

# MIRCEA THE OLD

A portrait of Mircea the Old, a ruler of Wallachia. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a crown with a bird on top and a red tunic with a gold collar. The background is a dark, textured green.

Father of Wallachia  
Grandfather of Dracula

A. K. Brackob

# МІЯСЕЯ THE OLD

FAATHER OF ШАЛЬАСНІА  
ГЯАНДФАТНЕЯ OF ДЯАСУЛЯ



Mircea the Old  
Prince of Wallachia, 1386-1418

A.K. Brackob

# MIŢCEA THE OLD

FATHER OF WALLACHIA  
GRANDFATHER OF DASCALA





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Las Vegas ♦ Oxford ♦ Palm Beach

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Dedicated to  
Florin Constantiniu  
and  
Keith Hitchins

*One Romanian, One American  
Two of the Finest Scholars  
and Men I Have Ever Known*





## INTRODUCTION

*Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.*

— Confucius

**A**lthough his grandson, Vlad the Impaler, better known as Dracula, has acquired greater international fame, Mircea the Old is the most significant ruler to sit on the throne of the Romanian principality of Wallachia during the Middle Ages. Together with his own great grandfather, Basarab, who won the independence of the principality, Mircea established the framework of this small state in southeastern Europe. As the great Romanian historian P.P. Panaitescu, author of one of the first comprehensive studies of his reign, pointed out, “just as the Church had its fathers, who laid its foundations, so too do countries have theirs.”<sup>1</sup>

Mircea the Old can rightfully be considered the father of Wallachia. He not only consolidated the political and administrative structure of the principality, but he defeated the Ottoman Empire, the greatest power of his day, in battle and made

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<sup>1</sup>P.P. Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân* (Bucharest, 1944), p. 347.

his country a major force in international politics at the dawn of the fifteenth century. The land over which he reigned, although small, stood proudly in defense of European civilization at a time of its greatest peril. Mircea also established a dynamic ruling dynasty from which the Dracula legend would ultimately be born. For all of these reasons, this incredible ruler deserves much greater international recognition for his achievements.

Mircea the Old was the son of Radu the Wise, prince of Wallachia (1376-1383), and his second wife Kalinikia, the daughter of Despot Dobrotitsa, ruler of the land between the Danube and the Black Sea that came to be called Dobrudja. Mircea was not necessarily even destined to rule, but fate intervened. He did not succeed his father on the throne, that honor befell his older brother Dan. Since Dan had no adult children, he did, however, name his younger brother Mircea as his associate ruler. Although some sources hint at a conflict between Mircea and Dan, they confuse later events; the two brothers worked closely together, just as their father Radu had done with his own elder half-brother Vladislav. Fortunately for the young principality, Dan's foresight ensured a smooth transition of power when he fell in battle against the Bulgarian Tsar Shishman in 1386, only three years after taking the throne. Mircea now became prince of Wallachia.

The name Mircea is said to be a diminutive form of Dimitrie.<sup>2</sup> It is derived from *mir*, the Slavonic word for peace,<sup>3</sup> but, with danger all around, Mircea's reign was far from peaceful. Still, he rose to meet every challenge and he ruled Wallachia with

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<sup>2</sup>St. Nicolaescu, "Domnia lui Alexandru Vodă," in *RIAF*, XVI (1915-1922), p. 225.

<sup>3</sup>N.A. Constantinescu, *Dicționar onomastic românesc* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1963), pp. 322-323.

astuteness and dexterity for over thirty years, leaving such a strong imprint on the history of the principality that, even long after his death, his successors looked back upon his reign as a point of reference.

Some historians claim that Mircea received the epithet ‘the Old’ to distinguish him from a later prince, Mircea the Shepherd, who ruled Wallachia in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup> This is incorrect. He is first referred to by this name in a diploma issued by Neagoe Basarab on June 28, 1519, long before the reign of Mircea the Shepherd (1545-1554; 1558-1559), which refers back to “the days of Voivode Mircea the Old.”<sup>5</sup> The epithet attached itself to his name as a sign of the respect and esteem with which later generations regarded him. It was common, for example, to refer to village elders as “old and wise men,” a sign of deference. Mircea, having given shape to the political and administrative institutions of his country and preserved its independence, had such a strong impact on the history of his land that his descendants looked back upon him as a wise elder, thus explaining the sobriquet ‘the Old.’

This book is intended as a survey of the life and times of this great Romanian prince of Wallachia. It brings to light the remarkable contributions made by Mircea to strengthen his principality and the key role he played in resisting Islamic expansion into Europe. Mircea is among the great rulers of his era. As the grandfather of Dracula, an understanding of his life and times is also essential to provide historical context to the reign of Vlad the Impaler. Although of vital importance, the study of

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<sup>4</sup>Emil Țirtoșu, *Titulatura domnilor și asocierea la domnie*, (Bucharest, 1960) p. 123.

<sup>5</sup>Doc. 147 in *DIR, XVI, B*, vol. I, p. 146.



Mircea's life and times is no easy task. Documents are limited and most of them are from external sources. As P.P. Panaitescu rightly pointed out, "About Mircea himself we know far too little; we know his deeds, which are the results of his personality, but of the man himself we know too little."<sup>6</sup> The 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death is an occasion to try to shed new light on this great ruler and his achievements.

I dedicate this book to two great scholars, the late Academician Florin Constantiniu and Dr. Keith Hitchins of the University of Illinois, whose contributions to the study of Romanian history will be cherished for generations to come. I will never forget their kindness and generosity. There are many to whom I am extremely grateful for their assistance over the years. I would especially like to thank my wife Dana, and friends and colleagues Sorin Pârvu, Petronela Postolache, and Academician Alexandru Zub who did much for the realization of this project. I should also express thanks to my long-time friends Michael Lang, Marcel Popa, Ioan Bolovan, Ernest H. Latham, Jr., and my late friend and colleague Gheorghe Buzatu for all they have done throughout the years for me, as well as to promote the study of Romanian history and culture.

*A.K. Brackob*

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<sup>6</sup>Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 346.

## CHAPTER I

### THE PRINCIPALITY OF WALLACHIA

*"Wallachia... appears to be named such, not after Flaccus, the Roman commander who ruled Moesia or Dacia, sent there by Trajan with thirty thousand people, brought and colonized there to work the land and to ensure provisions for the Roman army which had constant battles with the Scythians and the Sarmatians, but from the word **Walch**, which in the German language means Italian."*

— Baranyai Decsi Czímor János,  
sixteenth century Hungarian writer<sup>7</sup>

**A**lthough it came to be called *Wallachia*, the realm over which Mircea the Old ruled knew several names. The ancients called it *Dacia*, and fifteenth century Byzantine writers such as Laonic Chalkokondyles and Kritoboulos of Imbros continued to refer to the land north of the Danube with this designation. With the Cuman invasions of the twelfth century, it also became known as *Cumania*. When

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<sup>7</sup>Maria Holban, ed., *Călători străini*, vol. III, p. 214.

Hungarian monarchs imposed their suzerainty over the land south of the Carpathians in 1233, they added “King of Cumania” to their list of titles,<sup>8</sup> Hungarian sovereigns maintained this title as late as the reign of Sigismund of Luxemburg.<sup>9</sup> But, already in the fourteenth century, after the Cumans had been largely assimilated, this name was no longer in common usage.

Documents issued by the Hungarian chancellery call it the *Transalpine land* or *Transalpinia*. Just as Transylvania means “the land beyond the forest,” Transalpinia means “the land across the mountains.” Both of these designations reflect the perspective of the Hungarian conquerors who expanded east from the Pannonian plain to impose their rule over these territories. The Wallachian chancellery also employed this name in Latin language documents.

In Slavic and Greek language documents issued by the prince’s chancellery, the country is called *Ungrovalachia*, meaning *Hungarian Wallachia*. This designation reflects a Greek or Balkan perspective. From the eleventh century, the name Valachia referred to the mountainous region of Thessaly inhabited by a population of Latin origin, heavily engaged in pastoral activities. Thus, the term Ungrovalachia was applied to the land between the Carpathians and the Danube to distinguish it from the territory in northern Greece called Valachia.<sup>10</sup>

Fifteenth and sixteenth century Moldavian chronicles employ yet another name for the neighboring principality, calling it

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<sup>8</sup>Doc. XCIX in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, p. 127.

<sup>9</sup>Doc. 2214 in *Urkundenbuch*, vol. IV, pp. 549-551.

<sup>10</sup>Constantin C. Giurescu, “O nouă sinteză a trecutului nostru,” in *RIR*, II (1932), p. 15.

*Muntenia* or the *Mountainous Land*. For example, the German-Moldavian chronicle written near the end of the reign of Stephen the Great (1457-1504) tells how the greatest of Moldavia's rulers placed Vlad's son, Vlad the Monk, "as prince in Muntenia, whose son [Radu the Great] is still alive today and is prince in Muntenia."<sup>11</sup> This curious appellation again reflects a view from without. Although Wallachia is mountainous along its northern border, this rugged terrain does not characterize the principality. The provenance of the name is unknown, but it likely reflects the fact that the state had its origins in its mountainous region around Câmpulung, or possibly because of the shared border between the two principalities along the Carpathians. But this name is never found in Wallachian documents from Mircea's time.

The Turks called the country *Iflak*, their word for *Vlach*, a name they also applied to Mircea himself. The Polish chancellery called the country *Basarabia*, after the prince who consolidated the independence of the land south of the Carpathians by his resounding victory over King Charles Robert of Hungary at the battle of Posada in 1330. In his treaty with Poland in 1396, recognizing the suzerainty of Vladislav I over his principality, Vlad I calls himself "Voivode of Basarabia."<sup>12</sup> while Mircea called himself "great Prince of the land of Basarabia" when he renewed his previous alliance with the Polish monarch in 1403.<sup>13</sup>

Papal documents from Vlad's time designate the country between the Danube and the Carpathians as *Valachie* or *Wallachia*, meaning land of the Vlachs, a term applied to Latin-

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<sup>11</sup>Panaiteescu, ed., *Cronicile slavo-române*, p. 34. See also Olgierd Gorka, "Cronica epocii lui Stefan cel Mare (1457-1499)," in *RIR*, IV, V.

<sup>12</sup>Doc. CCCXVI in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, pp. 374-375.

<sup>13</sup>Doc. DCLII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, p. 824.



speaking peoples in the Balkans. Over time, this name also assumed the broader meaning of shepherd, the predominant occupation of this population. The appellation of *Vlach* is derived from the German name for the Celts, *Welsh*. As the Celts who settled in Gaul became Romanized, they began to use it to refer to all Latin or Latinized peoples. The Slavs borrowed this term from the Germans under the forms *Vlach*, *Valach*, and *Vlas*. The Poles, for example, use *Wolosey* to designate a Wallachian or a Romanian, and *Wlachi* an Italian. In 1923, Mussolini's foreign ministry sent a diplomatic note to the Polish Government, officially requesting that they cease to refer to their country as *Wlochy* and henceforth call it Italy. The Magyars, in turn, borrowed the name from the Slavs, calling Italians, *Olaszi*, and Wallachians or Romanians, *Olah*; the name of the famous sixteenth century Hungarian humanist Nicholas Olahus reflects his family origin. The Greeks also borrowed this term from the Slavs;<sup>14</sup> Vlachs are first mentioned in eleventh and twelfth century Byzantine chronicles, such as that of Anna Comnena, and the fifteenth century narratives of Byzantine writers George Sphrantzes and Michael Dukas refer to the land between the Danube and the Carpathians as Wallachia.

That the principality became known as Wallachia is in itself a curious development. In most cases, the name of a country is derived from that of its conquerors, even if the indigenous population assimilated them over time. For example, the Bulgars, a Turkic people from the east, who came to rule over the Slavic population south of the Danube in the seventh century A.D., were Slavicized over the course of several centuries, but the land they conquered became known as Bulgaria, and its inhabitants

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<sup>14</sup>Panaitescu, *Interpretări românești*, p. 97.

Bulgarians. In a similar manner, the land between the Carpathians and the Danube became known as *Cumania*, but by the fourteenth century this name had fallen into disuse. The reason this name was replaced by one reflecting the majority indigenous population, however, can be explained. Unlike the case of Bulgaria, the Cumans never formed a unified state in the area. They mixed with the Slavic ruling class, adopting their language and culture, but remained organized in voivodates and tribes.<sup>15</sup> This process of assimilation was well-advanced when Thocomer and Basarab united the land between the Danube and the Carpathians. As a result, the newly-formed principality wedged between the Bulgarian Empire and the kingdom of Hungary, both with pretensions of suzerainty over the land, came to be called after its most distinguishing characteristic, its majority Vlach population.

Located in southeastern Europe, the principality of Wallachia encompassed an area of approximately 47,000 square miles, situated between the Carpathian Mountains and the Danube River. The country's natural frontiers afforded it some protection from an enemy attack. The Danube, one of Europe's mightiest rivers, could only be safely traversed at certain points where the river narrowed and the currents slowed. The fifteenth century Ottoman writer Kivami pointed out the hazards posed by attempting to cross the Danube, claiming that "Each year it takes the lives of ten thousand Turks, without swords or knives, and without shedding blood."<sup>16</sup> Even where conditions were propitious, an enemy army found itself in great danger when it attempted to cross the river. It could take days for an army laden with supplies to effect a crossing, and, with its forces divided, it lay vulnerable to attack.

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<sup>15</sup>Panaiteescu, *Interpretări românești*, p. 96.

<sup>16</sup>Mihail Gublogu, ed., *Crestomație turcă*, Bucharest, 1978, p. 178.

For this reason, control over the fortresses protecting the principal crossing points was of vital importance. The main crossing points into Wallachia during Mircea's time along the Danube were: Calafat, across from the fortress of Vidin; Turnu, across from the powerful fortress of Nicopolis, where a cylindrical tower fort, originally built during Roman times, protected the landing on the Wallachian side; Giurgiu, across from Ruse, where Mircea built a stone fortress on the island nearest the shore to defend this frequently-traversed route; across from Silistra, on the Bulgarian side of the river, a fortress held by Mircea; at Floci, near the point where the Ialomița emptied into the Danube; and at Brăila, Wallachia's principal port and gateway to the Orient. Crossing points of lesser importance included: where the Jiu River emptied into the Danube across from Rahova; at Zimnicea; across from Svistov; and across from the fortress at Tutrakan on the Bulgarian shore.

The mountains, likewise, offered a limited number of passages into the country. From the west, Wallachia could be entered via the Cerna River Valley, via Mehadia, and then along the Danube to Severin. The Olt River Valley was the principal route leading from Sibiu, frequented merchants travelling to and from that important Saxon city. The main road leading into Wallachia from Brașov, the other powerful Saxon city bordering the principality, crossed the Carpathians at the Bran Pass, by way of Rucăr. This was the principal trade route linking Transylvania to the Wallachian port of Brăila. Less-travelled routes included the Argeș valley, protected by the fortress of Poenari, where Basarab laid his ambush for Hungarian King Charles Robert in 1330, the Prahova valley, Teleajen, the Buzău River valley, and the Jiu River valley. The border with Moldavia, to the east of the Carpathians, which ran along the Milcov and Siret Rivers,

presented no major geographical obstacles, thereby facilitating contacts between the neighboring principalities.

Wallachia was a land of geographic diversity, abundant in natural resources. Michael Bocignoli, a Ragusan who visited the principality at the beginning of the sixteenth century, provides the following description of the country: "It extends in length from west to east for twelve days' journey, and in width, from south to north, for a journey of a little over three days. In this uninterrupted plain, the land is fertile, good for planting, except for the places where it is cut by swamps and forests."<sup>17</sup> Wallachia in the time of Mircea the Old was heavily forested, making for a landscape quite different from that which we see today. Since ancient times, the thick forests, like the mountains to the north, provided a place of refuge for the indigenous populations in face of the numerous invaders who conquered or overran the country. The Romanian proverb, "The forest is the brother of the Romanian," reflects this time-honored reality. The district of Vlasca, or the Vlach land, earned its name because it was a forest refuge where the native population withdrew to avoid subjugation. The adjacent district called Teleorman, which in Cuman means 'the crazy forest,' is another such area,<sup>18</sup> its name reflecting the difficulty the conquerors faced in penetrating the region; another example is the Great Forest, in the Ilfov district, where the future capital of Bucharest developed. Numerous rivers also cross the country, flowing down from the mountains and emptying into the Danube.

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<sup>17</sup>Holban, ed., *Călători străini*, vol. I, pp. 175-176. A descendant of one of the leading families of the maritime republic on the Adriatic Sea, Michael Bocignoli visited Wallachia prior to 1512. His account was published in 1524.

<sup>18</sup>Giurescu, "O nouă sinteză a trecutului nostru," in *RIR*, I (1931), p. 363.

The most important waterways running through the interior of Wallachia were the Motru, Jiul, Olt, Vedea, Teleorman, Argeș, Dâmbovița, Ialomița, and Buzău rivers. Numerous lakes and ponds also dotted the landscape. The rivers played a key role in the development of the principality. They sustained a thriving fishing industry and, in addition to navigation, they formed natural overland communication and transportation routes, cutting through the dense forests, in the absence of road construction.<sup>19</sup>

Wallachia was organized into administrative units called *sudstvo* in Mircea's time,<sup>20</sup> but later known as *județe*. A royal official known as a *sudeț* administered each of these districts or counties. Most of them represented tribes or former voivodates<sup>21</sup> united when Thocomer and Basarab established the principality. Around 1581, a Genoese traveller, Franco Sivari, noted that "Wallachia is divided into sixteen large counties."<sup>22</sup> In Mircea's time, there were no fewer than seventeen districts, because the Ottomans had annexed Brăila in 1544 and transformed it into a Turkish *raya*, but there may have existed several more as over time the trend was toward consolidation. Most of their names are derived from geographical features, especially the river valleys around which they were centered. Although we lack precise information, the *sudstvo* possibly in existence during Mircea's time included Jaleș, Vâlcea, Upper Jiul, Motru, Balta, Prahova, Ilfov, Brăila, Padureț, Gilort, Saac (also called Săcueni), Muscel,

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<sup>19</sup>Panaiteescu, *Interpretări românești*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>20</sup>Doc. 89 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 154-156.

<sup>21</sup>Panaiteescu, *Interpretări românești*, p. 98.

<sup>22</sup>Holban, ed., *Călători străini*, vol. III, p. 14.

Buzău, Vlaşca, Romanţi, Lower Jiul, Ialomiţa, Teleorman, Argeş, Râmnic, Olt, and Dâmboviţa.

In addition to ruling over Wallachia proper, Mircea also held the title of *hertzog* or duke of Amlaş and Făgăraş in southern Transylvania. The Hungarian Crown had granted these duchies, with predominantly Wallachian populations, to the princes of the Transalpine land as perpetual estates. The larger of the two, Făgăraş, also known as the Olt land, became a possession of Wallachian princes during the reign of Mircea's uncle, Vladislav I, who acquired the duchy, located between the Saxon cities of Sibiu and Braşov, from King Louis the Great of Hungary. Vladislav first used the title "Duke of Făgăraş" in a decree dated November 25, 1369.<sup>23</sup> In a subsequent document, dated July 16, 1372, he calls the duchy his "new estate."<sup>24</sup> Amlaş, located west of Sibiu, became a domain of the princes of the Transalpine land during the reign of Mircea's brother, Dan I, who obtained it during the civil war that plagued Hungary following the death of Louis the Great. The duchies formed an integral part of the principality; the same laws and customs applied there as did south of the Carpathians.

It is difficult to determine the population of Wallachia during Mircea's reign. In a society based on oral tradition, written records were sparse. No censuses were taken and they did not register births and deaths or baptisms and marriages. Population estimates have ranged from as few as 266,000 to as many as 750,000.<sup>25</sup> A journal entry by Cicco Simonetta, Chancellor to the duke of Milan,

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<sup>23</sup>Doc. 3 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 12-13.

<sup>24</sup>Doc. 5 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 14-17.

<sup>25</sup>Louis Roman, "Populaţia Țării Româneşti în secolele XIV-XV," in *RdI*, 39:7 (1986), pp. 669, 678.

dated May 10, 1476, helps to shed some light on this problem. Simonetta noted the visit to the Milanese court of the Italian doctor Francesco Fontana, an emissary of King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary. As part of his mission, Fontana presented a list of revenues for the kingdom of Hungary, prepared by the Royal Chancellery in December 1475, which, fortuitously, Simonetta transcribed in his journal. Among other things, it reveals that, “From Wallachia, when the king is crowned, he receives a horse from each household; a horse from the nobles must have a value of 25 ducats, while one from ordinary people 15 ducats. And when the king takes a wife, each household gives him an oxen; and there are 40,000 households. In the time of King Ladislas, he received 60,000 oxen. Of this, he no longer takes anything, but they are all obligated to participate in the defense of the country.”<sup>26</sup> This journal entry provides us with the oldest known statistical source for the population of Wallachia.

The decline in the number of households in the principality, from 60,000 during the reign of Vladislav I or Ladislas Posthumous, that is to say during the time of Mircea’s son Vlad Dracul, to 40,000 in 1475, is due both to wars with the Turks, especially Mehmed II’s campaign against Vlad the Impaler in the summer of 1462, and the loss of the two Transylvanian duchies, which Matthias Corvinus had removed from under the control of the princes of the Transalpine land, even though they continued to bear the title, “Duke of Amlaș and Făgăraș.” But despite this precious indication, the average size of a household in fifteenth century Wallachia is unknown, making it difficult to provide an accurate estimate of the population in Mircea’s time. We know

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<sup>26</sup>See Annex in Șerban Papacostea, “Populație și fiscalitate în Țara Românească în secolul al XV-lea,” in *RdI*, 33:9 (1980), pp. 1785-1786.



that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the size of an average household was 4.5 persons. Fiscal policies, such as that described in the document recorded by Cicco Simonetta, which levied taxes per hearth or household, made extended families larger and more commonplace in the Middle Ages; as a result, the size of an average household in the fifteenth century may have been double, giving a total population of around 540,000 during Mircea's reign. Other evidence supports this assessment of Wallachia's population during the first half of the fifteenth century. As a general rule, barely one per cent of the population formed a country's military forces.<sup>27</sup> From the account of the Burgundian crusader Walerand de Wavrin, who visited Wallachia in 1445 during the reign of Mircea's son Vlad Dracul, we know that approximately six thousand men comprised the entire Wallachian army.<sup>28</sup> Thus, five to six hundred thousand is a reasonable estimate of the population of Wallachia during the time of Mircea the Old.

The vast majority of this population lived in rural communities, called *selo* (pl. *sela*). The fifteenth century Byzantine chronicler Laonic Chalkokondyles noted that "they live

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<sup>27</sup>Hale, *The Civilization of Europe in the Renaissance*, p. 129. P.P. Panaitescu calculated the population of Wallachia during the time of Vlad the Impaler as 400,000 to 500,000. To obtain this figure, he used exaggerated contemporary estimates of the size of Vlad's army, placing it at up to 40,000 men, and he considered that ten percent of the population comprised the military, see Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, pp. 60-61. Although his resulting estimate of the size of the population during the first half of the fifteenth century is reasonably accurate, the means he used to calculate it are erroneous.

<sup>28</sup>Iorga, "Cronica lui Wavrin," p. 126.

in villages and are inclined to a pastoral life.”<sup>29</sup> Likewise, Archbishop John of Sultanieh, who visited Wallachia during the reign of Mircea as an emissary of Tamerlane, observed that “They do not have large cities, but many villages and animals.”<sup>30</sup> Research has identified approximately 2,100 villages in Wallachia up to the beginning of the seventeenth century,<sup>31</sup> but, as the documentary evidence has lacunae, their actual number was probably somewhat higher; of these, 2,045 are still in existence. Most of these settlements formed along river valleys. Population density was highest west of the Olt River, the area known as Oltenia.<sup>32</sup> The size of villages in Wallachia varied. Five to ten households formed smaller villages, while larger ones had upwards of fifty; approximately twenty households comprised an average village during this period.

A small, but important segment of the population lived in urban centers. Franco Sivari noted the existence of “twenty-one large market towns” when he visited the principality at the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>33</sup> Slightly fewer cities existed during Mircea’s time. Urban centers began to develop in Wallachia during the thirteenth century, when, as a consequence of the

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<sup>29</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 63 (II, 77).

<sup>30</sup>Holban, ed., *Călători străini*, vol. I, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup>Lia Lehr, “Factori determinanți în evoluția demografică a Țării Românești,” in *SMIM*, VII, p. 163. Ion Donat, “Așezările omenești din Țara Românească în secolele XV-XVI,” in *Studii*, IX:6 (1956), p. 77, identifies 3,220 villages and cities from extant documents from the period 1325-1625, but his figure includes numerous toponyms subsequently eliminated by Lehr.

<sup>32</sup>Dinu C. Giurescu, *Țara Românească în secolele XIV și XV*, Bucharest, 1973, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup>Holban, ed., *Călători străini*, vol. III, p. 14.

Crusades which reopened contacts between East and West, trade with the Orient began to flourish. Unlike villages, cities were royal estates, each with its own charter granted by the prince. Most cities developed as markets along trade routes, and the revenues generated by transit taxes and duties on commercial transactions represented the most important source of monetary income for the royal treasury.<sup>34</sup> Many market towns arose in areas bordering on the hills and the plains, as places where the different products produced in each of these economic regions could be exchanged; the variety of goods available for trade allowed them to prosper. Cities that developed in areas that lacked this economic diversity usually formed along important trade routes.<sup>35</sup> Most towns grew up around clusters of villages and, despite their primitive fortifications, they became places of refuge as well as commerce for the surrounding rural population. Within these market centers, various crafts and trades also began to develop as the urban population increased. In Wallachia, however, a significant portion of city dwellers continued to engage in agricultural production, cultivating nearby fields, and when they required highly-skilled craftsmen the Wallachian elite frequently appealed to the Saxon cities of Transylvania.

