externally; in the end, it brought about a collapse just as spectacular as his rise had been.

⁶⁷ On this aspect cf. Ovidiu Cristea, *In visceribus regni. Constrângeri logistice în timpul “războiului cel lung”*, „Revista Istorică”, XVI, 1–4, 2006, pp. 141–152.