Foreign immigrants played a key role in the development of the earliest cities in Wallachia, especially Saxons and Hungarians coming from Transylvania. Their organization and institutions reflect these influences. The word for city, *orash*, is derived from the Hungarian term, *varush*. The Slavic term for town or market, *târg*, was also frequently employed to designate an urban center.

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<sup>34</sup>Panaitescu, *Interpretări românești*, p. 207.

<sup>35</sup>G.M. Petrescu-Sava, *Târguri și orașe între Buzău, Târgoviște și Bucharest*, Bucharest, 1937, pp. 87-89.

Towns were organized along the model of German cities, with citizens annually electing a mayor, called a *sudeț*, and an assembly of twelve councilmen, called *pârgari* from the German word for citizen, *burgher*, via the Hungarian *polgar*, who governed the city. We know that in Câmpulung these elections took place on the third day of Easter in the town square in front of the church.<sup>36</sup> In addition to these elected officials, the prince appointed a royal official, called a *pârcălab*, responsible for overseeing the city administration. In cities with royal courts, the prince also appointed a *vornic*.<sup>37</sup> Unlike the Saxon cities of Transylvania, stone walls did not protect any of the cities in Wallachia; trenches and wooden palisades served to defend the urban centers south of the Carpathians.

Located along the route crossing the Carpathians from Brașov, via Bran and Rucăr, *Câmpulung*, also called *Longo Campo*, was Wallachia's first capital and its oldest city. Saxon settlers coming south from Transylvania founded the city at the beginning of the thirteenth century when the Teutonic Knights took possession of the Bârsa land and began to extend their control across the mountains into what was then known as Cumania. They built a wooden fort here in 1211, which they replaced with a stone citadel in 1217. Câmpulung continued to grow even after King Andrew II of Hungary expelled the Teutonic Knights from the region in 1225. It is first attested to by the gravestone of one of the town's officials, Count Lawrence, buried there in 1300, around the

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<sup>36</sup>Constantin C. Giurescu, *Târguri sau orașe și cetăți moldovene*, Bucharest, 1967, p. 125.

<sup>37</sup>V. Costăchel, P.P. Panaitescu, and A. Cazacu, *Viața feudală în Țara Românească și Moldova*, Bucharest, 1957, pp. 426-427.

time the principality came into being. Even though the capital moved to Argeş during the reign of Basarab I, Câmpulung remained a royal residence, and Basarab's wife, Princess Margaret, helped to found a Catholic monastery here. The town was organized along the lines of Saxon cities in Transylvania.<sup>38</sup> The oldest known charter for a Wallachian city is one granted to Câmpulung by Mircea the Old or his son Michael, mentioned in later diplomas.<sup>39</sup> It enjoyed the greatest autonomy of all the cities in the Transalpine land.

With the development of the principality, *Argeş* (today Curtea de Argeş) flourished, and Basarab made it his capital, beginning construction here of a princely church and a royal court, which his son and successor, Nicholas Alexander, would complete. The new capital became a military target in 1330 when King Charles Robert led his army against Basarab in an ill-fated attempt to restore Hungarian suzerainty over the Transalpine land. Although Argeş continued to be the capital city during Mircea's reign, by the beginning of the fifteenth century, Târgovişte began to rival Argeş in importance. In his account of his travels through the area, Johann Schiltberger, a German squire who fell prisoner to the

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<sup>38</sup>Ştefan Olteanu, "Cercetări cu privire la geneza oraşelor medievale din Ţara Românească," in *Studii*, XVI:4 (1963), pp. 1276-1277; and "Câmpulung" in Predescu, ed., *Enciclopedia cugetară*, p. 160.

<sup>39</sup>Virgil Drăghiceanu, "Curtea Domnească din Argeş," in *BCMI*, X-XVI (1917-1923), p. 23. Diplomas issued by Prince Radu Mihnea in 1615 and Prince Leon in 1633 mention a privilege granted to Câmpulung by Michael in 1392, but, either it was issued later, during Michael's reign, or if the date is correct, it was granted by Mircea the Old. By the seventeenth century, when these diplomas were drafted, there was a great deal of confusion over the chronology of medieval princes.



Princely Church at Curtea de Arges

Turks at the battle of Nicopolis in 1396, wrote: “I was also in Wallachia, in its two capitals, which are called Argeș and Târgoviște.”<sup>40</sup> Although the capital moved to Târgoviște after Mircea’s reign, Argeș remained the seat of the Orthodox Metropolitanate in Wallachia throughout the fifteenth century.

Founded by Saxon settlers in the fourteenth century, *Târgoviște* developed from a village to a market town to become the capital of Wallachia in the first half of the fifteenth century. Situated between a hill region and a plain along the Ialomița River, where inhabitants from these areas met to exchange goods. It is first mentioned as a customs point in Mircea the Old’s undated decree, circa 1403, granting trade privileges to merchants from Poland and Lithuania,<sup>41</sup> and again in a similar decree for merchants from Brașov on August 6, 1413.<sup>42</sup> Located along a major trade route linking Transylvania and the Danube, its name in Slavonic literally means market town – the city prospered and became a royal residence during Mircea’s reign. Owing to its Saxon origins, Târgoviște was also the most important center of Catholicism in the principality. The city’s crest depicted the Virgin Mary in prayer, probably denoting the significance of St. Mary’s Catholic church, built there in the fourteenth century.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the Monastery of St. Francis was the headquarters of the Friars Minor in Wallachia, whose Order enjoyed the patronage of Mircea’s wife Mara. An Italian visitor to Wallachia during the first

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<sup>40</sup>Holban, ed., *Călători străini*, vol. I, p. 30.

<sup>41</sup>Doc. 1 in Hajdeu, *Archiva istorica*, vol. I, part. 1, pp. 3-4.

<sup>42</sup>Doc. 120 in *DRH, D*, pp. 197-198.

<sup>43</sup>Emil Vîrtosu, “Din sigilografia Moldovei și a Țării Românești,” in *DIR, Introducere*, vol. II, pp. 493-494.



half of the sixteenth century, Francesco della Valle, describes Târgoviște as “a not very large city located on a plain and surrounded by thick oak trees.”<sup>44</sup> It owed its rise to prominence to its favorable geographic location, with forests, rivers, streams, and swamps protecting it from attack. The Ragusan writer Felix Petancic (c. 1445-c. 1520), in a treatise describing invasion routes used by the Turks, prepared for Hungarian King Vladislav II, describes Târgoviște as “the capital of Wallachia, the principal residence of the princes, made inaccessible not by walls or girded by fortifications, but by ditches, fences, and barricades, strengthened on the outside only by sharp stakes, and it is located between swamps which surround it, along with dense forests and ponds, so that almost the entire surrounding region is impassable.”<sup>45</sup>

The royal court at Târgoviște was erected on a high terrace along the right bank of the Ialomița River, on the eastern edge of the town’s market. It first became a royal residence during the time of Mircea the Old, when his eldest son, Michael, made it his seat when he began to share power with his father during the final years of his reign, referring to it in a diploma for the monasteries of Cozia and Codmeana as “My Majesty’s city, Târgoviște.”<sup>46</sup> Near the residence was the royal chapel, also constructed during the time of Mircea.

The principality’s most important economic center during Mircea’s time was *Brăila*, the port city located along the Danube

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<sup>44</sup>Holban, ed., *Călători străini*, vol. I, p. 322.

<sup>45</sup>Holban, ed., *Călători străini*, vol. I, p. 444.

<sup>46</sup>Doc. 39 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 82-84.



River on Wallachia's eastern frontier. It was a key point linking trade routes between East and West. Chalkokondyles calls it "the city of the Dacians in which they do more commerce than in all the other cities of the country combined."<sup>47</sup> It developed from a small fishing village in the fourth century A.D., to a growing market town by the end of the twelfth or beginning of the thirteenth century.<sup>48</sup> It is first mentioned in a Spanish geography from 1350 as *Drinago*. Mircea's uncle, Vladislav I, granted privileges to merchants from Braşov and the Bârsa land to transport their goods along the route to *Braylan* "on their way to foreign lands."<sup>49</sup> Schiltberger recalls visiting "a city that is called Brăila, which is located on the Danube, and which is a port for boats and ships with which merchants bring goods from the land of the infidels."<sup>50</sup> Some indication of the scale of commerce passing through Wallachia's principal port is found in an Ottoman report from April 15, 1520, which records that "ships from the Black Sea, coming from Trebizond, Caffa, Sinope, Samsun, Istanbul, and other regions of the Ottoman Empire, go up the Danube to Brăila... Sometimes seventy to eighty ships arrive at Brăila from the Black Sea loaded with goods. These are sold, and grains are loaded in their place and they start back."<sup>51</sup>

Brăila prospered not only from foreign trade, but also because of its flourishing fishing industry. Merchants from Transylvania came here to purchase fish, as demonstrated by decree from 1437

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<sup>47</sup> Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 285 (IX, 505).

<sup>48</sup> Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoricul oraşului Brăila*, Bucharest, 1966, pp. 35-35.

<sup>49</sup> Doc. 46 in *DRH, D*, pp. 86-88.

<sup>50</sup> Holban, ed., *Călători străini*, vol. I, p. 30.

<sup>51</sup> Quo. Giurescu, *Istoricul oraşului Brăila*, pp. 48-49.

issued by Mircea's son Vlad granting trade privileges to merchants from Braşov and the Bârsa land.<sup>52</sup> Stephen the Great's privilege for traders from Lemberg, dated July 3, 1460, shows that Polish merchants regularly crossed Moldavia to purchase fish in Brăila and Kilia.<sup>53</sup>

Several other cities existed in Wallachia at the beginning of Mircea's reign. *Slatina*, a market town on the Olt River, is first mentioned as a customs point for merchants from Transylvania en route to Bulgaria in Vladislav I's decree of January 20, 1368.<sup>54</sup> *Piteşti*, on the Argeş River, a day's journey down river from the former capital, first appears in Mircea the Old's initial endowment for the Monastery of Cozia on May 20, 1388. This same document also mentions *Râmnicu Vâlcea*,<sup>55</sup> simply called Râmnicu, from the Slavonic word *rabnic* or *rabna*, meaning lake or pond, a city founded by Saxon and Hungarian settlers on the upper Olt River. Five kilometers southwest of Râmnicu Vâlcea was *Ocnele Mari*, a small market town that prospered because of the nearby salt mines from which it derived its name; it first appears in an undated decree from later in Mircea's reign.<sup>56</sup> *Târgşor*, also called *Novo Foro* or *New Market*, near present-day Ploieşti, is first mentioned as a customs point in Mircea's privilege for merchants from Braşov dated August 6, 1413.<sup>57</sup> *Calafat*, first appears in a diploma

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<sup>52</sup>Doc. 243 and Addenda A in *DRH, D*, pp. 340-341 and 463-464.

<sup>53</sup>Doc. 21 in B. Petriceicu-Hajdeu, ed., *Archiva istorică a României*, vol. II, Bucharest, 1865, pp. 171-176.

<sup>54</sup>Doc. 46 in *DRH, D*, pp. 86-88.

<sup>55</sup>Doc. 9 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 25-28.

<sup>56</sup>Doc. 27 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 62-63.

<sup>57</sup>Doc. 120 in *DRH, D*, pp. 197-198.

issued by Dan II for the Monastery of Tismana on August 5, 1424, in which he mentions that his father, Dan I, granted customs revenues from this small market town located across the Danube from Vidin to the Monastery.<sup>58</sup> *Târgu Jiu*, located on the river of the same name, existed during Mircea's time, when its *sudeț* or mayor is mentioned in a royal decree,<sup>59</sup> but the city first appears in a diploma that confirms mills built by monks from Tismana in that city to the cloister originally established by Nicodim, issued by Dan II on March 20, 1429, or April 9, 1430.<sup>60</sup> A circular sent by this same prince to customs officials throughout Wallachia at the beginning of 1431, to inform them of the privileges he recently granted to merchants from Brașov, lists additional cities:<sup>61</sup> *Buzău*, located along the river of the same name in the eastern half of the principality; *Floci*, a city near the point where the Ialomița River empties into the Danube, in the vicinity of the present-day village of Piuia Petrii, no longer exists, but in the fifteenth century it had an important fishing industry and was a prosperous commercial center, especially for the wool trade from which its name, *Floci*, derived; and *Gherghița*, along the Prahova River, the site of a royal retreat where the princes of Wallachia went to hunt and to fish in the nearby forests and ponds.<sup>62</sup> All of these towns and cities

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<sup>58</sup>Doc. 53 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 104-107.

<sup>59</sup>Doc. 32 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 70-71.

<sup>60</sup>Doc. 64 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 124-125. This diploma is dated from Argeș on Palm Sunday which falls on the dates specified in 1429 and 1430. These years are established by comparing the list of members of the prince's royal council with other documents from Dan II's reign.

<sup>61</sup>Doc. 69 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 130-131.

<sup>62</sup>Petrescu-Sava, *Târguri și orașe*, p. 17.

existed long before we find them first mentioned in extant documents.

Mircea conquered the strategic fortress and port city of Kilia, near the mouth of the Danube, from the Genoese in 1403-1404. Another important city on the Danube was *Giurgiu*, first mentioned in a document from 1403 in which Mircea the Old renews his alliance with King Vladislav I of Poland,<sup>63</sup> and again in a diploma dated May 11, 1409,<sup>64</sup> as a *grad*, a term used in Slavonic documents of the time with the sole meaning of fortress,<sup>65</sup> but when Mircea renewed his treaty with Vladislav I on May 17, 1411, he calls Giurgiu, “our city.”<sup>66</sup> Its location at one of the principal crossing points along the Danube led to its development as a market town and a customs point.

Although they are only first attested to in documents subsequent to his reign, other towns also existed during Mircea’s time. The most important of these were *Bucharest* and *Craiova*, both of which became important urban centers by the end of the fifteenth century. Bucharest, located along the Dâmbovița River, now the capital city of Romania, is first mentioned as a fortress in a diploma issued by Mircea’s grandson, Vlad the Impaler, on September 20, 1459.<sup>67</sup> It then became the preferred residence of Radu, another grandson, who succeeded Vlad in 1462, but it did not officially become the capital of Wallachia until 1659.

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<sup>63</sup>Doc. DCLII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. II, part. 1, pp. 824-825.

<sup>64</sup>Doc. 35 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 75-77.

<sup>65</sup>N.A. Constantinescu, “Cetatea Giurgiu: originile și trecutul ei,” in *AARMSI*, series II, vol. XXXVIII (1915-1916), p. 496.

<sup>66</sup>Doc. 115 in *DRH, D*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>67</sup>Doc. 118 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 203-204.

Tradition dates the origins of Craiova, or “the King’s City,” to the thirteenth century; some attribute its founding to the Bulgarian Tsar John Asen, while others consider that it was the residence of Cuman rulers.<sup>68</sup> It is first mentioned in a diploma issued by Prince Basarab the Old on June 1, 1475, which lists a boyar called Jupan Neagoe from Craiova as a member of the royal council.<sup>69</sup> On January 31, 1496, Mircea’s great grandson, Radu the Great, issued the first diploma known to have been written at Craiova.<sup>70</sup> Another small market town was *Tismana*. It had a *ban* responsible for governing the region, first mentioned in a diploma granted by Mircea’s grandson Radu for the nearby monastery on July 10, 1464;<sup>71</sup> the town prospered during the fifteenth century thanks to the important copper mines in the surrounding area, especially the one opened by Chiop Hanosh at Bratilova at the end of the fourteenth century. Mircea had granted royal revenues from this mine to the Monastery of Tismana,<sup>72</sup> a gift renewed by his son Vlad in his diploma for this cloister dated August 2, 1439.<sup>73</sup>

Wallachia, officially known as Ungrovalachia or the Transalpine land, was a prosperous country during Mircea’s reign, with a population of well over half a million people. It was divided into numerous administrative districts and had as many as twenty cities and market towns. It was a land of geographic diversity, with mountains and plains, numerous rivers, lakes, and forests, and an

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<sup>68</sup>“Craiova” in Predescu, ed., *Enciclopedia cugetară*, p. 231.

<sup>69</sup>Doc. 148 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 243-246.

<sup>70</sup>Doc. 264 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 427-428.

<sup>71</sup>Doc. 124 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 209-213.

<sup>72</sup>Doc. 14 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 33-36.

<sup>73</sup>Doc. 89 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 154-156.

abundance of natural resources. Its favorable position along international trade routes had generated abundant wealth that had led to the creation of the principality between the Danube and the Carpathians, but its unfortunate location on the crossroads between East and West, on the frontier between Christianity and Islam, made it a battleground over which the neighboring superpowers sought to exert their control.

When Wallachia was first established in the early fourteenth century essentially Byzantine institutions were adopted, borrowed from the older south Slav states, that met the specific needs of the new country.<sup>74</sup> The prince enjoyed autocratic powers and ruled the country with the assistance of a royal council known as the *sfatul domnesc*, made up of leading boyars who served at the pleasure of the prince. Under Mircea's rule the institutions of the state fully developed, although they would be gradually altered throughout the fifteenth century in response to the changing needs of the Romanian principality.<sup>75</sup> Among the members of this royal council were the most powerful and influential nobles, called *boyars*, supporters of the prince, and a number of officials, known as *dregători*, also drawn from the ranks of the boyars. The most important members of the *sfatul domnesc* were the great boyars who served on the council solely in their quality as great landowners, usually followed by lesser boyars who were also

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<sup>74</sup>Stoicescu, *Sfatul domnesc și marii dregători din Țara Românească și Moldova*, p. 45.

<sup>75</sup>For a detailed study of social, cultural, economic, and political life in Wallachia during this time, see Dinu C. Giurescu, *Țara Românească în secolele XIV-XV* (Bucharest, 1973).

court officials.<sup>76</sup> Among the titles given to members of the royal council during this period we find the following:

◇ JUPAN – An old Slavic word meaning lord or master. A title given to great boyars, usually members of the royal council.<sup>77</sup>

◇ VORNIC – First mentioned during Mircea's reign in a document from 1389, the *vornic* was the most important official in the royal council. He served as a magistrate, having juridical functions which he could exercise throughout the country. At times, there would be two *vornici* on the royal council, the second being of a lesser rank.<sup>78</sup>

◇ LOGOFĂȚ – First appears in documents between 1390-1400, the *logofăt* was the head of the prince's chancellery, responsible for drawing up correspondence, documents, and deeds known as *hrisoave* (sg. *hrisov*).<sup>79</sup>

◇ SPĂȚAR – First mentioned in a document issued by Mircea's chancellery in 1415, the *spătar* was a military officer, usually commander of the cavalry. At times, two *spătari* would serve on the royal council.<sup>80</sup>

◇ STOLNIC – First mentioned in a document from 1392, during the reign of Mircea, the *stolnic* was responsible for

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<sup>76</sup>This can be determined because in a *hrisov* [deed], the members of the royal council, who are recorded as witnesses to the document, are listed in their order of importance.

<sup>77</sup>Idem, pp. 27-28.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., pp. 185-204.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., pp. 170-185.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 243-247.



[illegible]



providing the court with food. He would also taste the food before the prince would eat.<sup>81</sup>

◇ PAHARNIC – Also first mentioned in a document from 1392, the *paharnic* does not become a regular member of the royal council until after 1424. He was charged with providing drink at the court; he would also be responsible for the prince's wine cellars.<sup>82</sup>

◇ COMIS – First mentioned in a document from 1415 during the reign of Mircea, the *comis* was charged with the care of the prince's horses, and for transporting the tribute and other gifts to the sultan.<sup>83</sup>

◇ VISTIER – First mentioned in a document from 1392 during Mircea's reign, the *vistier* was the court treasurer, responsible for recording all monies received and spent by the chancellery. He would also be charged with providing furs and clothes, both for the prince's personal wardrobe and for gifts. He would keep a register of all villages in the country and the taxes owed, in addition to recording all gifts received by the prince.<sup>84</sup>

◇ STRATORNIC – First mentioned as a member of the royal council in a document from the reign of Mircea's son Vlad Dracul,

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., pp. 280-284.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., pp. 273-280.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., pp. 293-298. When he issued a deed, the prince would traditionally receive a horse from the beneficiary of the act. In addition, horses would often be given as gifts.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., pp. 217-227.

dated 18 July 1437, under the name *postelnic*. He was responsible overseeing and maintaining for the prince's living quarters.<sup>85</sup>

Although not members of the royal council during Mircea's reign, other court officials included:

◇ ARMAȘ – The *armaș* was responsible for carrying out punishments ordered by the prince and had some military functions. He also oversaw the prince's Gypsy slaves.<sup>86</sup>

◇ PÂRCĂLAB – First mentioned in Wallachia in 1368, the *pârcălab* was the royal governor of a castle or fortified city.<sup>87</sup>

◇ GRĂMĂTIC – A court servant, not necessarily a boyar, who worked under the *logofăt* and had the duty to write out all official documents and correspondence issued by the court. The name of the *grămătic* would usually appear in a separate phrase, following the list of the members of the royal council, where he would include the place where the *hrisov* was issued and the date on which it was promulgated.

Such was the political structure of Wallachian society during the rule of Mircea the Old. Among his great achievements was the consolidation and strengthening of the organization of the principality during his long and distinguished reign. No small feat and one that would help his land survive during the incessant strife of the fifteenth century




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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., pp. 263-271.

<sup>86</sup>Stoicescu, *Sfatul domnesc și marii dregători din Țara Românească și Moldova*, pp. 227-233.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., pp. 204-217.

## THE LAND OF THE BASARABS

*"It was the ground fought over for centuries by the Wallachian, the Saxon, and the Turk. Why, there is hardly a foot of soil in all this region that has not been enriched by the blood of men, patriots or invaders."*

— Bram Stoker, *Dracula*<sup>88</sup>

**T**he land over which Mircea the Old came to rule had a long and complex history. Since Antiquity it was a crossroads between East and West, Romans and barbarians, Orthodoxy and Catholicism, Christianity and Islam. Already in the fifth century B.C., Herodotus described this division between two distinct cultures by comparing the story of how the Greeks carried off the Asian princess Medea with that of Paris' abduction of Helen. According to the father of history, the Greeks were the aggressors in the legendary Trojan War: "Abducting young women, in their opinion, is not, indeed, a lawful act; but it is stupid after the event to make a fuss about it. The only sensible thing is to take no notice; for it is obvious that no young woman allows herself to be abducted if she does not

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<sup>88</sup> Stoker, *Dracula*, p. 20.

wish to be. The Asiatics, according to the Persians, took the seizure of the women lightly enough, but not so the Greeks: The Greeks, merely on account of a girl from Sparta, raised a big army, invaded Asia and destroyed the Empire of Priam. From that root sprang their belief in the perpetual enmity of the Grecian world towards them – Asia with its various foreign-speaking peoples belonging to the Persians, Europe and the Greek states being, in their opinion, quite separate and distinct from them.”<sup>89</sup> To understand the life and times of Mircea the Old requires some perspective on the tangled past of this region, for, as the seventeenth century Moldavian chronicler Miron Costin once wrote, “Any story must begin from the beginning.”<sup>90</sup>

In ancient times, the Balkans, including the land north of Danube that later became Wallachia, was called Thrace. Herodotus provides the earliest historical information we have of this area. “The population of Thrace,” he observed, “is greater than that of any country in the world except India. If the Thracians could be united under a single ruler in a homogenous whole, they would be the most powerful nation on earth, and no one could cope with them...”<sup>91</sup> But the Thracians were divided into numerous tribes often at war with each another. The Getae or Dacians, often called Geto-Dacians, were the Thracian people generally regarded as the remote ancestors of the Romanians who inhabited Wallachia. They fought the Persian invaders led by Darius I in 514 B.C. Later, in 339 B.C., Meda, a daughter of the Getic King

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<sup>89</sup>Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt, Baltimore, 1968, p. 14.

<sup>90</sup>*Cronice atîngătoare la istoria romînilor*, ed. Ioan Bogdan, Bucharest, 1895, p. 179.

<sup>91</sup>Herodotus, *The Histories*, pp. 311-312.

Cothelas, became the sixth wife of Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great.<sup>92</sup>

In the first century B.C., the Dacian King Burebista united most of the tribes north of the Danube and posed a serious enough threat to Roman interests in the area that Julius Caesar considered an expedition against him prior to his assassination on the ides of March in 44 B.C. But the danger to Rome ceased with the assassination of Burebista and later that same year it led to the break-up of his kingdom. Only in the second half of the first century A.D. did another Dacian ruler, Decebal, reestablish a kingdom once again powerful enough to challenge Roman authority. After Decebal humiliated the legions of Emperor Domitian in A.D. 89, another Roman Emperor, Trajan, decided to take decisive action against the Dacians. After two long campaigns, in 101-102 and again in 105-106, he destroyed Decebal's kingdom and Dacia became the final province added to the Roman Empire.

Roman rule in Dacia lasted less than two hundred years, but it proved a key factor in the formation of the Romanian population that came to inhabit Wallachia. The historian Eutropius tells how "Trajan, after conquering Dacia, brought here from all over the Roman Empire great numbers of people to plow the land and to inhabit the towns."<sup>93</sup> These settlers mixed with the native Thracian population, just as they had done earlier in the provinces south of the Danube. Over time Latin became the predominate language among these people of diverse races. Despite the flawed history,

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<sup>92</sup>Kurt W. Treptow, "Macedonia and the Geto-Scythian Conflict during the Final Thracian Campaign of Philip II, 342-339 B.C.," pp. 74-86 in *Macedonian Studies*, XI:1-2 (1994).

<sup>93</sup>Quo. *A History of Romania*, ed. Kurt W. Treptow, Iași, 1997, p. 36.

it is interesting to note how people in Mircea's time grasped their past. The Italian humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini, one of the most influential scholars of the fifteenth century, and the future Pope Pius II, recorded that the Getae "were defeated and subjugated by Roman forces. Then a colony of Romans was brought there to keep the Dacians under control led by one named Flaccus for whom Flacchia was named. After a long time the name changed, as is bound to happen, and it was called Valachia, and instead of Flacci the inhabitants were called Vlachs. This people even now has a Roman tongue, although greatly changed and barely understandable to someone from Italy."<sup>94</sup>

Although the Emperor Aurelian abandoned the province of Dacia between 271 and 275, Roman influence north of the Danube persisted. Bridgeheads on the left bank of the Danube, with a corresponding buffer zone of some 20 to 30 kilometers to defend against barbarian invaders, remained in Roman hands for a long time after.<sup>95</sup> The Emperor Constantine the Great enhanced these fortifications and reestablished Roman control over much of Wallachia in 328.<sup>96</sup> Cities and military outposts along the Danube also served as important points of commercial and cultural exchange. Consequently, Roman influence north of the Danube continued through the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian (527-565). Thus, for nearly half a millennium Roman culture made its mark upon Wallachia and the mixing of populations gave

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<sup>94</sup>Holban, *Călători străini*, vol. I, p. 472.

<sup>95</sup>D. Tudor, "Stăpânirea romană în sudul Daciei, de la Aurelian la Constantin cel Mare," in *RIR*, X (1940), pp. 223-224.

<sup>96</sup>D. Tudor, "Constantin cel Mare și recucerirea Daciei Traiană," in *RIR*, XI-XII (1941-1942), pp. 140-141, 144.

birth to a new people speaking a Latin tongue. “Romanian is a word derived over time from Roman,” wrote Miron Costin in 1684, “and today, if you want to ask someone if they know Moldavian, you say to them: ‘do you know Romanian?’... They have never used another name among themselves. Foreigners have named them in different ways.”<sup>97</sup>

Still, in the mid-sixth century it is too early to speak of the existence of a Romanian people. Both during the period of Roman influence in Dacia and after various barbarian peoples overran the area, each contributing to a greater or lesser degree to the formation of this people. The most significant newcomers to the region were the Slavic tribes who came from the steppe and infiltrated the lands on both sides of the Danube during the fifth and sixth centuries. The Slavic element played a key role in the ethnogenesis of the Romanians; as the historian Ioan Bogdan categorically stated, before the Slavic invasions there can be no mention of a Romanian people.<sup>98</sup> Although the Slavs arrived in significant numbers, they did not absorb the Latinized population inhabiting Wallachia. The native people took refuge in the dense forests which covered much of the land at that time.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, Slavic influence was undeniable as they settled and imposed their rule throughout the region. The mingling of the Slavs with the Latinized population resulted in the evolution of the Romanian people who, in the time of Vlad Dracul, were called Vlachs or Wallachians.

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<sup>97</sup>Bogdan, ed., *Cronice atingătoare*, p. 187.

<sup>98</sup>Constantin Giurescu, “O nouă sinteză a trecutului nostru,” in *RIR*, I (1931), p. 349.

<sup>99</sup>S. Mehedinți, “Coordonate etnografice. Civilizația și cultură,” in *ARMSI*, series III, XI (1931), p. 144.

In the seventh century, the Bulgars, a nomadic Turkic people from the east, swept south across the Danube and imposed their rule over the Slavs living there. They defeated the Byzantines and forced Emperor Constantine IV to recognize the Bulgarian state in 681. The Bulgars cooperated with the native Slavic aristocracy and over time the much larger Slavic population assimilated them, forming the people known as the Bulgarians. Under Khan Krum (802-814) Bulgarian rule extended north of the Danube and strengthened Slavic influence in that area, installing a Slavic ruling class in former Dacia.

Up to the ninth century, Latin served as the language of the Church in Wallachia. Christianity had slowly spread to Dacia beginning in the second and third centuries A.D. It gained a firm hold in the region after Constantine the Great declared it an official religion of the Roman Empire and a bishopric was established at Tomis on the Black Sea coast. Linguistic evidence supports this thesis. The basic religious vocabulary in Romanian is of Latin origin: church – *biserică* (Latin *basilica*), cross – *cruce* (Latin *crux-cis*), priest – *preot* (Latin *presbiterum*), God – *Dumnezeu* (Latin *dom(i)ne deus*), Easter – *Paști* (Latin *pascha, -ae*), Christmas – *Crăciun* (Latin *creatio, -onis*), and angel – *înger* (Latin *angelus*), to give just a few examples. But the lack of a solid state structure north of the Danube left the Church loosely organized.

This began to change in 864 when the Bulgarian King Boris converted to Christianity and adopted the name Michael. Although Rome and Constantinople struggled for supremacy over the Bulgarian Church for the next half century, the Greek Church eventually gained the upper hand. Toward the end of Boris's reign, disciples of the Byzantine scholars Cyril and Methodius came to Bulgaria from Moravia; among them was Kliment of Ohrid (840-



916) who played a key role in spreading Christianity throughout the Balkans. These missionaries introduced the Cyrillic alphabet and in 888 the Bulgarian Church officially adopted the Slavic rite. As the Bulgarian Empire at this time included the territory of former Dacia, the Church north of the Danube also began to use the Slavic liturgy and continued to do so until the seventeenth century.<sup>100</sup> Under Boris's son Simeon (893-927), the first Bulgarian ruler to adopt the title of Tsar, the Empire reached its peak and Slavic language and culture became entrenched in former Dacia.

This period of Bulgarian rule was of vital importance for the formation of the future principality of Wallachia. "All of the seeds of state and church life from which, beginning in the thirteenth century, arose our political institutions in the Middle Ages," observed the Romanian historian Ioan Bogdan at the end of the nineteenth century, "have their origins in the period of Bulgarian influence: political and social organization in cnezates and voivodates, church hierarchy, the development of a nobility, or boyars, the Bulgarian language in the royal chancellery, in the church, in secular literature, and in private correspondence."<sup>101</sup>

In 1018, the Byzantine Emperor Basil II destroyed the First Bulgarian Empire, earning the epithet 'the Bulgar slayer.' For almost two centuries, Byzantine rule again extended to the Danube. Remnants of the Bulgarian Empire north of the Danube broke up into autonomous fiefdoms called cnezates and

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<sup>100</sup>Dimitrie Onciul, *Originile principatelor române*, Bucharest, 1899, pp. 136-140; and Alexandru Stefulescu, *Mănăstirea Tismana*, Bucharest, 1903, pp. 10-11.

<sup>101</sup>Ioan Bogdan, *Romînia și Bulgarii*, Bucharest, 1895, p. 22.

voivodates. But the fall of Bulgaria did nothing to diminish Slavic cultural influence in the area; Basil II promptly issued a decree recognizing the autonomy of the Bulgarian Church, headed by an Archbishop with his seat at Ohrid, the last capital of the Empire. The Church north of the Danube was under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Vidin, subject to Ohrid.<sup>102</sup> Despite attempts at rebellion, such as that led by Delean and Alusian, descendants of the last Tsars, in 1040, the Bulgarians did not succeed in restoring their Empire until the end of the twelfth century.

The power vacuum created by the collapse of the First Bulgarian Empire made it possible for other peoples to extend their influence over the territory of former Dacia. The first of these were the Hungarians, or Magyars, a Finno-Ugric people, who came to Europe from the Ural steppes and settled in the Pannonian plain at the end of the ninth century. Having converted to Catholicism under King Stephen I in the year 1000, they expanded their rule eastward over the territory that became known as Transylvania or “the land beyond the forest.” They encountered resistance from several Bulgarian-Wallachian voivodates and cnezates, but by the end of the twelfth century Hungarian rule had reached the Carpathians. To consolidate their authority in Transylvania and to defend the borders of the kingdom in the east and southeast, the Hungarian kings brought settlers into the province and granted them special privileges. The first to arrive were the Szecklers, a Turkic people related to the Hungarians. They settled in the area along the eastern Carpathians and had an autonomous local administration overseen by a count appointed directly by the king.

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<sup>102</sup>Onciul, *Originile principatelor române*, pp. 141, 143.

Perhaps the most important immigrants to reach Transylvania in the late twelfth century were the Germans, generally referred to as Saxons, although they came from throughout the German lands and not exclusively from Saxony. Each group of Saxon settlers was led by a *gräve* and the villages and towns they founded were often named after their leader, as in the case of the principal Saxon center, Sibiu, called Hermannstadt. The Saxons established fortified cities and brought urban life to Transylvania, developing trades and commerce. The Saxon territories had an autonomous administration, directly dependent on the king. This status is reflected in the German name for Braşov, Kronstadt, literally ‘the King’s City.’ Saxon privileges were secured in a general charter granted to them by King Andrew II in 1224. One of its provisions ensured the freedom of the people to elect their own magistrates, abolishing the hereditary rights claimed by many of the *gräves*.<sup>103</sup> The most important German cities near the border with the future principality of Wallachia were Braşov and Sibiu.

The eleventh and twelfth centuries witnessed the arrival of new migratory peoples from the east who left their mark on the region. These peoples moved in relatively small bands numbering upwards of 15,000 fighting men; with their women, children, and slaves accompanying them, the total reached 70,000.<sup>104</sup> Although the Byzantines regained control over the Balkans in the eleventh century with the fall of Bulgaria, on the other side of the Empire the Seljuk Turks crossed the Taurus Mountains in Anatolia and defeated a Byzantine army at Manzikert in 1071. This marked a

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<sup>103</sup> *History of Transylvania*, ed. Béla Köpeczi, Budapest, 1994, pp. 178-181.

<sup>104</sup> R. Rosetti, “Care au fost adevăratele efective ale unor armate din trecut,” in *AARMSI*, series III, XXV (1942-1943), p. 729.

watershed in the history of Asia Minor that had serious repercussions for southeastern Europe later on. From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries Turkish tribes continued to move into the area and replaced Greek with Islamic culture.<sup>105</sup> Another Turkic people, the Pechenegs, came to the Carpatho-Danubian region from the Ural steppes at the beginning of the eleventh century; in 1048, the warlord Kegen led 20,000 Pechenegs across the Danube at Silistria to enter the service of the Byzantine Emperor.<sup>106</sup> During the latter half of this century a related Turkic people called the Cumans also arrived. They defeated and assimilated the Pechenegs and over the next two hundred years played a major role throughout this entire region of Europe.

The Cumans occupied a vast area on both sides of the Danube. Unlike most Turkic peoples, they converted to Christianity in large numbers soon after their arrival, allowing them to mingle more easily with the existing population in the region. They settled in significant numbers between the Carpathians and the Danube so that the territory of the future principality of Wallachia east of the Olt River was called Cumania during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Before their arrival in the Danube basin they had come into close contact with the Russians and absorbed Slavic cultural influences. They cooperated and mixed with the local nobility in southeastern Europe. In Bulgaria, the Cumans helped to reestablish the Empire and provided the names for two of its dynasties, the Asens and the Tertsers. They also played an important role in Hungary, providing first a queen and then a king

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<sup>105</sup>L.S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*, New York, 1958, p. 34.

<sup>106</sup>N. Bănescu, "Cele mai vechi știri bizantine asupra românilor dela Dunărea-de-Jos," in *AIIN*, Cluj, I (1921-1922), p. 143.

during the second half of the thirteenth century and their language became written in the *Codex Cumanicus* printed by Geza Kún.<sup>107</sup> Descendants of the Cumans, called the Gagauz, are found today in the Republic of Moldavia, southeastern Ukraine, and the Dobrudja region of Romania and Bulgaria.

The closing decades of the twelfth century saw the rebirth of the Bulgarian Empire. In 1185, two brothers, Theodore and Asen, united the Bulgarian, Vlach, and Cuman populations south of the Danube in rebellion against the Byzantine Empire. Unsuccessful at first, the brothers fled north of the Danube to garner support among the Cuman tribes ruling there. Asen is a name of Cuman origin, but the Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates, who took part in the campaign against the rebels, serving as secretary to the Emperor, refers to the brothers as Vlachs: “The Vlachs hesitated at the beginning and refused to join the revolt to which Peter and Asen tried to incite them, being uncertain of the success of the enterprise. To free their compatriots of this fear, those of the same blood with them built a house of prayer under the name of St. Dimitrie the Martyr in which they gathered many of them of both sexes... behaving exactly as do those possessed by demons, they taught these self-intoxicated ones to say that God had decided to free the Bulgarian and Vlach peoples...” Choniates goes on to tell of a Byzantine priest taken prisoner by the rebels who “pleaded with Asen in his own language to set him free, for he knew the language of the Vlachs.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup>N. Iorga, “Imperiul Cumanilor și domnia lui Băsărabă,” in *ARMSI*, series III, VIII (1927-1928), pp. 97-103.

<sup>108</sup>Quo. N. Bănescu, “O problemă de istorie medievală: crearea și caracterul statului Asăneștilor (1185),” in *AARMSI*, series III, XXV (1942-1943), pp. 570, 575.

Stirred by nationalist sentiments of modern times, Romanian and Bulgarian historians have engaged in a long polemic over the ethnic origin of the two brothers. Trying to make claims of ethnic affiliation based on medieval sources is hazardous at best; the term Vlach also meant shepherd and many of these had been Slavicized. As John V.A. Fine, Jr., the preeminent American scholar on the history of the medieval Balkans, points out, "There is no evidence of any 'national' conflict or rivalry between these two people at this time. Thus, the modern academic controversy, being over an issue of little relevance to the Middle Ages, is probably best dropped."<sup>109</sup> With the aid of the Cumans from north of the Danube the rebellion succeeded. Theodore donned purple boots, a traditional symbol of the authority of the Emperor, and adopted the name Peter, after a Bulgarian Tsar of the mid-tenth century who had been canonized by the Church, marking the foundation of the Second Bulgarian Empire with its capital at Trnovo.

But the loss of Bulgaria was only the beginning of the problems confronting Byzantium. Racked by internal strife, the Empire faced its greatest peril to date when the army of the Fourth Crusade, having initially been raised to free Jerusalem from the Saracens, sacked Constantinople in 1204 and established a Latin Empire. The Greeks regained possession of the imperial city a half century later, but the Byzantine Empire never recaptured its former glory. This left Bulgaria with a claim to be the rightful heir to the imperial tradition in southeastern Europe; during the reigns of Kaloyan (1197-1207) and John Asen (1218-1241) the reborn Bulgarian Empire expanded its borders in the Balkans and extended its rule over Cumania north of the Danube. Meanwhile,

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<sup>109</sup> John V.A. Fine, Jr., *The Late Medieval Balkans*, Ann Arbor, 1994, p. 13.

the kingdom of Hungary had reached the Carpathians and, after the death of Tsar Kaloyan in 1207, it now began to make inroads across the mountains and to challenge Bulgarian suzerainty in the area.

To defend southern Transylvania against the neighboring Cumans, King Andrew II of Hungary called in the Teutonic Knights in 1211, granting them the Bârșa land.<sup>110</sup> One of the three great military crusading orders of the Middle Ages, the Teutonic Knights had been established only a few years earlier, in 1198. With the fall of Jerusalem in 1187 and the debacle of the Fourth Crusade, these defenders of the faith had to look outside the Holy Land for other areas to propagate Catholicism. Thus, they came to the Bârșa land. German colonists accompanying the Knights founded the city of Brașov around 1215. During this same period Dietrich, a leader of the Knights, established the fortress of Bran, originally known as Dietrichstein, to defend one of the principal mountain passes leading to Cumania. To draw them into the area, the king had granted the Teutonic Knights a series of privileges: they had an autonomous administration, the liberty to setup markets, and the right to build wooden fortresses such as the one at Bran. Acting on the authority of the Pope, the Knights soon expanded the scope of their mission; they began to erect stone fortresses and they crossed the mountains into Cumania. They raised these castles at strategic points on both sides of the Carpathians, usually atop high rocky peaks, sometimes on the ruins of old Roman or Dacian forts. They constructed one such fortress, called Cetatea Neamțului or “the Fortress of the

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<sup>110</sup>Doc. XLI in Eudoxia de Hurmuzaki and Nic. Densușianu, eds., *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1887, pp. 56-58.

German,” at the junction of the Dâmbovița and Dâmbovicioară rivers between Rucăr and Bran.<sup>111</sup> Their penetration south must be placed in connection with Papal efforts to convert the Cumans to Catholicism; to achieve this, the Pontiff established a bishopric of the Cumans at Milcov as early as 1217. Not only did the Cumans, under a leader named Bortz, resist the Germanic invaders,<sup>112</sup> the usurpation of royal prerogatives by the Knights also brought them into conflict with the Hungarian king. The Pope insisted that these new territories were subject exclusively to his jurisdiction and that the Knights acted solely on behalf of the Holy See.<sup>113</sup> Naturally, Andrew II disagreed. Unable to allow this challenge to royal authority to go unanswered, the king personally led an army against the Teutonic Knights at the beginning of 1225 and drove them from the area. Honorius III protested. He demanded that Andrew return the lands seized from the Knights which “we established through apostolic privilege not to be subjected to anyone other than the Roman Pontiff,” including “a fortress which they built across the Carpathian Mountains with difficulty and at great expense,”<sup>114</sup> referring to Cetatea Neamțului. The Hungarian king refused the Pope, but realizing the need for reliable settlers to develop and to defend this underpopulated border region,<sup>115</sup> Andrew II retained the German colonists who had originally

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<sup>111</sup>I. Pușcariu, “Cetatea Neamțului de la Podul Dâmboviței în Muscel,” in *AARMSI*, series II, XXX (1907-1908), p. 12.

<sup>112</sup>Doc. 7 in *DRH, D*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>113</sup>Doc. LX in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, p. 82.

<sup>114</sup>Doc. 5 in *DRH, D*, pp. 10-14.

<sup>115</sup>Doc. LVIII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 80-81.



accompanied the Knights to southern Transylvania and whose privileges he had confirmed the previous year.

Following the expulsion of the Teutonic Knights, the struggle between Hungary and Bulgaria for control over Cumania continued. A war between the two powers around 1230 left Hungary in control of lands around Vidin and part of the region between the Olt and Danube rivers; as a consequence, in 1233 the Hungarian king created the Banate of Severin and assumed the additional titles of king of Bulgaria and Cumania.<sup>116</sup> Still, much of Cumania remained under Bulgarian control throughout the reign of Tsar John Asen. The Tartar-Persian chronicle of Rashid, written in 1303, refers to Cumania in 1241 as the land of the Bulgarians.<sup>117</sup>

The conflict between Hungary and Bulgaria also assumed a religious character. Although the Bulgarian Church had submitted to Rome under Tsar Kaloyan after the crusaders took Constantinople in 1204, the union of Orthodoxy and Catholicism was nominal at best and soon forgotten. As Hungary and Bulgaria each strove to impose their rule over Cumania, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, represented by the two competing powers, battled for the hearts and minds of its inhabitants. On November 14, 1234, the Pope advised Bela, the son and co-regent of Andrew II of Hungary, of the urgent need to bring the Vlachs living there under the authority of the Archbishop of Cumania. "As I have learned, in the Diocese of the Cumans there are some people called Vlachs, who, although they call themselves Christians, embrace different rites and customs in a single faith and commit acts that are contrary to that name," wrote Gregory IX. "Thus, ignoring the

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<sup>116</sup>Docs. XCVIII and XCIX in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 126-127.

<sup>117</sup>Onciul, *Originile principatelor române*, p. 35.

Roman Church, they receive religious rites not from our venerable brother, the Archbishop of the Cumans... but from some pseudo-bishops who practice the Greek rite, while others, Hungarians as well as Germans, together with other righteous believers from the kingdom of Hungary, cross over to them to live there and, forming a single people with the aforementioned Vlachs, also ignore him and receive the aforesaid rites to the great indignation of righteous believers and to the great harm of the Christian faith.”<sup>118</sup> By 1238 the Pope had abandoned hopes of convincing the Bulgarian Church to return to the union with Rome; he excommunicated Tsar John Asen and called upon the Hungarian king to organize a crusade against the schismatics and to seize Bulgaria.<sup>119</sup> But chaos soon struck the entire region as a new threat loomed on the horizon.

The Tatars, a Mongol people from the east, swept into Europe in 1241. The attack did not come as a complete surprise for these nomadic warriors had already imposed their rule over the Cumans living to the east of Hungary in 1239, leading many of them to seek refuge in Hungary and Bulgaria. A Hungarian prelate wrote to the Bishop of Paris amidst the attack, telling him that two Tatar spies had been captured and brought before Bela IV where “They declared that their objective is the subjugation of the entire world” and that their ruler is called *Zingiton* (Ghenghis Khan, meaning the king of kings).<sup>120</sup> The Tatars defeated the Hungarian army and devastated the entire region as far west as Buda and the Dalmatian coast. Although their armies penetrated into Scandinavia and Germany and threatened to overrun the entire continent, the effect

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<sup>118</sup>Doc. 9 in *DRH, D*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>119</sup>Doc. CXXVI in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 168-169.

<sup>120</sup>Doc. CLIX in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 206-207.

of their attack was blunted when news of the death of the Great Khan Ogödoi reached them in the spring of 1242, bringing an abrupt halt to the offensive. In the aftermath, Bulgaria and Cumania were left to pay annual tribute to the loosely-organized Tatar state known as the Golden Horde.

Amidst these events, Tsar John Asen died in 1241 leaving the throne to his seven-year-old son Kaloman. The impact of the Tatar invasion and the lack of a strong ruler in Bulgaria opened the door for Hungary to extend its control over Cumania. To defend this area, King Bela IV called on another of the great medieval crusading orders, the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, also known as the Knights Hospitallers; after reaching an agreement with Rembald, the Grand Preceptor of the Order, the king issued a diploma entrusting them with the banate of Severin and granting them extensive privileges. With certain specified exceptions, Bela ceded to the Knights all revenues due the royal treasury from Cumania for the next twenty-five years. This document also provides some information, albeit sparse, about the political organization of Cumania. Cnezates ruled by John and Farcaș, located west of the Olt River, were placed under the authority of the Hospitallers. Another Cnezate in the same region ruled by the Voivode Litovoy was left to the Wallachians, but the king granted the Knights half of the revenues it owed to the Crown; the same exemption applied to the land of Seneslav, voivode of the Wallachians, located east of the Olt.<sup>121</sup> Despite the presence of the Hospitallers, the struggle for control of Cumania intensified. The Knights of St. John have settled “in a highly endangered area on the border with the Cumans and the Bulgarians,” wrote Bela IV to the Pope in 1254, “from where they hope to propagate the Catholic

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<sup>121</sup>Doc. 1 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 3-11.

faith among them, with the favor of the Apostolic Seat, all along the Danube to the sea....” But the king warned the Pontiff that Hungary and Europe faced the threat of a new invasion from the East: “The Tatars have made tributary the areas bordering the kingdom to the east, that is Russia, Cumania, the Brodnici lands [Moldavia], and Bulgaria.” That same year, the Franciscan missionary Wilhelm de Rubruquis, an emissary to the Great Tatar Khanate at Qara Qorum, reported that “from the mouth of the Don toward the west, up to the Danube, everything is under their control. And even beyond the Danube toward Constantinople, Wallachia, which is the land of Asen, and lesser Bulgaria all the way to Salonika, everyone pays them tribute.”<sup>122</sup> Lacking sufficient manpower and resources to fulfill their mission, the Hospitallers withdrew from the region in 1260.

While Hungary controlled a large portion of the future principality of Wallachia during the second half of the thirteenth century, its hold on the area weakened with the decline of the Arpad dynasty. Already in 1257 internal pressures forced Bela IV to divide his kingdom with his son Stephen. Stephen V married a Cuman princess named Elizabeth, and when Bela IV died in 1270 he remained the sole ruler of Hungary, but he died only two years later leaving his underage son Ladislas as his heir. The country fell under the control of a regency council and two rival factions of nobles struggled for supremacy. In these chaotic conditions, nobles in the border areas of the kingdom seized the opportunity to throw off Hungarian suzerainty.

One of those who revolted against Hungarian rule was the Voivode Litovoy mentioned in the diploma for the Knights of St.

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<sup>122</sup>Doc. CCI in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 265-275.

John of 1247. With the departure of the Hospitallers from the area, Litovoy expanded his control over the Severin region and, when the opportunity arose, sometime around 1273 or 1274, he began to assert his independence. Information about this insurrection comes from a diploma of Ladislav IV dated January 8, 1285, in which he praises the Magistrate George for his services to the Crown, including the suppression of Litovoy's revolt. "When we began our reign, when we were in our childhood, after the death of our beloved father," the king wrote, "Voivode Litovoy, together with his brothers, in their treachery, took under his control part of our kingdom, located across Carpathians, and despite our appeals he refused to pay us the revenues due to us from those parts. I sent against him the aforementioned Magistrate George who... killed him, while he captured his brother, named Barbath and brought him to us. For his ransom, we extracted a large sum of money and thus, thanks to the services of Magistrate George, the tribute owed to us from those parts was restored."<sup>123</sup> This document also hints at the increasing wealth of the region south of the Carpathians, an important factor driving the move toward independence.

Despite the suppression of Litovoy's revolt, the situation in Hungary and Cumania continued to deteriorate. In 1278, Pope Nicholas III sent Philip, the Bishop of Firminy, as papal legate to Hungary and Cumania in an attempt to quiet the unrest and rebellion brewing in those parts.<sup>124</sup> Seeking to overcome the factional strife dividing his country, Ladislav IV sought help from his mother's relatives, the Cumans, to restore order in the

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<sup>123</sup>Doc. 13 în *DRH, D*, pp. 30-34; see also Doc. CCCLXXXIX in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 483- 484.

<sup>124</sup>Doc. CCCXXXV in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 414-416.

kingdom. To the dismay of Popes Honorius IV (1285-1287) and Nicholas IV (1288-1292), he had the Queen imprisoned and took a Cuman woman as his concubine and lived among them, adopting their ways;<sup>125</sup> thus he came to be known as Ladislas the Cuman. But the king's efforts to reimpose royal authority antagonized the nobility even further and led to his assassination in 1290. His successor, Andrew III (1290-1301), a brother of Bela IV, fared no better. With his death in 1301 the Arpad dynasty came to an end; a state of anarchy prevailed in Hungary with a dozen large landowning families each asserting their independence.

With Hungary in disarray and Bulgaria weakened by internal strife, conditions were favorable at the end of the thirteenth century for the emergence of a new political organization in the area between the Carpathians and the Danube. Burgeoning trade between East and West in the aftermath of the Crusades fueled by the rise of an urban society in Western Europe and a corresponding demand for luxury goods brought steadily increasing wealth to this region located along the principal trade routes with the Orient. In 1304, Pope Benedict XI referred to Cumania as a rich and well-populated land with several bishops and many priests of the Greek rite.<sup>126</sup> The political fragmentation that characterized Europe during the Middle Ages resulted from the lack of economic ties between different regions. This all changed as trade began to flourish, cities developed, and the population increased; the need to secure expanding trade routes and the attraction of the wealth they generated sparked the formation of new, more centralized political structures. In the loosely knit lands known as Cumania,

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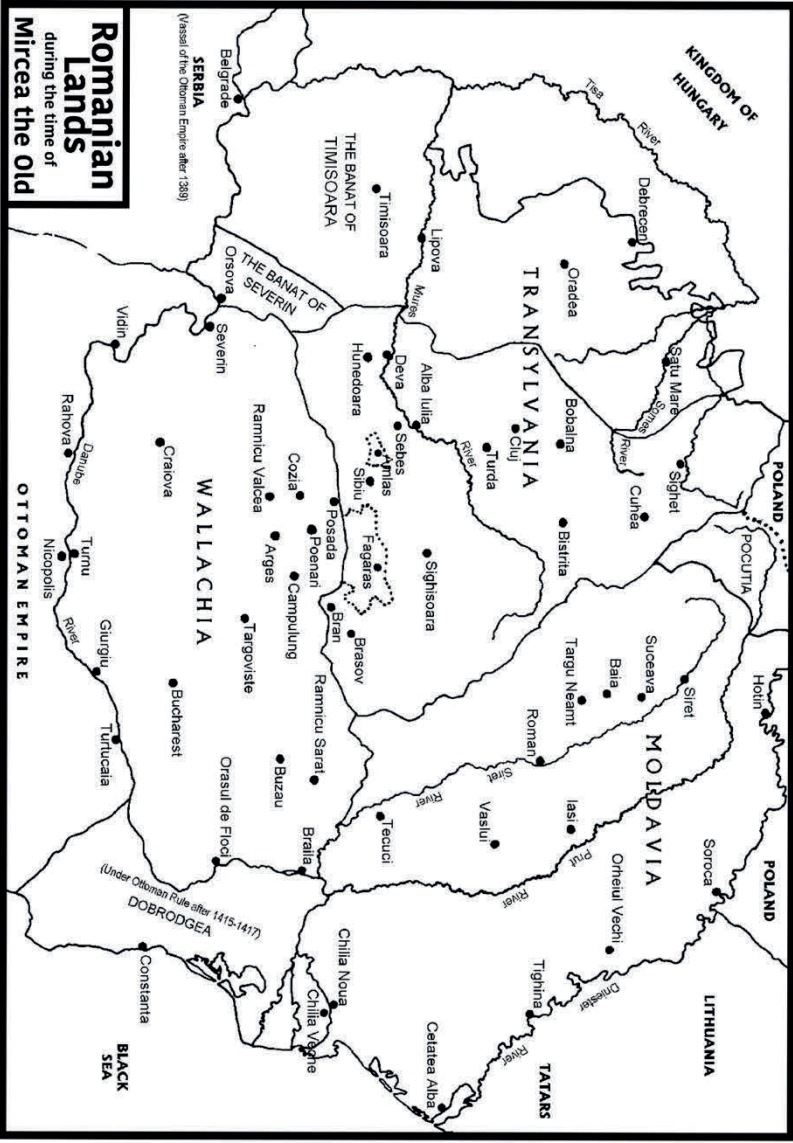
<sup>125</sup> Docs. CCCLXXVI and CCCLXXXV in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 467, 478-479.

<sup>126</sup> Doc. CCCCLXVIII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 563-565.

these factors, together with the turmoil in Hungary, led to the founding of the land over which Mircea the Old would one day rule – the principality of Wallachia.



**Romanian Lands**  
during the time of  
**Mircea the Old**



(Vasal of the Ottoman Empire after 1389)

(Under Ottoman Rule after 1415-1417)



## THE FOUNDER

*"Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end."*

— Marcus Annaeus Seneca (54 BC–39 AD)



While the details surrounding the origin of the principality are obscure, the conditions in Hungary that favored its establishment are better-known. Seven years of anarchy and civil war followed the death of Andrew III in 1301, as various pretenders to the crown of St. Stephen pressed their claims, each supported by different factions among the nobility. One of the most important players in the ensuing struggle for the throne was Ladislas Apor, the voivode of Transylvania. He ruled the province as a virtually independent fiefdom. Descendants of the Arpads through a female line, Charles Robert of the French Anjou family and Venceslav, a son of the king of Bohemia, both vied for the crown; the latter withdrew in 1305, ceding his claim to Otto of Bavaria who was then anointed and crowned as king of Hungary. But before Otto could consolidate his position, his rival, Charles Robert, gained a precious ally with the election of a French Pope, Clement V, in 1305.

Many considered the new Pope, formerly the Archbishop of Bordeaux, as a pawn of Philip IV, the king of France, who intended to use him to expand French influence in Europe. One of the steps taken in this direction by Philip and Clement was the destruction of the Templar Knights and the confiscation of their wealth. The Pope excommunicated Otto as Charles Robert advanced into Hungary. Faced with this challenge, Otto fled east to Transylvania in 1307, hoping to gather support from the German population there, as well as from Ladislav Apur. But Ladislav also harbored royal aspirations; he promptly arrested Otto and imprisoned him in the fortress of Deva, after confiscating the crown of St. Stephen and the royal insignia. Shortly thereafter, Otto was placed in the custody of a Wallachian voivode, possibly Stephen Maelat at Făgăraș where a castle had recently been constructed,<sup>127</sup> or across the mountains where Thocomer ruled. The unfortunate claimant was subsequently freed and returned to Bavaria where he continued to use the royal title until his death in 1312.

Meanwhile, although Charles Robert had been crowned king of Hungary in 1308, two more years passed before Ladislav Apur recognized the authority of the new monarch and turned over to him the crown of St. Stephen, the symbol of royal legitimacy.<sup>128</sup> But troubles in Hungary persisted and, for the next two decades, the Angevin king struggled to restore order in his kingdom.

Amidst all of this, the founding of the principality of Wallachia is shrouded in myth; it is thought to have taken place

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<sup>127</sup>Adolf Armbruster, "Românii în cronică lui Ottokar de Stiria," in *Studii*, 25:3 (1972), p. 475; Gheorghe Brancovici, *Cronica românească*, Bucharest, 1987, p. 52.

<sup>128</sup>Doc. CCCCLI in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, p. 572.

between 1290 and 1310. Seventeenth century chronicles record that Radu Negru, or Black Radu, crossed the mountains from Făgăraş in Transylvania, arriving first at Câmpulung, and then at Argeş: “he made the capital there, building the royal court and a church which is still there today. And he began to make order in the country, establishing counties, judges, boyars, and other things useful to the throne and the country, expanding it to the Danube and the Siret.”<sup>129</sup> But how much of this legend of a voivode coming down from Transylvania to found Wallachia, known in Romanian historiography as the *descălecătul*, is true?

The traditional name given to the founder of the principality is simply Negru vodă, literally the Black Voivode. Seventeenth century chroniclers added the name Radu because their sparse information about the early princes led them to equate the Black Voivode with Radu, Mircea’s father, who ruled Wallachia in the second half of the fourteenth century.<sup>130</sup> Although the tradition is clearly much older, the first written mention we have of the Black Voivode as the founder of Wallachia comes from a diploma issued by Prince Alexander Mircea for the Monastery of Tismana on January 8, 1569.<sup>131</sup> Unfortunately, it provides no help in identifying him. Some historians say that the legend of a *descălecătul* in Wallachia has no basis in historical fact, but rather that it is a myth derived from the story of the founding of the sister principality of Moldavia.<sup>132</sup> Others have drawn parallels between the story of the Black Voivode and the legend of William Tell and

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<sup>129</sup>Radu Popescu, *Istoriile domnilor Țării Românești*, Bucharest, 1963, p. 5.

<sup>130</sup>Onciul, *Originile principatelor române*, p. 31.

<sup>131</sup>Doc. 351 in, *DIR, XVI, B*, vol. III, pp. 303-304.

<sup>132</sup>Pavel Chihaia, *De la Negru Vodă la Neagoe Basarab*, Bucharest, 1976, p. 12.

the founding of the Swiss Confederation.<sup>133</sup> Still others have conjectured the existence of another prince named Radu at the end of the thirteenth century or identified the Black Voivode with different fourteenth century Wallachian princes.

Most legends have some basis in historical fact; the story of the Black Voivode is no exception. The conditions in Hungary that precipitated Litovoy's failed revolt in northern Oltenia steadily worsened in the years following the assassination of Ladislav the Cuman. All of this favored efforts to establish a unified state in Cumania. We know that from 1291 to 1324 there was no Hungarian governor, called a *ban*, of Severin, indicating that the newly-founded principality of Wallachia had likely incorporated this territory.<sup>134</sup> In addition, a diploma of Prince Matthew Basarab, dated April 12, 1636, mentions that he saw a diploma issued by the Black Voivode for the monastery of Câmpulung in 1291-1292.<sup>135</sup> Thus, it is plausible that the tradition concerning the founding of Wallachia by the Black Voivode around 1290 is true. But who was the Black Voivode and where did he come from?

Most historians have rejected the legend that the Black Voivode crossed the mountains from Făgăraș and unified Wallachia. The political situation in Transylvania at the time did not allow for such a scenario; also, Făgăraș did not become tied to Wallachia until the reign of Mircea's uncle, Vladislav I (1364-1376). This element is clearly borrowed from the story of the founding of Moldavia by the Voivode Dragoș from Maramureș.

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<sup>133</sup>Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Tradiția istorică despre întemeierea statelor românești*, Bucharest, 1980, p. 97.

<sup>134</sup>*Istoria românilor*, vol. III, Bucharest, 2001, p. 573.

<sup>135</sup>Ioan C. Filitti, "Despre Negru Vodă," in ARMSI, series III, IV, (1925) p. 36.

This has led historians such as Gheorghe I. Brătianu to conclude that “the historical reality is another; the rise of a native power which, fighting at times with the Tatars and at times with the Hungarians, founded Wallachia.”<sup>136</sup>

While this explanation for the founding of the principality seems logical, it does not conform with the historical information we possess. The legend of a *descălecătul* cannot be rejected outright. First of all, virtually all sources refer to the establishment of Wallachia as a fairly sudden event, and indicate that the Black Voivode came from somewhere outside the principality. For example, Vasile Buhăescul, a seventeenth century chronicler, records that in 1290 the Black Voivode “came down and founded Wallachia and died on the throne, ruling for twenty-four years.”<sup>137</sup> A gradual unification of the country from within the native ruling class would have been a long, drawn-out process, as demonstrated countless times throughout European history. The available evidence does not indicate that such a process occurred in Wallachia. The hypothesis that a conqueror came from outside the country to impose his rule over it is more tenable than supposing that one of the existing voivodes suddenly gained sufficient power to force the others to submit to his authority. The Hungarians certainly used every possible means to prevent one of their vassals in this strategically important border region from accumulating enough power to challenge royal authority, especially after the suppression of Litovoy’s rebellion. Thus, the legend of a *descălecătul* appears to have a basis in historical reality. But if the

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<sup>136</sup>Brătianu, *Tradiția istorică*, p. 88.

<sup>137</sup>Vasile Buhăescul, “Istoria Țării Românești și Moldovei,” in *RIAF*, XIV (1913), p. 156.

Black Voivode did not come from Transylvania, where did he come from?

Our first clue to discovering the identity of the Black Voivode comes from his name itself – Negru Vodă. As is also true in the case of the name Dracula, such epithets were given to remark distinguishing characteristics. Names such as Negru (Black) or Albu (White) generally remarked facial characteristics.<sup>138</sup> This interpretation is confirmed by Miron Costin who wrote that the first prince of Wallachia “was named Negrul Vodă, that is ‘the one whose face is black.’”<sup>139</sup>

Our next clue comes from the name of the first documented ruler of Wallachia – Basarab. Basarab, or Basarabă in its original form, is a name of Cuman origin; literally it means “the good father.”<sup>140</sup> The earliest mention of his reign is found in a diploma issued by Charles Robert on July 26, 1324;<sup>141</sup> another act from 1329 tells us that Basarab ruled Wallachia as early as 1320-1321,<sup>142</sup> but we cannot precisely date the beginning of his reign. From another royal diploma, dated November 26, 1332, we learn that Basarab is the son of Thocomer,<sup>143</sup> or Tugomir, a name of Turkic/Slavic origin. A diploma issued by Prince Gavril Movilă on November 13, 1618, refers to Basarab’s son and successor,

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<sup>138</sup>Constantinescu, *Dicționar onomastic*, p. LI.

<sup>139</sup>Bogdan, *Cronice atingătoare*, p. 193.

<sup>140</sup>Constantinescu, *Dicționar onomastic*, p. 192.

<sup>141</sup>Doc. 15 in *DRH, D*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>142</sup>Doc. 18 in *DRH, D*, p. 41.

<sup>143</sup>Doc. 25 in *DRH, D*, pp. 49-52.

Nicholas Alexander, as the *grandson* of the Black Voivode.<sup>144</sup> With these facts in mind, the most plausible explanation for the legend of the Black Voivode is that he was a Cuman-Tatar prince who came from lands in the east and imposed his rule over Wallachia.<sup>145</sup> Papal documents from the period that decry “incursions by Cumans, Tatars, schismatics, and hostile pagans” that had nearly ruined Hungary<sup>146</sup> support this conclusion. The Cuman-Slavic aristocracy that governed the land certainly facilitated the conquest.

Another indication of the association of the Wallachian dynasty with the Tatars is found in a letter sent from Avignon by Pope John XXII to Charles Robert on August 5, 1331. In it, the Pontiff mentions the king’s campaign in Wallachia the previous year as one “against the *Tatars*, enemies of the Catholic faith.”<sup>147</sup> The dark skin of the Cuman-Tatar conqueror accounts for his epithet, the Black Voivode. According to legend, the Black Voivode died around 1314-1315 and was buried at Argeș, confirming the chronicler’s assertion that he ruled for twenty-four years. Thus, we must identify the Black Voivode with Thocomer, the father of Basarab.

This hypothesis is further supported by the fact that throughout his reign of over thirty-five years Basarab maintained strong ties to the Tatar clans in the east and close relations with Bulgaria, another Tatar ally. The Wallachian dynasty appears to

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<sup>144</sup>Doc. 8 in *DIR*, XIII, XIV, XV, B, p. 12.

<sup>145</sup>Andrei Veres, “Originea stemelor țările române,” in *RIR*, I (1931), p. 230.

<sup>146</sup>Docs. CCCCXLIV and CCCCXLV in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 557-560.

<sup>147</sup>Doc. 21 in *DRH*, D, pp. 44-45, emphasis added.

have come from the region of southern Moldavia, between the Pruth and Dniester rivers, today in southwestern Ukraine; at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Abulfeda, an Arab scholar, referred to this territory as “the land of the Bulgarians and Turks.”<sup>148</sup> The area came to be known as Basarabia as it was the land of origin of the prince who gained fame throughout Europe following his remarkable victory over the king of Hungary in 1330.

When he inherited the throne around 1310-1315, Basarab faced many challenges as he sought to consolidate the independence of the principality founded by his father. Hungary gradually recovered from the anarchy of the previous decades as Charles Robert of Anjou worked vigorously to restore the authority of the monarchy. The new king secured his lands through a system of alliances with neighboring states, allowing him to concentrate on domestic matters; in 1320, he married Elizabeth, the sister of King Casimir of Poland, laying the basis for the future union of the two kingdoms under his son Louis. Charles Robert met the daunting task of bringing order to his troubled kingdom with skill and tenacity, making him, as the distinguished Hungarian historian Pal Engel observed, “one of the most successful rulers of the Middle Ages.”<sup>149</sup> After the death of Ladislav Apoc in 1316, Charles Robert gained effective control over much of Transylvania, but only quelled rebellion in the province, led by the sons of the late voivode, in 1324 with the help of Cuman forces.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>Quo. Brătianu, *Tradiția istorică*, p. 44.

<sup>149</sup>*A History of Hungary*, ed. Peter F. Sugar, Bloomington, 1994, p. 37.

<sup>150</sup>Kopeczi, ed., *History of Transylvania*, p. 205.



The Hungarian king also had to deal with the recently established principality of Wallachia to the south over which he claimed suzerainty. The dispute between the two countries centered around the banate of Severin which Wallachia had incorporated during the period of civil strife in Hungary. A series of border wars broke out in the area around Severin and Mehadia.<sup>151</sup> Consistent with his policy of trying to maintain peaceful relations with neighboring states so that he could deal more effectively with domestic problems, Charles Robert appealed to diplomatic means to resolve the dispute with his neighbor across the Carpathians. He sent Count Martin of Szalacs on several missions to negotiate with Basarab<sup>152</sup> and by 1324 good relations prevailed between the two countries. Wallachia maintained its autonomy and Basarab continued to hold Severin, but he accepted the suzerainty of the king and agreed to pay an annual tribute, known as the *censul*, to the Hungarian Crown.

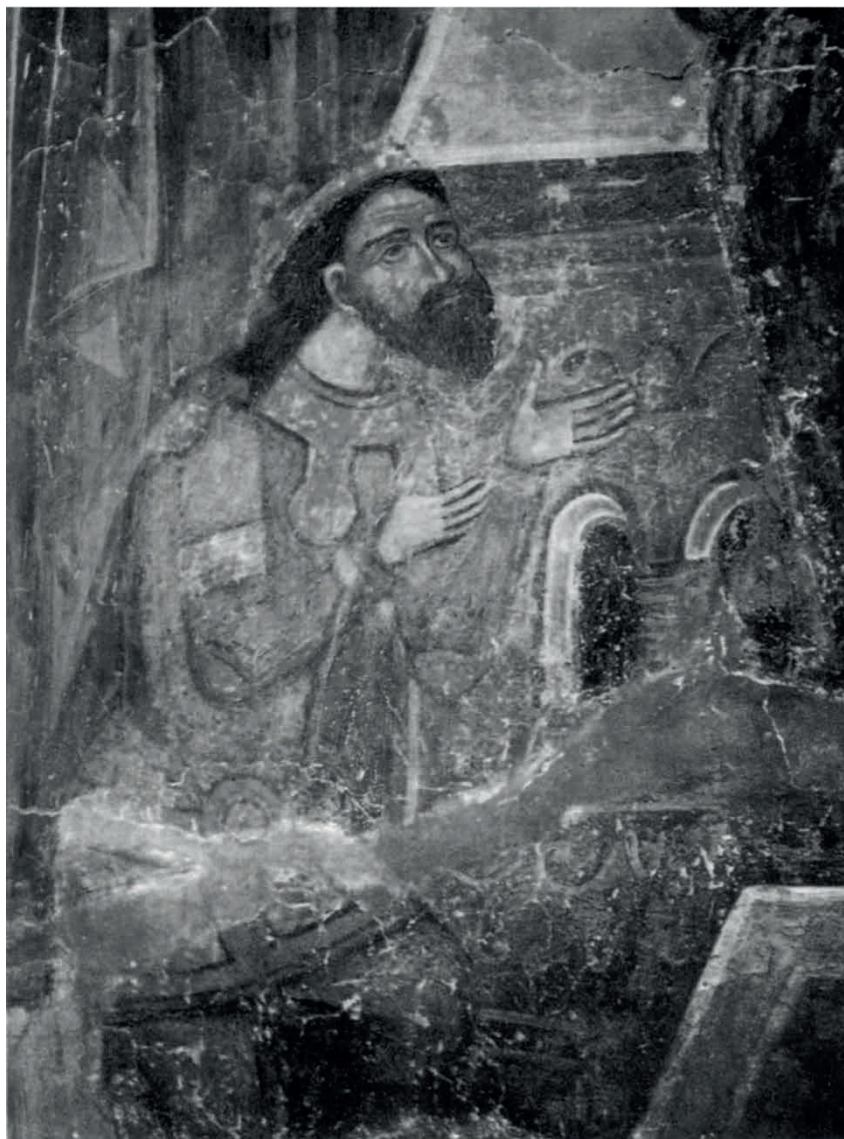
This state of affairs did not last long as tensions began to build. In a written statement dated June 18, 1325, the secretary of the Hungarian royal chancellery, Ladislav, a man “learned in medicine and science,” declared that one Paulo, son of Iwanko of Ugol, came before him to testify that Stephen, a son of the Cuman Count Parabuh, had slandered Charles Robert and praised the Wallachian ruler, “*disloyal* to the holy Crown,... saying that the power of our lord, the king, could in no way stand against or compare with the power of Basarab.”<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup>Doc. 18 in *DRH, D*, p. 41.

<sup>152</sup>Doc. 15 in *DRH, D*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>153</sup>Doc. 16 in *DRH, D*, pp. 37-38, emphasis added.



Basarab I, Prince of Wallachia c. 1310-1352

The situation seems to have improved somewhat by 1327 when Pope John XXII wrote to Basarab from Avignon praising his loyal service to the Catholic Church and asking him to receive Dominican inquisitors into the lands under his rule, “located in the kingdom of Hungary.”<sup>154</sup> But this letter also implies that Basarab harbored enemies of Hungary and the Church, especially Templar Knights from Germany and Poland who took refuge in significant numbers in Wallachia and Bulgaria during this period. By 1329 relations between the two neighbors had again taken a turn for the worse as Basarab gave shelter to the sons of Ladislas Apor, who had continued to oppose Charles Robert’s authority in Transylvania.<sup>155</sup> The threat of an armed conflict between Hungary and Wallachia now loomed on the horizon.

Throughout his reign, Basarab maintained close ties with the Golden Horde. Like neighboring Bulgaria, Wallachia at this time formed part of the system of tributary states established by the Tatars in the aftermath of their invasion of Europe in the mid-thirteenth century. Basarab retained the lands ruled over by his family between the Pruth and Dniester rivers. To strengthen ties with this area, the Wallachian prince colonized settlers from the relatively densely populated region of Oltenia in the nearly deserted territory between the Siret and Prut rivers, to create a bridge between Wallachia and Basarabia. This region later become part of southern Moldavia, but, as we learn from a letter to the king of Poland dated September 1, 1435, outlining the division of Moldavia between Princes Iliaș and Stephen, long after

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<sup>154</sup>Doc. 17 in *DRH, D*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>155</sup>Ștefan Pascu, “Contribuțiuni documentare la istoria românilor în sec. XIII și XIV,” in *AIIN, Cluj*, X (1945), p. 166.

the reign of Basarab it was still known as *Olteni*.<sup>156</sup> Accounts of the expedition to this area led by the Emir of Aîdîn, Umur Bey, in 1339- 1341, confirm that Basarab ruled these areas. These Turks came here to defend Byzantine interests, including Kilia, against the Genoese; the Danube port is referred to as being “on the border of Wallachia.”<sup>157</sup>

The fact that the Tatars played an extremely important role in the history of this region of Europe well into the mid-fourteenth century is often overlooked; although a loosely organized confederation, the Golden Horde ruled over the land east of the Carpathians that became the principality of Moldavia and claimed suzerainty over Wallachia and Bulgaria. In words reminiscent of Herodotus’s description of the Thracians, the Byzantine chronicler Laonic Chalkokondyles affirmed that the Tatars ‘would be the largest, most powerful, and strongest, as is no other people in the world, if they would not be scattered throughout many parts of the world in Asia and Europe... If united, and they would decide to live in the same country and to remain obedient to a single Emperor, no one in the entire world would be able to resist them so as not to be subjugated.’<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>156</sup>Constantin C. Giurescu, “Oltenii și Basarabia: colonizări muntene în sudul Moldovei în veacurile XIV și XV,” pp. 130-139 in *RIR*, X (1940); Doc 192 in Mihai Costăchescu, *Documentele moldovenești înainte de Ștefan cel Mare*, vol. II, Iași, 1932, pp. 681-684. Petre Diaconu, “Kilia et l’expédition d’Umur Beg,” in *RESEE*, XXI:1 (1983), p. 29 argues that the Emir’s expedition reached Anchialos in Bulgaria and not Kilia on the Danube.

<sup>157</sup>Quo, *Istoria românilor*, vol. III, p. 572; see also Mustafa A. Mehmet, “Aspecte din istoria Dobrogei sub dominația otomană în veacurile XIV-XVII,” in *Studii*, 18:5 (1965), p. 1100.

<sup>158</sup>Laonic Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, Bucharest, 1958, p. 94.

Following the common practice of the day, both Basarab and his father Thocomer used marriage alliances to consolidate their political position. Tradition has preserved the name of Basarab's wife, Margaret or Marghita, and the fact that she was Catholic; although we have no information to indicate her origins, the marriage clearly had political undertones. Given the extent of French influence in fourteenth century Wallachia, which cannot be explained solely by ties to Angevin Hungary, one may speculate that Margaret came from France. For Basarab, religion was a matter of political expediency. As with many noble families of Cuman origin in the area where the Bishopric of Milcov had aggressively propagated the Latin rite, Basarab most likely had a Catholic upbringing. But at a time when the independence of Wallachia was defined in terms its relationship to Hungary, the principal Catholic power in the region, Basarab forged ties with certain heretical sects and with the Orthodox Church. We have already seen that he accorded refuge to Templar Knights persecuted in the West and considered by Rome during this period as the most dangerous heretical group in Europe. Because of his deviation from the Catholic Church, Charles Robert referred to Basarab in 1332 as a "schismatic,"<sup>159</sup> a term applied to those of the Greek rite or other Christian sects split off from the Church of Rome; only five years before the Pope himself had called Basarab "a devout Catholic prince."<sup>160</sup> From his marriage to Margaret, Basarab had several sons, but the only one we know by name is his eldest son and successor, Alexander, also called Nicholas Alexander. We also know of at least one daughter, Theodora, who

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<sup>159</sup>Doc. 25 in *DRH, D*, pp. 49-52.

<sup>160</sup>Doc. 17 in *DRH, D*, pp. 39-40.

married Alexander, the nephew and heir of Bulgarian Tsar Michael Shishman.

The marriage of Theodora to Alexander of Bulgaria consolidated the already close ties between the two neighboring states. When Bulgaria went to war against Byzantium in 1323-1324, Wallachia proved a staunch ally. The Byzantine chronicler Ioannes Kantakuzenus recorded that Basarab's troops participated alongside those of Michael Shishman against the Emperor in 1324.<sup>161</sup> Six years later, Basarab, along with Tatar forces, again came to the aid of Bulgaria, taking part in the disastrous battle at Velbuzd on July 28, 1330, in which the Serbs inflicted a massive defeat on the Bulgarians and their allies. Serbian chronicles say that Basarab took part personally in the battle and, reflecting the close ties between the Wallachian prince and the Golden Horde, they refer to his troops as Wallachian-Tartars.<sup>162</sup> Tsar Michael Shishman was killed in the fighting after falling from his horse, leaving Basarab's son-in-law, Alexander, as the new ruler of Bulgaria. On the other side, the future Serbian Tsar Stephen Dushan distinguished himself commanding a cavalry unit in this battle.<sup>163</sup>

When news of the defeat at Velbuzd reached Hungary, many felt that Basarab was now vulnerable and that the time had come to take military action against the rebellious prince and to bring the territory across the Carpathians back under the control of the Crown of St. Stephen. The Hungarian attack on Wallachia in 1330 was an extension of the power struggle ongoing in Transylvania

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<sup>161</sup>Maria Holban, "Despre raporturile lui Basarab cu Ungaria Angevină" in *Studii*, 20:1 (1967), p. 12.

<sup>162</sup>N. Iorga, *Studii și documente*. vol. III, Bucharest, 1901, p. II.

<sup>163</sup>Fine, *Late Medieval Balkans*, pp. 271-272.

since the death of Ladislas Apor in 1316. The architects of the campaign were Transylvanian Voivode Toma de Szécsény and Count Dionysius, castellan of the fortress of Mehadia; their declared objectives were the recovery of Severin, which Basarab continued to hold, and the removal of the troublesome prince who harbored the sons of Ladislas Apor, archrivals of Toma and Dionysius and opponents of Angevin power in Transylvania. Swayed by the arguments of these nobles and their supporters in favor of military action, the *Chronicon pictum Vindobonense*, which provides the most extensive account of the campaign, tells us that Charles Robert gathered a large army and set out against Basarab in September 1330, “even though the voivode had always faithfully paid the tribute owed to His Majesty, the king.”<sup>164</sup>

The royal army set out from Temesvar [today Timișoara] and headed southeast, crossing the mountains into the Severin district. The invaders met little or no resistance and promptly occupied the strategic Danubian fortress; the king placed it under the command of Dionysius. Basarab now faced a difficult situation. Not only had the defeat at Velbuzd weakened his military capacity, but it deprived him of the assistance of his Bulgarian allies. Given these circumstances, the Wallachian prince resorted to diplomacy in an attempt to end the conflict with the Hungarian king. According to the *Chronicon pictum Vindobonense*, “Basarab sent emissaries worthy of great honor to the king to say to him: ‘Because you, my lord and king, have troubled to gather an army. I will pay for your trouble with 7000 silver marks and I will peacefully turn over to you Severin and all that belongs to it, which at present you hold

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<sup>164</sup>G. Popa-Lisseanu, ed., *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanorum, Fasciculus XI: Chronicon pictum Vindobonense*, Bucharest, 1937, p. 109.





Battle of Posada, 1330  
from the *Chronicon pictum Vindobonense*



by force, and, in addition to this, I will faithfully pay each year the tribute that I owe to your Crown and I will send at least one of my sons to serve at your court with my money and at my expense.”<sup>165</sup>

The peace terms proposed by Basarab were extraordinarily generous, reflecting both the gravity of his situation and the wealth of his principality. The offer to pay 7000 silver marks in war reparations is in itself remarkable. This was the equivalent of 1,680,000 dinars or 1,447 kilograms of silver or 74 kilograms of fine gold; to give some idea of what this sum represented, it should be noted that in the late fourteenth century the Moldavian Prince Peter Mușat loaned the king of Poland the much lower sum of 3000 silver rubles and received the province of Pocuția as collateral, while it took decades for the king to repay only part of the principal.<sup>166</sup>

Basarab's offer sparked a debate in the royal camp. A Czech nobleman, Count Donch, advised Charles Robert to accept the terms: “Lord, this Basarab speaks to you with great humility and honors you; for this, reply to him in your letter with the favor of royal benevolence, full of love and compassion...” Surprisingly, however, the pro-war Transylvanian faction won out. The king refused the Wallachian prince's proposal and told his emissaries: “Tell Basarab this: ‘he is the shepherd of my sheep and I will

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<sup>165</sup>Popa-Lisseanu, ed., *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanorum*, XI, p. 109.

<sup>166</sup>Dinu C. Giurescu, “Relațiile economice ale Țării Românești cu țăările peninsulei balcanice,” in *Romanoslavica*, XI (1965), p. 168; Radu Manolescu, *Comertul Țării românești și Moldovei cu Brașovul*, Bucharest, 1965, p. 19; and Ilie Minea, “Războiul lui Basarab cel Mare cu regele Carol Robert,” in *CI*, V-VII (1929-1931), p. 338.

remove him from his hiding places by his beard’.”<sup>167</sup> The Hungarian objective remained the forceable removal of Basarab from the Wallachian throne.

Having decided to continue the war, the Hungarian army advanced slowly eastward in the direction of Argeş, the capital of Wallachia. Basarab wisely refused to meet the Hungarians in open battle; he harassed the invaders<sup>168</sup> and employed scorched-earth tactics to slow their advance and bought precious time as he awaited the arrival of troops from his Tatar allies. His tactics had the desired effect: although they had not engaged in battle, the situation of the Hungarian army became critical by late October as the weather grew colder and they lacked sufficient food and water. By the time he reached Argeş, Charles Robert had a change of heart. Negotiations between the two sides resumed and the king now agreed to Basarab’s terms on the condition that he provide logistical support to ensure the safe and quick return of the royal army to Transylvania.

Basarab feigned peace but prepared for war as Tatar reinforcements had now arrived. The route taken by the royal army in its retreat to Transylvania and the location of the subsequent battle of Posada are disputed by historians. The most likely route seems to have been along the Argeş river valley as contemporary sources say that the Hungarian army was lost and not on a main road, making it highly unlikely they had followed one of the frequently-travelled routes along the Olt river valley or the Câmpulung-Rucăr-Bran-Braşov road; from the capital of Argeş this would be the most direct route back to Transylvania. In

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<sup>167</sup>Popa-Lisseanu, ed., *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanorum*, XI, pp. 109-110.

<sup>168</sup>Doc. 35 in *DRH, D*, pp. 65-66.

effect, Basarab proffered the Hungarians a short-cut home, but he had a surprise in store for them along the way.

When the royal army entered a narrow pass, probably in the vicinity of the fortress of Poenari, the Wallachians, supported by Tatar troops and possibly some Templar Knights, sprang a carefully-prepared ambush on the king's army.<sup>169</sup> The attack came to be known as the battle of Posada, a term used to refer to a fortified passage or crossing and not the name of a locality. The *Chronicon pictum Vindobonense* describes the ensuing battle: "The innumerable masses of Wallachians, from high upon the cliffs, running from every part, showered down arrows upon the Hungarian army in the valley below, along a road that should not even be called a road, but more properly a narrow path, where, unable to maneuver, the best horses and soldiers fell in battle because, as a result of the steep cliffs... they could not attack the Wallachians on either side of the road, nor could they advance, nor did they have where to run, being trapped there; the king's soldiers were caught like fish out of water."<sup>170</sup> Charles Robert himself narrowly escaped death, having changed clothes with Desiderius, the son of Count Dionysius, who was subsequently killed in the fighting.<sup>171</sup> The battle began on Friday, November 9, and lasted until Monday, November 12. The king later described it as a "hostile attack launched with brutality in some narrow and heavily forested places, surrounded by powerful fortifications."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>169</sup>Doc. 37 in *DRH, D*, pp. 67-69.

<sup>170</sup>Popa-Lisseanu, ed., *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanorum*, XI, p. 110.

<sup>171</sup>Ilie Minea, *Informațiile românești ale cronicii lui Ian Dlugosz*, Iași, 1926, p. 13.

<sup>172</sup>Doc. 29 in *DRH, D*, p. 57.

Charles Robert managed to flee incognito, with a portion of his army, but the Hungarians suffered heavy losses; the dead included royal vice-chancellor Andrew Albensis.<sup>173</sup> In addition to those killed, the Wallachians and their Tatar allies took many prisoners, horses, and large quantities of plunder. The king's royal seal also disappeared amidst the chaos.

The battle of Posada marked the most devastating defeat of a Hungarian army since the Tatar invasion of the previous century. News of Basarab's victory spread throughout Europe.<sup>174</sup> Around the same time, the Tatars launched an attack on Transylvania from the east.<sup>175</sup> Posada secured the independence of the newly established principality and, as a result of this great victory, Basarab would become known as *Intemeietorul* or "the Founder;" throughout the remainder of his reign, Charles Robert never again took up arms against his neighbor to the south.

Basarab remained a strong ally of the Tatars until the end of his reign and in so doing preserved the independence of Wallachia. In 1343, after the death of Charles Robert, Basarab sent Alexander, his son and heir to the throne, with a Wallachian army to join the Tatars in an unsuccessful attack on Transylvania.<sup>176</sup> But despite political tensions, ties to the powerful neighboring kingdom continued. Angevin Hungary had a significant influence on political, social, cultural, and economic life in Wallachia.

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<sup>173</sup>Doc. CCCCXCVII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, pp. 622-623.

<sup>174</sup>Emil C. Lăzărescu, "Despre lupta din 1330 a lui Basarab Voevod cu Carol Robert," in *RI*, XXI: 7-9 (1935), p. 246.

<sup>175</sup>Gheorghe Brancovici, *Cronica Românească*, p. 55.

<sup>176</sup>E. Lăzărescu, "In legătură cu relațiile lui Nicolae Alexandru-Voevod cu Ungurii," in *RI*, XXXII (1946), pp. 130-132.

Charles Robert introduced Western feudal customs and a new-style of government to Hungary based on Western feudal principles. Naturally, these also spread across the Carpathians. For example, French dress-style became fashionable among the elite and the nobility adopted heraldic symbols like those their Hungarian counterparts; the Wallachian coat of arms displayed on coins minted during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries borrowed elements from the seal of Angevin Hungary.<sup>177</sup> Hungarian influence was especially strong in urban centers such as Câmpulung, Argeș, Râmnicu Vâlcea, and Târgoviște where Hungarians formed a significant part of the population. The young Wallachian state adopted many aspects of Hungarian public administration; terms such as *orash* (city), *ban* (governor), *hotar* (border), and *pârcălab* (castellan), among others were borrowed from the Hungarian language, along with many toponyms of Hungarian origin.<sup>178</sup>

Nor did Basarab completely cut ties with the Catholic Church. A letter from Pope Clement VI to Louis the Great of Hungary dated October 17, 1345, tells of the conversion of Basarab's son Alexander to Catholicism, along with other commoners and nobles from Wallachia and Transylvania.<sup>179</sup> This political gesture should be viewed in connection with the changing political situation within the Golden Horde. After the death of Khan Uzbek in 1342, Tatar policy became increasingly anti-Christian<sup>180</sup> and

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<sup>177</sup>Brătianu, *Tradiția istorică*, p. 93.

<sup>178</sup>Giurescu, "O nouă sinteză," in *RIR*, I (1931), p. 352.

<sup>179</sup>Doc. 32 in *DRH*, D, pp. 60-61.

<sup>180</sup>Gheorghe I. Brătianu, "Originile stemelor Moldovei și Țării Românești" in *RIR*, I (1931), p. 59.

their hold on the areas bordering Hungary tenuous. The Pope hoped to strengthen the Catholic cause even further. On June 2, 1348, Clement VI addressed an invitation to the Franciscan monks in Hungary to send some of their brothers to *Cumania* to strengthen the faith of those recently converted and to convert others.<sup>181</sup> Of course, none of this would have been possible without Basarab's consent.

Basarab, Mircea the Old's great grandfather and the man who secured the independence of Wallachia, died at the end of 1351 or the beginning of 1352. His son Alexander, who, upon his conversion to Catholicism, took the additional name Nicholas, succeeded him as prince. By previously making Alexander his associate ruler, Basarab had assured a smooth transition of power, eliminating disputes over succession, something very important for the security of the principality given the dangers surrounding it.



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<sup>181</sup>Doc. VIII in Eudoxia Hurmuzaki, ed., *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. I, part. 2, Bucharest, 1890, pp. 7-8.

## A BRAVE NEW LAND

*How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world  
That has such people in't!*

— Shakespeare<sup>182</sup>

**N**icholas Alexander assumed the throne of this brave new land during a new period of great upheaval. Around the time of Basarab's death, Hungary launched an offensive against the Tatars driving them from the region east of the Carpathians that came to be called Moldavia. Voivode Dragoș, from the Maramureș region north of Transylvania, ruled the newly-conquered territory on the king's behalf. Although Tatar attacks persisted throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this effectively removed them from the political equation in the Carpatho-Danubian region.

South of the Danube, Bulgaria was also in decline. In the early part of the century, under Tsar Svetoslav (1300-1322), the Bulgarian Empire extended its rule along the Black Sea coast. But soon after, the Genoese expanded their influence in the Pontic

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<sup>182</sup>Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Act 5, Scene 1.

area, challenging both Bulgarian and Byzantine interests. The devastating defeat at Velbuzd in 1330 was a severe blow to the Bulgarian Empire. In its aftermath, a revolt broke out in the eastern part of the Empire led by a Bulgarian boyar of Cuman origin named Balika; the Byzantines and the large Greek population living in the coastal cities supported the rebellion. The new state, with a Greek administration, had its capital at Kaverna. In 1346, Balika intervened in the Byzantine civil war on the side of the Paleologus family, sending 1000 troops, under the command of his brothers, Dobrotitsa and Theodore, to aid the regent, Empress Anne of Savoy. Dobrotitsa distinguished himself in the service of the Byzantines and married the daughter of the most powerful member of the regency council, Alexis Apokoukus. When his brother Balika died in 1354, Dobrotitsa became ruler of the land along the Black Sea coast stretching from Varna north to the mouth of the Danube, that came to be called Dobrudja after him. Because of his ties to the Imperial family, he also received the title of despot.

Relations between Bulgaria and Wallachia cooled in the early 1350s when Tsar John Alexander divorced Nicholas Alexander's sister Theodora to marry his mistress of the same name, a Jewess converted to Christianity. All these factors forced Alexander to reconsider Wallachia's foreign policy. He now sought an accommodation with Charles Robert's son and successor Louis the Great. The king sent Demetrius, the dishop of Oradea, on a series of diplomatic missions to Wallachia and, as a result of his efforts, by the end of 1354 Alexander had acknowledged Hungarian suzerainty.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup>Doc. XXVIII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, pp. 37-38.





Nicholas Alexander  
Prince of Wallachia, 1352-1364

Alexander's ties to the Catholic Church facilitated the renewal of political relations with Hungary. Basarab had originally arranged a marriage for Alexander with an Orthodox princess from Bosnia. A son, Vladislav, also called Vlaicu, resulted from this union. Later, before his conversion to Catholicism in 1345, Alexander married a Catholic princess named Clara. We have no additional information about her background, but she may have been an Italian, possibly from Venice. Alexander's second marriage resulted in the birth of several children: two sons, Radu and Voislav, and three daughters, Ana, Elizabeth, and Anca. Like his father, Alexander arranged marriages for his children to achieve political aims. Ana married her cousin Stratimir, son of Tsar John Alexander of Bulgaria; Elizabeth married the Hungarian duke of Oppeln, a relative of Louis the Great's wife Elizabeth, and, finally, in 1360, a Ragusan emissary, Nicole Luccari, negotiated the marriage of Anca to Uros, the son and successor of Serbian Tsar Stephen Dushan.<sup>184</sup>

Nicholas Alexander remained in good relations with Hungary through 1359. A diploma issued by Louis the Great on August 29 of that year grants estates in Transylvania to some Wallachian boyars who had fled to Hungary "when the Transalpine Voivode Alexander Basarab did not want to recognize us as his rightful lord... they remained faithful to Our Majesty."<sup>185</sup> This document reflects the division within Wallachia after Basarab's death and Alexander's reluctance to submit to Hungarian suzerainty. The defeat of the Tatars in Moldavia in 1353 appears to have been the

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<sup>184</sup>Virgiliu Drăghiceanu, "Curtea domnească din Argeș," in *BCMI*, X-XVI (1917-1923), p. 17; and Pavel Chihaia, *Din cetățile de scaun ale Țării Românești*, Bucharest, 1974, pp. 181, 311.

<sup>185</sup>Doc. 40 in *DRH*, D, pp. 73-75.

decisive factor in forcing his change of policy. When Louis the Great toured Transylvania in 1359, Alexander, as his vassal, appeared before the king to pay homage; in a solemn ceremony, most likely held at Alba-Iulia in December of that year, the Wallachian prince presented gifts to his sovereign and prostrated himself before the monarch, acknowledging his suzerainty.<sup>186</sup>

Although Alexander paid formal homage to the king, he had never fully reconciled himself to the idea of accepting Hungarian overlordship. Political necessity had dictated his decision. Even as he openly acknowledged the king as his suzerain, Alexander sought ways to protect his autonomy and looked for opportunities to assert his independence once more. His ties to the Catholic Church had served him well, allowing him greater flexibility in his foreign policy, but as a vassal of Hungary they had the opposite effect. To counter this, the prince sought to formalize ties with the Greek Orthodox Church which represented the vast majority of his subjects. Supported by Metropolitan Ianchint of Vicina, Nicholas Alexander sent repeated requests to Patriarch Calixtus to establish a metropolitanate in Wallachia.

After difficult negotiations, in May of 1359 the Patriarch agreed to appoint Ianchint, at the prince's request, as "the true hierarch of all Wallachia" on the condition that Alexander and his heirs agree that the Wallachian Church will remain under the jurisdiction of the Patriarch and that, at Ianchint's death, they will only accept a hierarch sent by the Ecumenical Synod.<sup>187</sup> Alexander further strengthened his ties to the Orthodox world by

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<sup>186</sup>Lăzărescu, "Relațiile lui Nicolae Alexandru cu Ungurii," pp. 133-134, 139.

<sup>187</sup>Docs. 9 and 10 in *DIR, XIII, XIV, XV, B*, pp. 13-16.

providing financial support to the monastic center at Mount Athos, especially the Cutlumuz Monastery.<sup>188</sup> Thus, while Alexander paid homage to Louis the Great in Transylvania, at home Ianchint was setting up the new metropolitanate in Argeş with the precise scope of countering Hungarian influence.

Soon after he returned from his audience with Louis the Great, Alexander's chance to reassert his independence presented itself. A new event took place to alter the balance of power in the region. Toward the end of 1359, a Romanian voivode from Maramureş, Bogdan of Cuhea, led a revolt against Hungarian rule. He crossed the mountains into Moldavia, drove out the successors of Dragoş, and proclaimed the independence of the principality. With the Hungarians out of Moldavia, Alexander seized the opportunity to break the bonds of vassalage and to stop paying annual tribute to the Angevin king. Wallachia maintained its independence from Hungary throughout the rest of his reign. Louis the Great later complained that Alexander "forgot all of the benefits he received from us and, as an ingrate, while he still enjoyed this earthly life, he did not hesitate to renege with bold daring the bond by which he was bound before us, as well as the letters of agreement concluded between us."<sup>189</sup> Nicholas Alexander, Mircea's grandfather, died on November 16, 1364; his eldest son, Vladislav, succeeded him on the throne.

By the end of Alexander's reign, the Ottoman Turks, a new force to which the fate of Wallachia and the entire region would be tied for the next five hundred years, had established a foothold in southeastern Europe. Osman Bey (1284-1326) laid the basis of

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<sup>188</sup>"Primul Testament al lui Hariton" in *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanae*, vol. IV, Bucharest, 1982, pp. 285-293.

<sup>189</sup>Doc. 42 in *DRH, D*, pp. 78-80.

the future Ottoman state in Anatolia, but his son and successor, Orhan (1326-1359), established the foundations of an Empire, doubling its size. The Turks became involved in European affairs, intervening in the Byzantine civil wars on the side of John VI Cantecuzenus; Orhan married the Emperor's daughter Theodora and sent troops to relieve Salonika, then under siege by the Serbian Tsar Stephen Dushan. By 1354, the Ottomans gained a permanent base in Europe when, in the aftermath of a devastating earthquake, they occupied Gallipoli, the principal crossing point between Asia and Europe. Having gained this foothold on the continent, the Turks took advantage of the chaotic situation in the Balkans to expand further into Europe. The Turkish advance in southeastern Europe at this time was nothing more than a series of random conquests, where and when the opportunity presented itself. Ottoman expansion in both Asia and Europe continued under Orhan's son Murad I (1360-1389). He took Adrianople in 1362 and then made it his capital, thereby brazenly declaring Ottoman intentions to impose Islamic rule over Christian Europe.

Several things favored Ottoman expansion in Europe at this time. The Black Death had reached Constantinople in 1347 aboard Genoese ships arriving from the Black Sea port of Caffa; it spread throughout the continent during the following decades, decimating up to one-third of the population. Europe had also entered a period of social and economic crisis that sparked major peasant uprisings in France (1358), England (1381), and Transylvania (1437). The British historian Rodney Hilton explains that "society was paralysed by the increasing costs of the social and political superstructure – costs which were not being

paid for by any increase in society's productive resources."<sup>190</sup> Southeastern Europe was a collection of small states frequently in conflict with one another making them easy prey for the powerful, centralized Ottoman Empire. All of Europe was divided. The long, intermittent struggle between France and England known as the Hundred Years' War kept the states of western Europe from focusing their attention elsewhere, and the Catholic Church, theoretically a unifying factor, was itself divided into opposing camps by the Great Schism. In addition, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches had never reconciled. These factors and a host of others prevented any unified Christian opposition to the Islamic invaders.

On the other side of the coin, the Ottomans possessed significant advantages. Driven by a zealous religious ideology, and having a highly centralized administration, the Turks did not have to deal with the types of problems that divided Europe. The Sultan apportioned the lands of his Empire employing what is known as the *timariote* system, creating a non-hereditary aristocracy with no limits on their military service; all lands were held at the Sultan's discretion and could be passed on from father to son only with his express consent. This was diametrically opposed to the Feudal system in Europe where nobles jealously guarded their power and privileges, ruling over semi-autonomous fiefdoms. Equally important was the organization of the Janissary corps at the beginning of the reign of Murad I; this provided the Sultan with a professional standing army, the likes of which Europe had not seen since Roman times. The ranks of the Janissaries were filled by means of the *devshirme*, essentially a tax

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<sup>190</sup>Rodney Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism*, London, 1985, pp. 241-242.



on male Christian children. These children, aged eight to eighteen, were carefully selected from Christian families having more than one son and living in territories under Ottoman rule; the recruits were then assigned to estates in Anatolia, converted to Islam, and trained as warriors. Fiercely loyal, the Janissaries became the Sultan's personal bodyguard and his elite fighting force. Finally, driven by an Islamic concept of world domination, with the Sultan as both political and spiritual leader, the Ottomans confronted Christian Europe from a position of unity and strength that Europeans could not match.

Louis the Great was determined to bring Wallachia back under Hungarian suzerainty, and the death of Nicholas Alexander seemed to afford him the perfect opportunity. From his capital at Visegrad, Louis issued an order on January 5, 1365, to mobilize the royal army for a campaign against Wallachia, declaring that Alexander's son "Vladislav, following the bad habits of his father..., refused to recognize us in any way as his rightful lord."<sup>191</sup> But the Hungarian army that gathered at Temesvar that spring ultimately had another destination. Abandoning the offensive against Wallachia, probably because he received intelligence that Vladislav was well-prepared to meet the attack, the king redirected his forces south against Vidin, then ruled by Vladislav's cousin and brother-in-law, Stratimir.

Around 1360 Tsar John Alexander had divided his Empire between his two sons, Stratimir and Shishman. Stratimir ruled over the western part with his capital at Vidin, while his half-brother Shishman, John Alexander's son by his second marriage, ruled over the eastern part from Trnovo. The division of the

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<sup>191</sup>Doc. 42 in *DRH, D*, pp. 78-80.

country amounted to a death sentence for Bulgaria. Vidin was a major commercial center in the region, especially for trade with Ragusa and the Dalmatian coast, and a strategically important fortress on the Danube; from here Louis hoped to extend Hungarian influence and to spread Catholicism south of the Danube. The Hungarians took the city by storm on May 30, 1365, and captured Stratimir and his wife, Vladislav's half-sister Ana. The Bulgarian Tsar and Tsarina were exiled to Humnic in Croatia where they remained in custody for the next four years. With Vidin now under Hungarian rule, Vladislav decided to acknowledge Louis the Great's suzerainty, entitling himself "Ladislav, by the grace of God *and his Majesty the King*, Transalpine Voivode and Ban of Severin."<sup>192</sup>

With the Hungarians advancing in the Balkans and the Ottoman threat omnipresent, Byzantine Emperor John V Paleologus made the unprecedented decision to travel to Hungary to seek assistance from Catholic Europe to drive back the Muslim invaders. Never before had a Byzantine monarch left the Empire except at the head of a conquering army. But the Turks were not the only peril Byzantium faced. Pope Urban V wrote to John V in early 1366 advising him to return to union with the Roman Church, menacingly reminding the Emperor that Constantinople was threatened on one side by the king of Hungary and on the other by the king of Cyprus, aided by many Latins.<sup>193</sup> Meanwhile, Shishman attacked Black Sea ports held by Dobrotitsa and the Byzantines. On the surface, negotiations in Buda between John V and Louis the Great proceeded well. In July, Urban V again wrote

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<sup>192</sup>Doc 46 in *DRH, D*, pp. 86-87, emphasis added.

<sup>193</sup>Doc: LXXX in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, pp. 111-112.



to the Emperor, this time to congratulate him on his intention to unite with the Church of Rome, together with his entire people.<sup>194</sup> But, at the same time, the Pope wrote to Louis the Great, warning him not to place too much faith in the promises of the Greeks, and to offer them help against the Turks only after the Emperor and his sons return to union with the Church of Rome.<sup>195</sup> When negotiations concluded, John V made his way overland via Temesvar, Sebeş, Mehadia, and Severin to Vidin, on the Danube, where he embarked on a ship for the voyage home. The route was feasible only because of Vladislav's alliance with Hungary. But along the way, probably around Nicopolis or at Varna on the Black Sea coast, the Bulgarians under Shishman captured the Emperor and held him prisoner.

The Emperor was fortunate in that his cousin, Amadeus of Savoy, had come to Constantinople on a crusading expedition. The man known as the Green Count, after the color of his armor, recovered Gallipoli from the Turks in May 1366. When news of John V's capture reached Constantinople, Amadeus advanced up the Black Sea coast, took back Messembria from the Bulgarians, and laid siege to Varna, demanding that Shishman release the Emperor. The Green Count appealed to the Emperor's ally Dobrotitsa, whose capital was then at Kaliakra, for assistance.<sup>196</sup> By the end of 1366, their combined actions led to the safe return of John V. To strengthen ties between Byzantium and Dobrotitsa

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<sup>194</sup>Doc. LXXXVII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, pp. 127-129.

<sup>195</sup>Doc. LXXXIII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, p. 119.

<sup>196</sup>N. Iorga, "Venetia in Marea Neagră, I. Dobrotici," in *AARMSI*, series II, XXXVI (1913-1914), pp. 1046-1047; and Francisc Pall, "Encore une fois sur le voyage diplomatique de Jean V Paléologue en 1365/66," in *RESEE*, IX:3 (1971), p. 539.

around this time, John V's son Michael Paleologus married one of Dobrotitsa's daughters. Desperate for aid from the West, John V stayed true to his word and travelled to Rome where he personally converted to Catholicism before the Pope on October 18, 1369. But his efforts were in vain. Despite papal appeals, no significant aid from the West was forthcoming and the union of the two Churches could not be realized. "As Michael VII had so tragically demonstrated nearly a hundred years before," John Julius Norwich, the acclaimed historian of the Byzantine Empire, keenly observed, "union could not be unilaterally imposed from above; the Emperor had no control over the souls of his subjects."<sup>197</sup> Ultimately, John V had no choice but to renew his peace treaty with Murad I, placing him in the humiliating position of vassal to the Sultan.

Meanwhile, to rebuild his Empire, the Bulgarian Tsar Shishman allied with the Sultan and, with Ottoman military assistance, he attacked Hungary in 1367, laying siege to Vidin. In these circumstances, Vladislav proved an indispensable ally for Louis the Great. He supplied the city with desperately needed victuals<sup>198</sup> and helped the king fend off the Bulgarian-Turkish attack. Then, on January 20, 1368, at the request of the Hungarian court, Vladislav confirmed his peace treaty with Louis the Great and granted trade privileges to the Transylvanian city of Braşov.<sup>199</sup> But despite these manifestations of peace, storm clouds loomed on the horizon. Vladislav never intended to remain a vassal of the

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<sup>197</sup>John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Decline and Fall*, New York, 1996, p. 332.

<sup>198</sup>Doc. 50 in *DRH, D*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>199</sup>Doc. 46 in *DRH, D*, pp. 86-87.

king of Hungary and he patiently awaited the opportunity to reassert Wallachia's independence.

Vladislav's most reliable ally throughout this period was Dobrotitsa. The two neighboring lands seem to have forged an alliance already during Nicholas Alexander's reign through the marriage of his son Radu to Dobrotitsa's daughter Kalinikia, probably arranged by Metropolitan Ianchint who had strong ties to Dobrotitsa's lands. In 1367, while Vladislav fought the Bulgarians and Turks beneath the walls of Vidin, Dobrotitsa launched an offensive against John Shishman's Empire from the east, seizing the Danubian port city of Silistra where he made his son Terter local ruler.<sup>200</sup> Throughout this period, Dobrotitsa engaged in a long war with Genoa as the Italians sought to monopolize trade along the Black Sea coast. In the course of this war, which did not formally end until 1387, after the despot's death, Genoa managed to seize control of the strategic Danubian port city of Kilia.

An opportunity soon presented itself for Vladislav to throw off the Hungarian yoke. The burden of Hungarian rule and the aggressive Catholic proselytizing of the Franciscan missionaries caused increasing unrest among the largely Orthodox population in Vidin and the surrounding territory. By late summer of 1368, a full-scale rebellion had broken out and threatened to spread to the Banat region of Hungary. Although Hungarian officials at Vidin blamed Shishman for inciting the revolt and asked "Vladislav, the Transalpine voivode, to send, if not more, at least three or four of

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<sup>200</sup>Ernest Oberlander-Tarnoveanu, "Quelques remarques sur les émissions monétaires médiévales de la Dobroudja méridionale" in *RRH*, XXVII: 1-2 (1988), p. 113.

his flags,”<sup>201</sup> the king clearly viewed the Wallachian prince as the source of his troubles in the region. In September of that year, Louis again mobilized his army for war against Vladislav.<sup>202</sup> The Hungarians launched a two-pronged attack in October 1368. The king led a force against Severin in the west, while the voivode of Transylvania invaded from the north, via the Bran pass, in an attempt to reach Argeș. A contemporary Hungarian chronicler, Johannes de Küküllew, records that Vladislav “stood guard along the Danube with a large army, on the border with Bulgaria, to impede the crossing of the king’s army. Meanwhile, Voivode Nicholas forced the crossing of the Ialomița River [most likely the Dâmbovița River] where the Wallachians had built trenches and fortifications and encountered a large army of Voivode Vlaicu, led by Count Dragomir, the castellan of Dâmbovița. He defeated them in a fierce battle in which many fell and the commander himself [Dragomir] fled. But after that, he [Nicholas] advanced too far and entered the bogs with reeds and narrow passages; then the Wallachians, striking from the forests and mountains, attacked him, and he, the voivode, with many other brave men and leading nobles... met death here. And when the Hungarian soldiers separated from the army of the voivode retreated and tried to escape, the Wallachians surrounded them... in a swampy, desolated area and killed many of them, so that few were able to escape.... The body of Voivode Nicholas could only be recovered from the clutches of the Wallachians after a bloody battle...”<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup>Doc. 53 in *DRH, D*, pp. 93-95.

<sup>202</sup>Doc. 51 and 52 in *DRH, D*, pp. 91-93.

<sup>203</sup>Quo. Victor Motogna, “La războaiele lui Vlaciuc-Vodă cu Ungurii,” in *RI*, IX: 1-3 (1923), p. 18.

But by late November, Louis's army received reinforcements, with the arrival of troops led by Nicholas Garai, and managed to force the crossing of the Danube "against the attacks of the soldiers and archers of Laicu, voivode of the Wallachians, who fired arrows like a rainstorm." Küküllew adds that the Hungarians "forced the enemy to flee and they dispersed like smoke. Then the army entered the Severin land and occupied it."<sup>204</sup> As winter was upon them, the Hungarians withdrew after consolidating and garrisoning the fortress of Severin. The king's success was ephemeral. With help from Dobrotitsa, and reinforced by Dragomir's victorious troops, Vladislav quickly regained Severin and traversed the Danube. Coming to the aid of the rebellious local population, the Wallachians occupied Vidin on February 12, 1369. By now anti-Hungarian and anti-Catholic sentiment had reached a boiling point. The arrival of Vlaicu's men sparked the outbreak of a massacre which claimed the lives of the Franciscan missionaries in that city. But the Wallachian prince's offensive did not end here. Vladislav also attacked Hungarian positions in southern Transylvania, burning the Monastery of St. Nicholas at Talmesch, along the Olt River, twenty kilometers south-southeast of Sibiu.<sup>205</sup>

Louis the Great could not allow this defeat to go unanswered. By April, he had gathered a new army and set out against Vladislav. The impending conflict forced both sides to negotiate. By mid-summer they reached a peace agreement; Louis agreed to restore Vladislav's brother-in-law Stratimir to the throne in Vidin.

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<sup>204</sup>Quo. Alexandru A. Vasilescu, "Cetatea Dâmbovița" in *BCMI*, XXXVIII (1945), p. 32.

<sup>205</sup>Doc. CXIII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part 2, p. 149.

On August 29, 1369, the king wrote to Peter, the ban of Bulgaria: “We have freed the Tsar of Vidin on the guarantee of Voivode Vlaicu and of Dobrotitsa and we have promised to return his country to him, on the condition that he give us his two daughters as hostages.”<sup>206</sup> Stratimir also had to promise to prevent further violence against Catholics in his lands. To ensure this, at the encouragement of her mother, Nicholas Alexander’s widow, the Catholic Princess Clara, Tsarina Ana, Stratimir’s wife, converted to Catholicism.<sup>207</sup> Finally, as Vidin was an important commercial center for trade between Transylvania and Ragusa on the Adriatic coast, Stratimir granted trade privileges to merchants from Braşov.<sup>208</sup>

Vladislav emerged as the clear victor in this confrontation. Not only did he succeed in returning Stratimir to the throne and in forcing Louis to accept his rule over Severin, as part of the peace settlement the king also granted Vladislav and his successors the duchy of Făgăraş in southern Transylvania. With the acquisition of this predominantly Romanian populated territory, the Wallachian prince now added “Duke of Făgăraş,” to his title,<sup>209</sup> which he referred to in a diploma from 1372, granting the market of Scherkkengen (today Şercaia) and several villages in this region to his relative Ladislav of Dobka, in recognition of his services

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<sup>206</sup>Doc. 54 in *DRH, D*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>207</sup>Doc. CXXII Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, p. 158.

<sup>208</sup>Doc. I in Gr.G. Tocilescu, ed. *534 documente istorice slavo-române*, Bucharest, 1931, p. 3; and P. Dragulev, “Scrisoarea Țarului Strasilir dela Vidin către negustorii Braşoveni,” in *RIR*, IX (1939), p. 295.

<sup>209</sup>Doc. 3 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 12-13.

against the Bulgarians and the Turks, as his “*nove plantacions*.”<sup>210</sup> In return, Vladislav again recognized the suzerainty of the Crown of St. Stephen and agreed to protect Catholicism. On November 25, 1369, he issued a decree ordering all Catholics in his principality to accept a new bishop sent as the representative of the bishop of Transylvania to whom the Catholic Church in Wallachia was subordinate.<sup>211</sup> But despite the urging of his step-mother Clara, a devout Catholic, Vladislav did not respond favorably to Pope Urban V’s personal appeal to him in April 1370 to return to union with the Church of Rome so that he may become an “Athlete of Christ” in recognition of his military victories.<sup>212</sup> It should be noted that Vladislav’s refusal came only six months after the Byzantine Emperor himself had submitted to Rome.

Like his father before him, Vladislav, while protecting Catholicism, shrewdly took steps to strengthen Orthodoxy in his country as a counterbalance to Hungarian political interests which were inextricably linked to Catholic propaganda. He supported the Orthodox monastic center at Mount Athos, rebuilding the Cutmuluz Monastery.<sup>213</sup> On this occasion he met the monastery’s abbot, Hariton, who subsequently became the Metropolitan of Wallachia. Vladislav also made gifts to the Lavra Monastery on Mount Athos, including an inscribed icon donated by him and his wife Ana.<sup>214</sup> More importantly, he strengthened the Church by seeking the approval of the Patriarch to establish a second

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<sup>210</sup>Doc. 5 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 14-17.

<sup>211</sup>Doc. 3 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 12-13.

<sup>212</sup>Doc. CXXIII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part 2, p. 159.

<sup>213</sup>Doc. 11 in *DIR, XIII, XIV, XV, B*, pp. 16-19.

<sup>214</sup>N. Iorga, “Muntele Athos in legătură cu țerile noastre,” in *AARMSI*, series II, XXXVI (1913-1914), pp. 459-460.

Metropolitanate in Wallachia, strategically located at Severin to counter Hungarian-Catholic proselytizing in this area. The Ecumenical Synod approved the plan in October 1370, appointing Daniil Kritopoulos, who took the monastic name Antim, as Metropolitan in Severin because “with the passage of time, as the population of the country happens to be larger, almost innumerable, a single hierarch is not enough for such a large people...”<sup>215</sup> This new Metropolitanate remained subordinate to Argeș,<sup>216</sup> but henceforth, until Wallachia lost the Severin land in the early fifteenth century, the principality had two metropolitans, one at Severin and the other at Argeș.

The most important step Vladislav took to strengthen Orthodoxy, however, was to establish monasteries in his country. These served as religious, cultural, and educational centers, and also played an important role in political and economic life. The introduction of monasticism to Wallachia was the work of a monk named Nicodim, the most important cultural and religious figure in the principality during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Born of a Greek father and Serbian mother, Nicodim took his monastic vows at Mount Athos. He spent several years in Serbia, helping to organize the Church there. Then, around 1369, when the conflict between Orthodoxy and Catholicism in the borderlands between Wallachia, Bulgaria, and Serbia was at its height, he led a group of Serbian monks to Wallachia where they received Vladislav’s support and protection. By 1372, Nicodim and his followers had raised the Monastery of Vodița in the Severin land, receiving generous financial contributions and

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<sup>215</sup>Doc. 15 in *DIR, XIII, XIV, XV, B*, p. 22.

<sup>216</sup>Doc. V in Eudoxia de Hurmuzaki and N. Iorga, eds., *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. XIV, part 1, Bucharest, 1915, pp. 6-7.





Monastery of Tismana

material donations from the Wallachian prince. These included villages exempted from all royal works and taxes. In addition, Vladislav recognized the autonomy of the monastery, declaring that after Nicodim's death neither the prince, nor the metropolitan, nor anyone else could appoint the new abbot, and that the monks would be free to choose their own leader in the manner that Nicodim established.<sup>217</sup> This "rule of Nicodim" came to govern all monasteries in Wallachia.

Vodița was a modest construction along the banks of Danube with a small church dedicated to St. Anthony. But Nicodim, hearing God's call, determined to found a larger monastery at a less vulnerable location in the interior of the country. While travelling in the heavily-forested, mountainous areas of northern Oltenia, he met a child who led him to a place in the cavernous mountains. According to legend, Nicodim entered a small cave, located above a larger one through which a stream flowed, to meditate and to pray. There he encountered a large snake that hissed and opened its mouth to bite the monk. Nicodim calmly made the sign of the cross using a lead crucifix he wore around his neck. The snake fled and fell from the cave and died instantly, leaving its imprint on the stone above the lower cave. Nicodim then descended and blessed the site where he raised the monastery called Tismana.<sup>218</sup>

The legend of the founding of Tismana has all the elements of an allegory for the victory of Christianity over the forces of evil, represented by the serpent, an image that later contributed to the development of the Dracula myth. During Vladislav's reign a

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<sup>217</sup>Doc. 6 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 17-19.

<sup>218</sup>Stefulescu, *Mănăstirea Tismana*, pp. 51-54.

small wooden church was raised on the site. Under his successors, Radu and Dan, a stone monastery was constructed. Tismana became the most important religious center in Wallachia during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Nicodim remained here as abbot until his death at the end of 1406. His followers spread the monastic tradition to the neighboring lands of Transylvania and Moldavia. Nicodim also served as a political advisor to Wallachian princes. As a theologian, he corresponded with Evtimiy, the Bulgarian Patriarch at Trnovo, the leading spiritual figure in the Slavic Orthodox world, on various moral and religious issues. He also compiled and illustrated a Slavonic translation of the Holy Scriptures which remains one of the cultural and artistic treasures of Wallachia dating from this period.

Vladislav's efforts to maintain his autonomy were carefully planned. The situation in the Balkans changed when Shishman, once an ally of the Turks, began to support the Serbs against the Ottomans. Hoping to drive the Muslims from Europe, Serbian leaders organized an offensive against the Turks in 1371. On September 26, the two sides met in battle at Cernomen on the Marica River. It resulted in a major victory for the Sultan that opened the way for further Ottoman expansion in the Balkans. This directly threatened Shishman's Empire. Following the principle that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, by late 1372, Vladislav found himself in an alliance with the Sultan against both Hungary and Shishman's Bulgaria. By the summer of 1374 he had seized the important Danubian city of Nicopolis from the Bulgarians<sup>219</sup> and appears to have extended his control over Rucăr in the Carpathians. In response, Louis the Great had placed an

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<sup>219</sup>Doc. 63 in *DRH, D*, pp. 107-108.

embargo on salt imports from Wallachia at the beginning of 1373.<sup>220</sup> Meanwhile, Pope Gregory XI forbade the sale of arms to the Turks and Wallachians because they used these weapons against Christians.<sup>221</sup> Vladislav failed to hold Nicopolis, but the conflict with Catholic Hungary continued throughout the remainder of his reign. Louis took measures to strengthen his border defenses; he built a powerful stone fortress at Bran<sup>222</sup> on the site of the wooden fort that the Teutonic Knights had constructed at the beginning the thirteenth century. In the early sixteenth century, the humanist Nicholas Olahus, a Transylvanian native, described Bran as “indescribably strong, like a bolt and gate for Transylvania, located in a steep place from where you enter into Wallachia.”<sup>223</sup> To defend the fortress, also called Terciu by the Hungarians and the Saxons, Louis brought in English archers,<sup>224</sup> the most renowned bowmen in Europe at that time.

Vladislav died around 1376, shortly after his teenaged half-brother Voislav, both apparently victims of the plague. Although the sparsity of crowded urban centers lessened the impact of the Black Death in Wallachia in comparison with many other parts of Europe,<sup>225</sup> it still wreaked havoc on the principality. “Fear of the plague” was among the reasons given to the Patriarch by the elderly Metropolitan Ianchint for his not making the journey to

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<sup>220</sup>Doc. 61 in *DRH, D*, p. 106.

<sup>221</sup>Doc. CLII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part 2, p. 207.

<sup>222</sup>Doc. 67 in *DRH, D*, pp. 110-112.

<sup>223</sup>Holban, *Călători străini*, vol. I, p. 492.

<sup>224</sup>N. Iorga, *Istoria armatei românești*, vol. I, Vălenii-de-Munte, 1910, p. 91.

<sup>225</sup>Lia Lehr, “Factori determinanți în evoluția demografică a Țării Românești,” in *Studii și materiale de istorie medie*, vol. VII, Bucharest, 1974, p. 189.

Constantinople to attend the Holy Synod.<sup>226</sup> In his last will and testament, written in July 1378, Hariton, the former abbot of the Cutlumuz Monastery who became Metropolitan of Wallachia, declares that he is deathly ill “and tried in the most powerful manner by *the plague which is now rampant*.”<sup>227</sup> Vladislav had no sons and so his half-brother Radu succeeded him on the throne. Numismatic evidence indicates that Vladislav had earlier made Radu his associate ruler,<sup>228</sup> thus ensuring a smooth transfer of power.

Radu, dubbed Negru by seventeenth century chroniclers who mistook him for the founder of the principality, was Mircea's father. Writing in the early fifteenth century, Eberhard Windecke, Sigismund of Luxemburg's biographer, called him Pankraz the Wise, Pankraz being a corrupt form of Ban Radu,<sup>229</sup> an indication of the esteem he had earned as ruler of Wallachia. Radu is a name of Slavic origin, meaning ‘happy’. Its variants include Radoslav or Radomir.<sup>230</sup> Like Mircea and Vlad, it was a popular name among the Wallachian elite; there were four rulers named Radu during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Radu had two wives. The first, Ana, probably a Serbian princess, bore him a son named Dan. Although Nicolae Iorga has suggested that she was a

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<sup>226</sup>Doc. VI in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. XIV, part 1, pp. 7-8.

<sup>227</sup>Doc. 21 in *DIR, XIII, XIV, XV, B*, pp. 28-32, emphasis added.

<sup>228</sup>Octavian Iliescu, “Domni asociați în țările române în secolele al XIV-lea și al XV-lea” in *Studii și cercetări de istorie medie*, II: 1 (1951), pp. 41-43.

<sup>229</sup>Constantin Giurescu, *Istoria românilor*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1942, p. 421.

<sup>230</sup>Constantinescu, *Dicționar onomastic*, pp. 355-357.

Byzantine princess,<sup>231</sup> and others a daughter of Oltenian boyars,<sup>232</sup> Radu's second wife and Mircea's mother, Kalinikia, was most likely a daughter of Dobrotitsa.<sup>233</sup> She bore him Mircea and other sons.

Unfortunately, relatively little information has survived about Radu's reign. We know that he fought to maintain Wallachia's independence against Hungary. A contemporary Italian chronicle, *Cronaca Carrarese*, written by Galeazzo and Bartolomeo Gatari, tells of a great battle in the summer of 1377 between Louis, the king of Hungary, and "Radano, the infidel prince of Bulgaria," a confusion because of the Slavic aristocracy that ruled Wallachia. Radu received Ottoman military assistance in his battle with the Hungarians, while the Venetians, perhaps because of his mother's family ties, supplied him with arms despite the Pope's interdiction of their sale four years earlier. Although Louis claimed victory in his foreign correspondence<sup>234</sup> and possibly regained Severin, in late October he decried heavy losses suffered "in our recent expedition against the Transalpine Wallachians."<sup>235</sup> To attract the support of his Saxon subjects in southern Transylvania for a new campaign against Wallachia, the king wrote to the officials of Braşov on November 19, promising them that "if the Transalpine land will fall into our hands," he would lower customs taxes.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>231</sup>N. Iorga, *Chestiunea Dunării*, Vălenii-de-Munte, 1913, p. 154.

<sup>232</sup>P.P. Panaiteşcu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, Bucharest, 1944, p. 46-48.

<sup>233</sup>Sergiu Iosipescu, *Balica, Dobrotiţa, Ioancu*, Bucharest, 1985, p. 125.

<sup>234</sup>G.I. Brătianu, "L'expédition de Louis I-er de Hongrie contre le prince de Valachie Radu I-er Basarab en 1377," in *RHSEE*, II: 4-6 (1925), pp. 76-77; 80-82.

<sup>235</sup>Doc. CXC VII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part 2 pp. 248-249.

<sup>236</sup>Doc. CLXXXIX in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part 2, pp. 242-243.





Louis the Great  
King of Hungary

Yet, despite repeated efforts throughout the remainder of his reign, Louis the Great failed to subjugate the “Land across the Mountains.”

Despite the ongoing struggle with Hungary, Radu did not adopt a policy hostile to the Catholic Church. Instead, he appears to have tried to distance the Catholic Church in Wallachia from Hungarian domination by establishing a Bishopric at Argeș, directly dependent on Rome rather than on the Bishop of Transylvania. This again may reflect Clara’s influence. On July 15, 1379, Pope Urban VI granted the Franciscans permission to establish monasteries in Serbia and Wallachia.<sup>237</sup> A new Catholic church, dedicated to St. Nicholas, was built in the capital of Argeș, and, in 1381, Urban VI appointed Nicholas Anthony as bishop for the Wallachian diocese. Perhaps because of his sagacious religious policy, Radu was subsequently dubbed “the Wise.”

Near the end of Radu’s reign, a new period of political crisis engulfed Hungary. Building on the successes of his father, Charles Robert, Louis the Great had strengthened Hungary and become one of Europe’s most powerful monarchs. When his maternal uncle Casimir of Poland died without an heir in 1370, Louis assumed the added title of king of Poland. The joining of the two kingdoms under the same ruler created a superpower in Eastern Europe with the potential to dominate half of the continent. But the union was a fragile one and in peril from the moment of its inception for Louis had not yet produced an heir. His second wife, Elizabeth of Bosnia, bore him three daughters, but no son. The king attempted to overcome this problem betrothing his oldest daughter, Catherine, to Louis, the duke of Orleans and brother of

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<sup>237</sup>Doc. CCVII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, pp. 268-268.



French King Charles V, but his plan failed when Catherine died shortly thereafter.

Next, he arranged for the engagement of his infant daughter Mary to Sigismund of Luxemburg, son of Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV. Theoretically, this made Sigismund heir to the thrones of Hungary and Poland, but the marriage had not yet taken place when Louis died in 1382. This sparked a major political crisis. The Polish nobility refused to accept Mary and Sigismund as their sovereigns and Sigismund's attempts to assert his claim by force failed. After a long series of conflicts and negotiations, a compromise was finally reached; the nobles agreed to recognize Louis's youngest daughter, Hedwiga, as Queen of Poland. She was crowned in October 1384. Next, the critical question of marriage was debated, for whoever married Hedwiga would become the next king of Poland. The man chosen was Jagiello, the pagan grand duke of Lithuania, on the condition that he convert to Catholicism. He did so and then he married Hedwiga on February 18, 1386. Adopting the Christian name Vladislav, he was crowned king on March 4 of that year. The union of Poland and Lithuania created a new power in Eastern Europe, one that would rival Hungary in the following decades.

The situation in Hungary was no less turbulent, reminiscent of the period following the death of Andrew III at the beginning of the century. Although Mary was crowned queen after the death of Louis the Great, the opposition of queen mother Elizabeth to her pending marriage prevented Sigismund from being crowned king. Elizabeth planned to rule as regent, with the help of the powerful Palatine Nicholas Garai. Sigismund attempted to force the issue in 1385, arriving in Hungary to claim his bride and his throne, but he was driven out by the regents.

Meanwhile, a new pretender appeared on the scene in the form of Charles of Durazzo, the king of Naples and a distant relative of Louis I. Educated in Buda, Charles enjoyed the support of part of the nobility. He landed in Dalmatia in the fall of 1385 and made his way to the Hungarian capital where he was crowned as Charles II on December 31, 1385. Elizabeth, appalled at the audacity of the Neapolitan king, immediately began plotting against him. On February 24, 1386, less than two months after his reign began, agents of the queen mother assassinated Charles. The late king's supporters could not let this deed go unpunished. In reply, they killed Nicholas Garai and took Elizabeth and Mary captive. The queen mother was strangled to death some months later.

With civil war rampant, Sigismund returned to Hungary in the fall of 1386 to free his captive fiancée and to press his claim to the throne once more. This time he had the support of a powerful faction of nobles who, tired of the ongoing domestic strife, saw him as a means to restore order in the kingdom. Mary was freed and on March 31, 1387, nineteen-year-old Sigismund of Luxemburg, the man who would later place Mircea's son Vlad on the throne of Wallachia, became king of Hungary.

Amidst the turmoil engulfing neighboring Hungary, Mircea the Old's father, Radu I, died around 1383. His eldest son Dan now succeeded him on the throne. Little is known about Dan's reign. A Bulgarian ballad tells of "Dan Voivode Ban, who rules over many lands... over fortresses, monasteries, and mountains, over the wide plain, over the numerous villages."<sup>238</sup> Another

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<sup>238</sup>Quo. Ion Donat, "Așezările omenești din Țara Românească," in *Studii*, IX:6 (1956), p. 81.

ballad speaks of Dan as living in a village called Satul din Vale (the Village in the Valley) and drinking wine with the villagers.<sup>239</sup> The little information available to us indicates that Dan took advantage of the disarray in Hungary; he appears to have regained Severin and continued his attack north against the fortress of Mehadia, where a diploma issued by Sigismund in 1390 recalls “the time when Voivode Dan invaded with his powerful army... the said places of our fortress of Mehadia.”<sup>240</sup>

As a result of this conflict with Hungary, Dan seems to have gained the small Duchy of Amlaş near Sibiu. Queen Maria had granted this estate to the bishop of Transylvania on June 1, 1383,<sup>241</sup> but the upheaval in Hungary and the need to secure peace along the southern border of the kingdom forced the transfer of this territory to the ruler of the Transalpine land on the same terms as Făgăraş, which Wallachian princes had ruled since the time of Vladislav I. Dan also completed the building of the Monastery of Tismana. The only surviving document from his reign grants and confirms villages and other privileges to this monastery. Dan recounts that “at the beginning of the reign granted to me by God, I found in the land of My Majesty, at the place called Tismana, a monastery, not in all of its parts yet finished, which the holy departed most venerable Voivode Radu, the father of My Majesty, raised from its foundation, but he did not finish it due to the shortness of his life. For this reason, My Majesty willed that, as his successor on the throne, to be his successor also in this and to

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<sup>239</sup>N. Şerbănescu and N. Stoicescu, *Mircea cel Mare (1386-1418)*, Bucharest, 1987, p. 43.

<sup>240</sup>Doc. 76 in *DRH, D*, pp. 123-125.

<sup>241</sup>Doc.CCXIX in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part 2, p. 278.

continue the charity of my father and for my own soul to finish building this church dedicated to the Holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary...”<sup>242</sup> This document is also significant as it is the first written evidence we have of the presence of Gypsy slaves in Wallachia.

Dan had at least three sons, Vlad, John, and Dan, but they all were apparently still quite young at the time of his death. To ensure a smooth succession, numismatic evidence indicates that, at the beginning of his reign, Dan named his half-brother Mircea as his associate ruler. This proved a wise precaution; it ensured a smooth transition of power when, only three years later, Dan unexpectedly fell in battle against the Bulgarian Tsar John Shishman on September 23, 1386. Fate had now intervened and Mircea, an unlikely ruler, assumed the throne, destined to become the most celebrated prince in the medieval history of Wallachia.



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<sup>242</sup>Doc. 7 in *DRH, B*, vol. pp. 19-22.

## ASSUMPTION

*“A wise man ought always to follow the paths beaten by great men, and to imitate those who have been supreme, so that if his ability does not equal theirs, at least it will savour of it.”*

— Nicolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*<sup>243</sup>

**M**ircea the Old assumed the throne of Wallachia in the fall of 1386, during a time of tumultuous political change in the region. Hungary and Poland emerged from the chaos following the death of Louis the Great as separate, but powerful states competing to extend their influence in the Black Sea region to control the important East-West trade routes. Meanwhile, the Ottoman advance in the Balkans continued and the forces of Islam would soon reach the Danube. The small principality between the Carpathians and the Danube struggled to preserve its autonomy amidst the pressure exerted upon it by these three regional superpowers. Fortunately, in Mircea the Old, whom the Turkish chronicler Leunclavius dubbed “the bravest and most

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<sup>243</sup>Nicolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 41 (VI).

able of Christian princes,<sup>244</sup> Wallachia had a leader capable of confronting these new challenges. He set the example that his sons, including Vlad Dracul, and his grandsons, including Vlad the Impaler, known as Dracula, would strive to emulate.

Since the time of Nicholas Alexander, a common cause joined Wallachia to its neighbor Moldavia – the struggle against Hungarian domination. When Mircea took the throne, Peter I (c. 1375-1392), a descendant of Bogdan I who had proclaimed the independence of the principality in 1359, ruled Moldavia. Through his mother, Margaret or Mușata, Peter had ties to the ruling family of Lithuania.<sup>245</sup> When Lithuanian Grand Duke Jagiello became king of Poland these ties transformed into relations of vassalage as Moldavia accepted the suzerainty of the Polish Crown on May 6, 1387,<sup>246</sup> to counter the threat posed by Hungary. This bond was strengthened the following year when Vladislav Jagiello solicited a loan of 4000 silver rubles from the Moldavian prince, offering the region of Pocuția, to the north of Moldavia, as collateral. Peter responded by sending 3000 silver rubles, the equivalent of 360,000 gold galbens, to the king,<sup>247</sup> money desperately needed by the Polish monarch to consolidate his hold on the throne and to fend off the attacks of Sigismund who had not yet renounced his claim to the Polish Crown.

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<sup>244</sup>Johannes Leunclavius, *Historia Musulmana Turcorum de monumentis ipsorum exscripta*, Frankfurt, 1591, f. 418.

<sup>245</sup>C. Ciohandru, *Alexandru cel Bun*, Iași, 1984, p. 41.

<sup>246</sup>Docs. 162 and 163 in Costăchescu, ed., *Documentele moldovenești*, vol. II, pp. 599-603.

<sup>247</sup>Doc. 164 in, Costăchescu, ed., *Documentele moldovenești*, vol. II, pp. 603-606.

Both Moldavia and Wallachia allied with the Bosnian ruler Tvrtko (1353-1391) to oppose Sigismund's plans to bring their lands back under Hungarian control. To concentrate his military efforts in this direction, Sigismund concluded an armistice with Vladislav on August 2, 1388.<sup>248</sup> But the new Hungarian king had spread his military resources too thinly and Poland could not be expected to sit idly by and watch Hungary extend its domination east of the Carpathians, thereby threatening the prosperous trade route linking the Polish commercial center of Lemberg (today Lvov in Ukraine) with the Black Sea port of Akkerman (today Belgrad-Dnestrovskiy in Ukraine). This forced Sigismund to postpone plans for an offensive in the region. But Hungary continued to represent a serious danger to the independence of Wallachia. Mircea needed help to counter the threat posed by his more powerful neighbor; in the summer of 1389, with the mediation of his ally Peter I, the Wallachian prince opened negotiations with Poland. On January 20, 1390, Mircea concluded a treaty of mutual assistance with King Vladislav against "the hostile attacks of Sigismund, the king of Hungary, and those of his vassals or any of his subjects."<sup>249</sup>

But the Hungarian threat was not the only problem Mircea the Old faced when he ascended the throne of Wallachia. Up to now, the principality had limited dealings with the Turks, and the Wallachians had often found themselves allied with the Ottomans against Hungary or Shishman's Bulgaria. Relations between Wallachia and the Ottomans began to change, however, as the Sultan's armies encroached upon the Danube and imperiled the

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<sup>248</sup>Doc. CCXLVIII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, p. 309.

<sup>249</sup>Doc. CCLVIII and CCLXII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, pp. 315-316 and 322.

lands of Wallachia's long-time ally Dobrotitsa. Around the time when Mircea became prince, Dobrotitsa died. His son Terter, also called Ivanko, succeeded him as despot of the lands along the Black Sea coast reaching inland to the Danube and the border with Shishman's Bulgaria.

More than two decades of war with Genoa had reached an end by the time of Dobrotitsa's death; Ivanko concluded the formal peace treaty ending the conflict with the Genoese on May 27, 1387. The agreement restored peaceful relations and regulated commerce between the two sides, stipulating customs taxes and according the Genoese the right to maintain a consul, a trading house, and a Catholic church in Dobrudja.<sup>250</sup>

During this time, with Sultan Murad I engaged in campaigns in Anatolia, a league of Serbian and Bosnian rulers, led by the Serbian King Lazar, launched an offensive against the Ottomans in the Balkans, winning a series of battles and skirmishes against them. Neither Ivanko nor Shishman took part in these attacks, but, as vassals of the Sultan, they were obligated to lend aid to the Turks under these circumstances. But the Turkish chronicler Mehmed Neshri tell us that "These two scoundrels, revolting against the Sultan, did not come to the army."<sup>251</sup> Thus, in 1388, Murad I sent his grand vizier, Ali Çenderli, with a powerful army to punish his recalcitrant subjects. The Turks overran Bulgaria and Dobrudja. Shishman fled to his fortress at Nicopolis on the Danube where he eventually surrendered and again swore allegiance to the Sultan who then restored his lands to him. Ivanko

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<sup>250</sup>Doc. 24 in *DIR, XIII, XIV, XV, B*, pp. 34-40.

<sup>251</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 110.



was less fortunate. He perished in the fighting, while Ali Pasha occupied parts of Dobrudja.

Mircea presumably sent troops to Ivanko's aid, but the death of Dobrotitsa's son now placed the Wallachian prince in direct conflict with the Turks. Ivanko had no children. This left his nephew, Mircea, the eldest son of Ivanko's sister Kalinikia, as heir to the despotate along the Black Sea coast. The energetic young prince moved quickly to extend his control over the lands between the Danube and the Black Sea, seizing Silistra and other areas occupied by Ottoman forces during Ali Çenderli's campaign. By 1389 Mircea had added "Despot of the lands of Dobrotitsa and Lord of Silistria" to his title.<sup>252</sup> Although he now ruled over this area, Dobrudja maintained a separate political and administrative structure and Greek remained the official language in the province.<sup>253</sup> Mircea attempted to consolidate his hold over this newly-acquired territory by granting some estates there to boyars from Wallachia; a Greek-language document dated March 28, 1412, tells of a village near Kaliakra owned by Mircea's logofăt, Baldovin.<sup>254</sup>

The Turks did not stand in his way when Mircea pressed his claim as the rightful heir to the lands of Dobrotitsa. The Ottomans, at this time, were busy in Serbia. In the summer of 1389, Sultan Murad I led his troops against Lazar and his allies. The two armies met in battle at Kosovo Polje on June 15 of that year. Although some have claimed that Mircea sent a contingent to aid Lazar against the Turks, there is no convincing evidence to support this

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<sup>252</sup>Doc. CCLXII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, p. 322.

<sup>253</sup>Oberländer-Târnoveanu, "Quelques remarques," p. 121.

<sup>254</sup>Doc. 36 in *DRH,B*, vol. I, pp. 77-78; Constantin C. Giurescu, "În legătură cu Mircea cel Bătrân," in *RIR*, XV (1945), pp. 414, 431.

assertion; it results from the desire of nationalist Romanian historians to connect Wallachia's greatest prince with this famous battle. It is inconceivable that Mircea, in hostile relations with both Bulgaria and Hungary at this time, would have sent military aid to Lazar, an ally of both Shishman and Sigismund. Besides, with the acquisition of Dobrudja, he had already stretched his resources to their limit; nor could he ignore the need to protect his own frontiers against his hostile neighbors. The battle of Kosovo marked the death knell of medieval Serbia, which less than half a century before, under Tsar Stephen Dushan, had been poised to dominate the Balkans and threatened to conquer Constantinople itself. The Turks routed the Serbian armies. Lazar was captured and then executed on the Sultan's order. Murad I was then himself killed when Lazar's son-in-law, Milosh Obravich, infiltrated the Ottoman camp and plunged a dagger into his chest. But this did nothing to change the outcome of the conflict. Murad's son Bayezid quickly seized control and, to prevent any dispute over his succession, he ordered that his brother Yakub be strangled to death immediately. Despite the decimation of its armies at Kosovo, Serbia lived on as a vassal of the Sultan until its final absorption into the Ottoman Empire in 1459.

The new Sultan hastened the pace of Ottoman expansion in the Balkans, as well as in Anatolia; Bayezid became known as *Yildirim*, the Thunderbolt, because of his rapid actions and movements. With an Ottoman attack on Wallachia now imminent, Mircea faced an increasingly perilous situation. Surrounded by enemies, he traveled to Lemburg where he renewed his alliance with King Vladislav in July 1391.<sup>255</sup> But Mircea stood alone against the Sultan because Poland at this time had no direct

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<sup>255</sup>Doc. CCLXXV in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, pp. 334-335.



Battle of Kosovo, 1389

interest in halting the Ottoman advance so long as it seriously inconvenienced Vladislav's principal enemy, the king of Hungary.

The inevitable occurred later that year when an Ottoman force under Firuz Bey made the first Turkish incursion "into Wallachia which," the Ottoman chronicler Kemalpashazade admits, "at that time was not yet subjected,"<sup>256</sup> while Bayezid campaigned in Rumelia, as the Ottomans called the European portion of their Empire. According to the Turkish chronicler Idris Bitlisi, Firuz Bey returned from Wallachia with "great plunder and many sturdy sons and beautiful daughters that he captured as slaves, choosing the fifth part for the Sultan."<sup>257</sup> Mircea could not afford an extended conflict with Turks. With Bayezid's armies threatening the principality, another Turkish chronicler, Mehmed Pasha, records that "Mircea, the voivode of Wallachia, submitted and obliged himself to pay tribute."<sup>258</sup> His treaty with the Sultan came to be known as the "Capitulations" or *Ahidname*; Mircea agreed to pay annual tribute in the sum of 3000 galbens, but maintained the independence of his principality.<sup>259</sup> Although for many years historians considered the Capitulations to be an eighteenth century forgery, their authenticity is now widely accepted.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>256</sup>Quo. Aurel Decei, *Relații româno-orientale*, Bucharest, 1978, p. 153, nt. 1.

<sup>257</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 156.

<sup>258</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 290.

<sup>259</sup>Doc. 1 in Dimitrie A. Sturdza and C. Colescu-Vartic, eds., *Acte și documente relative la istoria renascerei României, vol. I (1391-1841)*, Bucharest, 1900, pp. 1-2.

<sup>260</sup>Mustafa Ali Mehmed, *Istoria turcilor*, Bucharest, 1976, p. 128; Ștefan Ștefănescu, *Țara Românească de la Basarab I "Intemeietorul" până la Mihai Viteazul*, Bucharest, 1970, p. 117.

Despite the Capitulations agreement, Mircea remained wary of the Ottoman threat. In search of potential allies, he fostered diplomatic contacts with various Anatolian rulers along the Black Sea coast opposed to the Sultan. The danger to Wallachia increased dramatically in the summer of 1393 when the Ottomans conquered Shishman's Bulgaria and transformed it into a Turkish pashalik; the Bulgarian Tsar was killed and Patriarch Evtimiy, who had led a desperate resistance against the Muslim invaders at Trnovo during the three-month siege of the city, was exiled. The Turks may also have taken Silistra from Wallachia at this time.

With the Ottoman Empire now at Wallachia's borders, the principality began to suffer periodic raids from irregular troops known as *akingi* or *agazi*. The fifteenth century Italian writer Giovanni Maria Angiolello, a confidant of Mehmed the Conqueror, explained that these troops "are not paid, except by the booty they may gain in guerilla warfare. These men do not encamp with the rest of the army, but go traversing, pillaging, and wasting the country of the enemy on every side, and yet keep up a great and excellent discipline among themselves, both in the division of the plunder and in the execution of all their enterprises."<sup>261</sup> Mircea acted quickly in face of these attacks. Realizing the futility of trying to fend off these incursions, he decided instead to take the offensive against these Islamic raiders.

With Bayezid engaged in Anatolia, Mircea received intelligence from the Emir of Sinope that a favorable moment had arrived for him to make his move against the *akingi*. He carefully planned the assault, determined to prove to the Thunderbolt that he too could strike with lightning speed. Mircea boldly selected

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<sup>261</sup>Quo. Decei, *Relații româno-orientale*, p. 152.

Karnobat, one of the main *akingi* bases deep in the Balkans, as his target. In the fall of 1393 the Wallachian prince crossed the Danube, probably at Giurgiu, and headed south. On horseback, the journey to Karnobat took approximately 36 hours, travelled in four stages.<sup>262</sup> This daring attack, striking near the heart of the Empire, took the Turks completely by surprise; according to Bitlisi, the Wallachians “devastated Karnobat and many among the Muslims became martyrs.”<sup>263</sup> Mircea returned to Wallachia with great plunder and many slaves,<sup>264</sup> having, for the moment, seriously diminished the capacity of the *akingi* to cause harm to his principality.

Bayezid could not let such audacity go unanswered. He left Anatolia, which the Ottomans called Rum, and hastily returned to Rumelia, determined to make order in the European portion of his Empire. In the winter of 1393-1394 the Sultan set up court at Serres and summoned all of his Christian vassals in the Balkans there to settle various disputes. Among those in attendance were the Byzantine Emperor Manuel II, the Emperor’s brother Theodore, despot of Morea, and Serbian ruler Stephen Lazarevich; the prince of Wallachia was notably absent. Mircea now face the inevitability of an open conflict with the Ottomans.



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<sup>262</sup>Decei, *Relații româno-orientale*, p. 155.

<sup>263</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 156.

<sup>264</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 113.

## NOVINE AND NICOPOLIS

*"an argument broke out among the princes as to which of them would command the others. Sigismund believed that the one who knew the ways and customs of the enemy and who fought them before should be names to lead. And for this reason, he named, as commander of the army, the prince of Wallachia, a brave man, active and powerful, who, having fought with the Turks on several occasions, had triumphed over them."*

— Johann Trittheim, *Annales Hirsaugienses*<sup>265</sup>

**T**he imminent threat now posed by the Ottomans forced Mircea to reconsider his foreign policy. The alliance with Poland would be of no use to him in the face of a Turkish attack; nor could he any longer depend on Moldavia, also an important factor in his relations with Poland, for support following the death of Peter I in 1392. Up to now Mircea's foreign policy, like that of his predecessors, had been dictated by the notion that Hungary represented the greatest threat to Wallachia's

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<sup>265</sup>Johannis Trithemii, *Spanheimus tomus secundus Annalium Hirsaugiensium*. St. Gall, 1690, p. 298.



independence. This all changed when the Ottoman Empire became Wallachia's new neighbor to the south; the Turkish peril now drew Wallachia and Hungary together in a common cause and relations between Mircea and Sigismund gradually began to improve.

At the end of May 1394 Sigismund sent the Hungarian nobleman Gregory Bethlen to Wallachia as his emissary; the Transylvanian Voivode Frank de Szécsény, from whom Bethlen was ordered to receive instructions before his departure, facilitated the negotiations with Mircea.<sup>266</sup> While more urgent matters in Anatolia forced Bayezid to return there in the spring of 1394, delaying his attack on Wallachia, negotiations between Mircea and Sigismund dragged on. They had not yet reached a formal agreement in the fall of 1394 when the Sultan crossed back over to Europe to lead his armies against the recalcitrant voivode of *Iflak*, the Ottoman name for Wallachia. Bayezid's attack would culminate in one of the most famous battles in the history of the principality.

In late September, Ottoman forces crossed the Danube at Nicopolis and occupied the Wallachian fortress of Turnu, called Little Nicopolis, on the opposite bank. From here the Sultan proceeded in the direction of Târgoviște; Mircea harassed the Ottomans as they advanced, but retreated before their superior force as he could not risk a pitched battle. An eighteenth century chronicle of the Catholic Monastery of St. Francis in Târgoviște records that Bayezid set fire to the city and the monastery.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>266</sup>Doc. 80 in *DRH, D*, p. 129.

<sup>267</sup>B.P. Hajdeu, *Archiva istorică a României*, vol. I, part. 2, Bucharest, 1865, p. 47.



From here the invaders set out in the direction of the capital, Argeş. Meanwhile, according to the Byzantine chronicler Laonic Chalkokondyles, “Mircea gathered the army of his country, but did not plan to descend upon him [Bayezid] to give battle; instead, with great care, he placed the women and children in the mountains near Braşov for shelter. After that, he followed with his army close to Bayezid through the oak forests of the country which are numerous and cover all parts of the land making it difficult for an enemy to move and not easy to conquer.”<sup>268</sup>

As the Ottomans marched through Wallachia, both Sigismund and the Transylvanian Voivode Frank de Szécsény closely monitored the situation from locations near the border in southeastern Hungary and southern Transylvania.<sup>269</sup> Hungary had provided Wallachia with some material assistance, but, as they had not yet concluded a treaty, the king’s intention was not to lend Mircea military support, but to ensure that the Ottomans did not cross the border into Transylvania. As a result, Mircea now stood alone against the might of the Ottoman Empire.

The Sultan’s forces held the advantage in terms of numbers, equipment, discipline, and experience. But the Wallachians too had some things going for them; as they were defending their homeland, they knew the terrain intimately and possessed the element of surprise. The wily prince used all of these things to his full advantage. As the Turks neared Argeş, they entered a swampy, heavily-wooded area which prevented the deployment of their forces in a manner that would allow them to exploit their

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<sup>268</sup>Laonic Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, trans. Vasile Grecu, Bucharest, 1958, p. 64 (II, 79).

<sup>269</sup>Viorica Pervain, “Din relațiile Țării Românești cu Ungaria la sfârșitul veacului al XIV-lea” in *AIIA, Cluj*, XVIII (1975), p. 96.



Sultan Bayezid the Thunderbolt

numerical superiority. Mircea seized this opportunity to strike back at the Empire. Here, on October 10, 1394, the battle of Rovine was fought.

According to Turkish sources, the battle took place near the Argeş River; Rovine does not refer to a specific location, but is a Slavonic term meaning ditch or swamp. The Ottoman chronicler Orudj bin Adil described the ensuing conflict: “Mircea, the Infidel, bringing his army with him, came against Sultan Bayezid and, upon meeting one another, a great battle took place, so that on the side of the Muslims, as well as on the side of the Infidels, many were slaughtered.”<sup>270</sup>

The fierceness of the fighting at Rovine was remembered for centuries after. Writing near the end of the seventeenth century, the chronicler George Brankovich recalled, “never was there such a terrible battle as that one; the blood of the soldiers spilled until it reached the fetlocks of the horses.”<sup>271</sup> The result was a hard fought victory for Mircea. The Sultan, having suffered heavy losses, and with winter drawing near, retreated back across the Danube.

Mircea had defended his principality brilliantly, but victory came at a heavy cost. With his military forces depleted and resources running low, the conclusion of an alliance with neighboring Hungary was now imperative; all the more so because his victory at the battle of Rovine was ephemeral at best and he knew that the spring thaw would bring with it the return of Turkish armies determined to pillage the land and to drive him from the

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<sup>270</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 48.

<sup>271</sup>Gheorghe Brancovici, *Cronica românească*, p. 61.

throne. Under these circumstances, negotiations between Wallachia and Hungary resumed with renewed intensity.

Sigismund ultimately hoped to form a broad anti-Ottoman alliance and to lead a crusade to drive the Turks from Europe and to extend Hungarian hegemony over all of southeastern Europe. Part of his plan was to negate Polish influence in the region. The immediacy of the Ottoman threat had drawn Wallachia closer to Hungary, but Moldavia remained firmly in the Polish camp. At the end of 1394, Stephen I succeeded to the throne as the representative of the pro-Polish faction in the country; on January 6, 1395, the new prince swore allegiance to Vladislav I, promising to stand with him against their mutual enemies, including the king of Hungary and Mircea, referred to in this treaty as “the voivode of Basarabia.”<sup>272</sup>

While Stephen renewed his principality’s ties of vassalage to the Polish Crown, Sigismund was in the Szeckler lands in Transylvania, preparing to cross the mountains to invade Moldavia. Toward the end of January, Sigismund won a victory over the Moldavians at the battle of Hîndau, today Ghindăoani, south of the fortress of Neamț. On February 3, the Hungarian army encamped before this fortress,<sup>273</sup> the principal stronghold protecting Moldavia’s border with Transylvania, constructed during the reign of Peter I. Failing to take the citadel, the king could not capitalize on his previous victory, and with pressing

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<sup>272</sup>Doc. 167 in Costăchescu, ed., *Documentele moldovenești*, vol. II, pp. 611-615.

<sup>273</sup>Docs. 81 and 82 in *DRH, D*, pp. 130-131.

matters awaiting him in Transylvania, Sigismund left Moldavia, arriving in Braşov by February 14.<sup>274</sup>

Sigismund's failure to bring Moldavia under his control did not represent a major setback to his plans for a campaign against the Turks because the participation of that principality was not a strategic necessity. Wallachia, on the other hand, represented an essential element in any scheme for a new crusade. The lengthy negotiations of the previous year between Hungary and Wallachia finally paid off as both sides now realized the urgent need to conclude an agreement.

With Sigismund across the border in Braşov, Mircea set out from his capital at Argeş, passing through Câmpulung, Rucăr, and Bran, to meet him. On March 7, 1395, the king and the prince concluded a treaty formalizing the alliance between Hungary and Wallachia. Negotiations had been difficult partly because Mircea refused to accept the inclusion of any clause in the agreement that could be construed as a recognition of Hungarian suzerainty. The result was a narrowly-focused treaty in which both sides agreed to provide mutual assistance "against those terrible, cunning sons of evil, enemies of the name of Christ, and unforgiven enemies of ours, the Turks."<sup>275</sup>

Interestingly, Mircea noted that the document was "sealed with our small seal for lack of the larger one." Seals were the principal means of authenticating documents during this time and the prince's large seal would normally be applied to any act of such importance; for this reason, Mircea made special mention of

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<sup>274</sup>Ilie Minea, *Cetatea Neamţului*, Iaşi, 1943, p. 7; Giurescu, "O nouă sinteză a trecutului nostru," in *RIR*, II (1932), p. 18.

<sup>275</sup>Doc. 87 in *DRH, D*, pp. 138-142.



the fact that he had to use his small seal. In all likelihood, Mircea's large seal was lost during the battle of Rovine the previous fall and had not yet been replaced. On this occasion, commercial privileges between Wallachia and Braşov were also renewed.<sup>276</sup>

Mircea counted on his alliance with Hungary to provide him with much needed military support as Turkish forces now massed along his southern frontier. Sigismund held true to their agreement and made immediate plans to send an advance force of some 400 men under the command of Stephen de Losoncz, the former ban of Macva, to Wallachia. On April 6, the king ordered Gregory Bethlen, who had handled the negotiations with Wallachia during the previous year, to join this expeditionary force as his personal representative.<sup>277</sup> Sigismund, meanwhile, remained in Transylvania to gather a larger army with which he intended to come to Mircea's aid. A contemporary French chronicle tells us that Stephen de Losoncz had specific instructions from the king "to find out the manner in which they [the Turks] could be attacked and to return with reliable information."<sup>278</sup>

The Ottomans, however, had no intention of sitting idly by while Sigismund made his preparations to enter Wallachia. They had maintained a bridgehead at Turnu since the previous fall and used this base to gather an army with orders from the Sultan to invade the principality, oust Mircea, and to place in his stead Vlad, the eldest son of Mircea's brother Dan. Vlad Dan apparently went into self-imposed exile sometime after his father's death in search of outside assistance to help him press his claim to the throne;

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<sup>276</sup>Docs. 88 and 89 in *DRH, D*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>277</sup>Doc. 93 in *DRH, D*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>278</sup>Quo. Giurescu, "În legătură cu Mircea cel Bătrân," p. 426.

Mircea's proclamation of his young son Michael as associate ruler several years earlier may have determined him to do this. As tensions mounted between Mircea and the Turks, the pretender received a warm welcome at the Ottoman Porte. He probably accompanied the Sultan to Wallachia during the campaign of the previous fall for Bayezid certainly had no intention of transforming the principality into a pashalik and needed a legitimate candidate with a strong base of support among the native population to place on the throne. The fifteenth century Hungarian chronicler Johannes de Thurocz provides indications that Vlad Dan worked from Turnu during the winter of 1394-1395 to gather support among dissatisfied factions within the country.<sup>279</sup>

Given the long history of animosity between Wallachia and Hungary, and the aggressive Catholic proselytizing of the latter, there were certainly many amongst the predominantly Orthodox population of the principality who disapproved of Mircea's alliance with Sigismund. The Sultan was too preoccupied elsewhere to participate personally in this new Ottoman campaign. On April 16, 1395, he captured Salonika. Bayezid then proceeded to Athens and on to Brusa, the capital of the Asian portion of his Empire, as he prepared for a new seige of Constantinople.<sup>280</sup>

Nevertheless, a significant Turkish force gathered at Turnu, including contingents led by the Sultan's Serbian vassals, Stephen Lazarevich, Marko Kraljevich, and Constantine Dragoshevich, the father-in-law of Byzantine Emperor Manuel II. This army penetrated into the interior of the country in early May. They

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<sup>279</sup>Pervain, "Din relațiile Țării Românești cu Ungaria," p. 98.

<sup>280</sup>Tahsin Gemil, *Românii și otomanii*, Bucharest, 1991, p. 81.

likely advanced along the Olt River valley which afforded them both maximum opportunity for plunder and ease of movement north toward the important city of Râmnicu and the capital of Argeş as it was a well-populated and frequently-travelled route. Mircea now prepared to confront this new Ottoman invasion.

Reinforced by the troops led by Stephen de Losoncz, the Wallachian prince hurried south determined to halt the Turkish advance. The two forces met in battle on May 17, 1395. This second battle of Rovine, so-called because it also took place in marshlands, albeit at a different location than that of the previous year, was another fierce encounter. Thurocz describes how the king sent Stephen de Losoncz to Mircea's aid, "but, being overwhelmed by the numbers of the enemy, he was killed in a bloody battle with heavy losses on both sides, losing the battle and at the same time his life. After the death of their commander, his soldiers fled, leaving the enemy great booty and many prisoners."<sup>281</sup> The Ottoman forces also suffered heavy losses before finally winning the day; Serbian commanders Marko Kraljević and Constantine Dragoshevich died in the fighting.<sup>282</sup> Mircea now fled northward to await help from Sigismund, while Vlad Dan and the Ottomans advanced toward the capital of Argeş.

According to a contemporary Bulgarian chronicle, after his defeat at the second battle of Rovine, Mircea "fled to the Hungarians."<sup>283</sup> In reality, although he abandoned Argeş to the invaders, Mircea continued to hold Câmpulung where he awaited

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<sup>281</sup> Quo. Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 254.

<sup>282</sup> George Sp. Radojicic, "La chronologie de la bataille de Rovine: in *RHSEE*, V:4-6 (1928), pp. 136-137.

<sup>283</sup> Quo. Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 242.



help from Sigismund. Difficulties raising an army had delayed the king's departure for Wallachia;<sup>284</sup> in late June he was in the vicinity of Braşov making final preparations for his campaign against the Turks. From here he advanced into Wallachia via the Bran pass.

On July 6, the royal army encamped around Câmpulung<sup>285</sup> where Sigismund and Mircea conferred to plan their counter-offensive against Vlad Dan and the Ottoman invaders supporting him. The combined Wallachian-Hungarian army now possessed numerical superiority; the recent battle and the likely withdrawal of some contingents from the country for use elsewhere had reduced the Ottoman force.

Sigismund and Mircea appear to have retaken Argeş and Râmnicu and proceeded down the Olt valley with little opposition. Their objective was the fortress of Turnu, on the Danube, which Vlad Dan and his Turkish allies had used as a base for their latest incursion into the country; possession of this citadel had allowed for the uncontested crossing of men and material from Nicopolis, the recently acquired Ottoman stronghold on the opposite bank. When they besieged the fortress, intense fighting began. "Three times the banner of the king fell to the ground and three times it was raised again," relates the French chronicle of St. Denis, "as the king continuously encouraged his men to fight for Christ."<sup>286</sup> In the face of these repeated assaults, the citadel fell to the royal army. Sigismund wrote that, "attacking them with strength, we

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<sup>284</sup>Doc. 105 in *DRH, D*, pp. 171-174.

<sup>285</sup>Doc. 94 in *DRH, D*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>286</sup>Quo. Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 257.

took the fortress with the help of Christ.... After that we left faithful castle guards in that fortress.”<sup>287</sup> Mircea had regained the strategic points previously lost, but Vlad Dan remained at large in Oltenia where he had found a base of support among the native population opposed to Mircea’s pro-Hungarian policy.

Unfortunately for Mircea, Sigismund could not remain in Wallachia to follow-up on his victory. Soon after he captured Turnu, the king received news that his pregnant queen had died after a fall from a horse had provoked a miscarriage. The death of Maria was a serious blow to the young king. Not only had he lost a beloved wife and a potential heir, but he now feared for his throne as the legitimacy of his claim to the Crown of St. Stephen was based on his marriage to the daughter of Louis the Great.

On the northern border of his kingdom, the Poles prepared to attack. Vladislav also claimed the Hungarian throne through his marriage to Louis’s youngest daughter, Hedwiga, but, fortunately for Sigismund, Johannes de Kanisa, the capable archbishop of Strigoni, fended off the invaders without necessitating the presence of the king in this region. But there remained a very real danger that certain factions among the Hungarian nobility might use the occasion of Maria’s death and Sigismund’s absence from the country to organize a revolt to undermine the king’s authority.

As a result, the two armies now went in separate directions. Sigismund headed northwest on his way back to Hungary, while Mircea returned to Argeş hoping to consolidate his hold on the principality. By August 25, the king had reached Severin<sup>288</sup> and prepared to cross the mountains. With the enemy force divided,

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<sup>287</sup>Doc. 99 in *DRH, D*, pp. 154-158.

<sup>288</sup>Doc. 95 in *DRH, D*, pp. 151-152.



Sigismund of Luxemburg  
King of Hungary

Vlad Dan seized the opportunity to strike back as the royal army trekked through the mountain passes leading from the Severin land to the Banat in Hungary. In a diploma dated June 6, 1397, Sigismund recalled the ensuing attack: “we climbed the peaks of the mountains to a place called Posada [not to be confused with the site of the battle of the same name in 1330] in the ordinary language, through some narrow paths surrounded by large bushes where numerous Wallachians laid in ambush, and they attacked us violently from the dark and thick forests, hurling spears and firing poison arrows.”<sup>289</sup> Sigismund escaped back to Hungary, but with his victorious campaign suddenly transformed into a bitter defeat.

Having vanquished the Hungarians, and with domestic affairs now preoccupying Sigismund, Vlad Dan gained the upper hand in his struggle with his uncle for the throne of Wallachia. The arrival of Ottoman reinforcements in September further strengthened his position.<sup>290</sup> The country was now split, with Vlad controlling the western portion of the principality and Mircea the eastern part. At this point, the Patriarch of Constantinople tried to mediate the conflict. He directed his emissary, the metropolitan of Mytilene, on the Aegean island of Lesbos: “You have been chosen to go to the parts of Wallachia to do all that you have been instructed verbally by our humbleness and that which is contained in the letters to the princes there.”<sup>291</sup>

These efforts came too late. In early October, Stephen I of Moldavia intervened in Wallachia to help Vlad Dan. They forced

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<sup>289</sup>Doc. 99 in *DRH, D*, pp. 154-158.

<sup>290</sup>Ilie Minea, *Informațiile românești ale cronicii lui Ian Dlugosz*, p. 15.

<sup>291</sup>“Acta Patriarchatus Constantinopolitani,” doc. 50, in *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanae*, vol. IV, p. 250, emphasis added.

Mircea to flee across the mountains to Transylvania where he continued to rule the duchies of Amlaș and Făgăraș. Vlad I was now prince of Wallachia.<sup>292</sup> But the fighting did not end here. As Ottoman reinforcements continued to arrive, Vlad Dan and his Turkish allies launched an offensive against Transylvania, reaching Brașov and Temesvar.<sup>293</sup> This expedition had the character of a raid intended to finish off Mircea, as well as to pillage and to cause destruction in the Hungarian lands. On December 10, 1395, Paul de Armaninis, the ambassador of Mantua to Hungary, reported from Buda that Sigismund had to cancel a scheduled meeting with his brother, King Venceslas IV of Bohemia, because of these attacks.<sup>294</sup>

The loss of Wallachia represented a major setback to Sigismund's plans for an anti-Ottoman crusade. In a diploma dated December 8, 1397, the king decried the events two years earlier when "our enemy, Voivode Vlad, who was at that time placed and raised to the leadership of our Transalpine land by the aforesaid Turks, was there with a large army of Turks and Wallachians."<sup>295</sup> Despite this impediment, Sigismund continued with his efforts to organize the long-delayed crusade intended to drive the Turkish infidels from Europe.

Having lost Wallachia by arms, the king now tried to win it back to the Hungarian cause though diplomatic means. The negotiations that followed also served as a cover for intelligence-

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<sup>292</sup>Octavian Iliescu, "Vlad I<sup>er</sup>, voivode de Valachie" in *RRH*, XXVII:1-2 (1988), p. 79.

<sup>293</sup>Ștefan Pascu, "Contribuțiuni documentare la istoria românilor în sec. XIII și XIV," in *AIIN*, Cluj, X (1945), p. 218.

<sup>294</sup>Gemil, *Românii și otomanii*, p. 81.

<sup>295</sup>Doc. 101 in *DRH*, D, pp. 160-169.

gathering operations. On March 21, 1396, Maternus, the bishop of Transylvania, wrote to the officials of Sibiu: “The possessor of this letter, Johannes Tatar, a man in the service of the royal court, was sent by our lord, the king, with certain important messages to the Voivode Vlad.... we ask you to send to Vlad, together with the aforementioned Johannes Tatar, a capable and worthy man, knowledgeable in the Wallachian language, and order this emissary of yours to spy, quietly and secretly, and to gather news of the Turks and other information.”<sup>296</sup> Efforts to draw Vlad I into an anti-Ottoman coalition failed. Encouraged by his ally, Stephen I of Moldavia, Vlad Dan instead opened negotiations with Poland. On May 28, 1396, as “voivode of Basarabia and count of Severin,” having “recently” attained the throne, he swore allegiance to Polish King Vladislav I and his wife Queen Hedwiga, explicitly recognizing them as the rightful sovereigns of Hungary.<sup>297</sup>

Although Wallachia remained outside the Hungarian camp, the crusade that Sigismund had long dreamed of leading finally began to take shape. Bayezid’s renewed siege of Constantinople hastened its realization. With the imperial capital in dire straits, the Byzantine chronicler Dukas recalls how “Emperor Manuel, not knowing what to do and not having help from anywhere, wrote to the Pope, to the king of France, and to the king of Hungary announcing the blockade and the desperate situation facing Constantinople and that if they would not come quickly to help and to provide assistance he will surrender the city into the hands of the enemies of Christianity.”<sup>298</sup> Sigismund heeded the

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<sup>296</sup>Doc. 97 in *DRH, D*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>297</sup>Doc. CCCXVI in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, pp. 374-375.

<sup>298</sup>Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină*, Bucharest, 1958, p. 78 (XIII, 8).

emperor's call for help and by February 1396 he had concluded a treaty with Manuel II.

Preparations for war now began in earnest. The Great Schism divided the Catholic Church at this time, but the Hungarian king managed to convince rival popes, Boniface IX in Rome and Benedict XIII in Avignon, to set aside their differences for the moment and each sent out calls for a crusade against the Turkish infidels. Through letters and emissaries, Sigismund personally appealed to Christian rulers throughout Western Europe to join in the crusade; he wrote to the French King Charles IV, telling him how the Sultan boasted that he would go to Rome and feed his horses oats on the altar of St. Peter's Basilica. The German monk Johann Tritheim tells us that in this way the king "gathered in a short time a large army against the Turks."<sup>299</sup>

The call to arms did not go unheeded as nobles throughout Europe began to rally to the Christian cause. The most enthusiastic response came from Burgundy where John of Nevers, the son of Duke Philip the Fair, gathered a large contingent of knights and set out for Buda in late April. France also answered the appeal from the heir of the Angevin kings of Hungary. Among the French nobles who headed east that summer to take up arms against the Turks were Count Philip de Artois, Admiral Jean de Vienne, Marshal Jean le Maingre, called Boucicaut, and Lord de Coucy. In the midst of the Hundred Years' War, France and England set aside their differences momentarily as the duke of Lancaster joined the crusaders with a contingent of English knights. German knights, led by Count Palatine Rupert and John of Zollern, the

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<sup>299</sup>Quo. Șerban Papacostea, "Mircea la Nicopol (1396): O marturie ignorată," in *RdI*, 39:7 (1986), p. 697.

Burgrave of Nuremburg, also came to take part in Sigismund's grand venture.

Brimming with confidence, the crusaders did not fully grasp the gravity of the task at hand. The atmosphere was almost festive; a contemporary French chronicle recounts that Boucicaut joined the crusade, "first because he desired above all to fight the Turks, then for the excellent food to which he had been treated on earlier occasions by the king of Hungary."<sup>300</sup> As these crusaders rendezvoused at the Hungarian capital, the Turkish noose tightened around Constantinople. The Byzantines received some much-needed relief when Venice, in anticipation of the upcoming crusade, sent galleys to the beleaguered imperial capital.<sup>301</sup> All the pieces were finally falling into place.

A substantial force of crusaders from all over Europe had gathered at Buda. It is said that Sigismund, "looking over the large number of his soldiers, remarked that with such a great army he could not only defeat the Turks, but if the sky were to fall they could hold it up with their lances."<sup>302</sup> Manuel II later recounted that "a vast army gathered at Nicopolis, comprised of Hungarians, Frenchmen, and Burgundians, at which all of the barbarians trembled merely upon hearing their names."<sup>303</sup> But to have a clear idea of the size of this force it must be remembered that European armies during this period were small in comparison with later

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<sup>300</sup>Quo. Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 262.

<sup>301</sup>Appendix LV in N. Iorga, "Veneția în Marea Neagră, II" in *AARMSI*, series II, XXXVI (1913-1914), p. 1117.

<sup>302</sup>Brancovici, *Cronica românească*, p. 60.

<sup>303</sup>"Manueles Paleologus" in *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanae*, vol. IV, p. 336.



centuries<sup>304</sup> and that medieval sources notoriously exaggerated figures for literary effect. In reality, Sigismund had a total of around 10,000 troops, even though contemporary accounts give estimates as high as 200,000.<sup>305</sup>

This army set out for Temesvar where Mircea, the exiled prince of Wallachia joined them with a force of approximately 1,000 men. Because of his experience and knowledge of the terrain, the king assigned Mircea to lead the advance guard; the Byzantine chronicler Chalkokondyles recorded that Sigismund “had with him the Dacians [Wallachians], a brave people, to show them the way and to open the road for the army.”<sup>306</sup> From Temesvar, the crusaders proceeded to Orșova, where they crossed the Danube around August 13, 1396.

Among those who made this crossing was Johann Schiltberger, a fifteen-year-old squire from Bavaria in the service of a knight called Reichartinger. The Ottomans captured the youth at the battle of Nicopolis and he spent the next thirty years of his life travelling throughout Asia as a slave of the Turks and the Mongols. When he finally returned home, he entered the service of Duke Albert III of Bavaria and wrote a journal of his travels, providing us with, among other things, a first-hand account of the Nicopolis campaign. He recounted how the army of crusaders, “crossed the Danube into Bulgaria and headed toward a city called Vidin, which is the capital of Bulgaria. Then the prince of the country and of the city [Stratimir] voluntarily pledged his

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<sup>304</sup>Hale, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Europe*, p. 78. Before 1500, 12,000 to 30,000 men comprised a large army.

<sup>305</sup>R. Rosetti, “Care au fost adevăratele efective ale unor armate din trecut,” in *AARMSI*, series III, XXV (1942-1943), pp. 734, 740-741.

<sup>306</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 59 (II, 69).

# Schildberger.

Ein wunderbarliche / vnnnd kurtzwenlige  
 Histori/ wie Schildberger / einer auß der Stat München  
 in Bayern/ von den Türcken gefangen/ in die Heydens-  
 schafft gefüret / vnnnd wider heymkommen.

Item/ was sich für Krieg / vnnnd wunderbarer thaten/  
 diemeyl er inn der Heydenschaft gewesen / zuge-  
 tragen / gang kurtzweylig zu lesen.



Inhalt vnd nutz diser Histori/ findestu in  
 dem nechstfolgenden berich.

Battle of Nicopolis  
 from the book by Johann Schiltberger

allegiance to the king. Then the king garrisoned the city with 300 men, cavalry and good infantry.” Vidin and the surrounding territory controlled by Stratimir was all that remained of the once mighty Second Bulgarian Empire since the fall of Trnovo in 1393. The last Bulgarian Tsar, Mircea’s uncle through his marriage to Ana, the sister of Mircea’s father Radu, made a desperate gamble by opening the gates of the city to the crusaders, hoping that they would help him to restore the former glory of his empire or at least ensure its survival.

From Vidin, the crusaders marched along the Danube to Rahova. “In that place, there were many Turks who did not want to surrender the city,” recalled Schiltberger. “Then the citizens rose up and drove out the Turks by force and submitted to the king; many of the Turks were killed, while others were taken prisoner. The king also garrisoned this city with 300 of his men.”<sup>307</sup> Up to now, the crusaders had encountered little serious resistance. The initial objective of the campaign, as Sigismund had told Byzantine emissary Emanuil Philanthropeno earlier that summer, was to reach the port city of Varna on the Black Sea coast.<sup>308</sup> Continuing their march to the sea, the crusaders advanced along the right bank of the Danube in the direction of Nicopolis.

Once he reached Nicopolis, Sigismund expected the arrival of additional troops. The new Transylvanian voivode, Stibor de Stiboricz, a Pole from Slovakia, led an army into Wallachia, intending to neutralize Vlad Dan so that he would be unable to assist the Turks south of the Danube and then to join the king’s forces at Nicopolis. Vlad I, supported by Ottoman soldiers, tried

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<sup>307</sup> *Călători străini*, vol I, pp. 28-29.

<sup>308</sup> Iorga, “Veneția în Marea Neagră, II,” p. 1089.

to block Stibor's advance. A difficult battle ensued with heavy losses on both sides. The fighting degenerated to the point where Stibor and Vlad Dan engaged in single combat. The Wallachian prince was severely wounded in this encounter and forced to flee with his troops.<sup>309</sup> The Transylvanian voivode's victory opened the way for an unimpeded march to Nicopolis and removed Vlad I as a potential threat to the Christian army advancing along the Danube.

By mid-September, the crusaders led by Sigismund had reached Nicopolis where Stibor's force joined them. Built on a rocky plateau overlooking the Danube, the Roman Emperor Trajan is credited with founding Nicopolis whose Greek name means "City of Victory." The name proved ominous to the Christian force now camped before its walls. From this highly defensible position, the Turkish garrison prepared to offer stiff resistance. As a result, the fortress could not easily be taken by assault and the crusaders prepared for a prolonged siege. For over two weeks, the Christian army tried to take the city by various means, including mining the large round tower protecting the stronghold, but to no avail. Finally, they prepared to set it ablaze.<sup>310</sup>

Meanwhile, the Sultan made plans of his own. Although it meant raising the siege of Constantinople, Bayezid, true to his sobriquet 'the Thunderbolt,' prepared to move quickly north to relieve Nicopolis. Orudj bin Adil wrote that when he received news of the advance of the crusaders led by the king of Hungary,

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<sup>309</sup>Doc. 101 in *DRH, D*, pp. 160-169.

<sup>310</sup>N. Iorga, ed., "Cronica lui Wavrin și românii," in *BCIR*, IV (1927), p. 139.

“Sultan Bayezid set out with ten thousand volunteers and met the infidels near Nicopolis.”<sup>311</sup> Another Turkish chronicler adds that the Sultan first went to Trnovo where he made preparations for his counter-offensive.<sup>312</sup> From here, he proceeded north to the Danube. A decisive battle between Muslim and Christian forces was now imminent.

According Schiltberger, when he received news of the impending arrival of the troops led by the Sultan, “King Sigismund blocked their path a mile from the city with his army.” The crusaders abandoned plans to set fire to the fortress as they prepared for battle. The long-awaited moment when they would confront the enemy of Christendom was now at hand. At this point, Schiltberger relates that “the prince of Wallachia, called Mircea, came and asked the king for permission to make a reconnaissance of the enemy.” In typical medieval fashion, he provides exaggerated numbers. Schiltberger claims that Mircea reconnoitered the Ottoman force with 1000 of his men; realistically, he probably engaged about 100 troops from his total force of 1000 in this type of operation.

After completing his reconnaissance, Schiltberger says that Mircea reported to Sigismund “that the enemy had 20 flags with him, and that under each flag there were over 10,000 men.”<sup>313</sup> The numbers are completely out of proportion with what we know of medieval armies. A flag was the equivalent of a modern regiment. It usually numbered around 500 men, but not more than 1000. Any more than that could not be held together under a single banner in

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<sup>311</sup>Mihail Guboglu, ed., *Crestomație turcă*, Bucharest, 1978, p. 217.

<sup>312</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 113.

<sup>313</sup>*Călători străini*, vol. I, p. 29.

this midst of battle. Thus, if we accept that Mircea's reconnaissance revealed 20 flags in the Turkish camp, it confirms Orudj bin Adil's estimate of 10,000 Ottoman troops under Bayezid's command, rather than the 200,000 claimed by Schiltberger.

The stage was set for a decisive confrontation between two forces of approximately equal strength, although the Ottomans may have enjoyed a slight numerical superiority. In the Christian camp, a council of war was now held. Schiltberger recalled that "the king wanted to prepare the battle order. Then the prince of Wallachia asked that he be permitted to lead the first attack, which the king heartily approved. But the duke of Burgundy [John of Nevers], hearing this, protested against this honor going to another, saying that he had come from afar with a great army... which had cost him a great deal."<sup>314</sup> Now the effects of the lack of a unified command and an overconfidence bordering on arrogance made themselves apparent in the Christian camp. Chalkokondyles confirms that "the Celts [French], being proud and uncalculated, as usual, wanted the victory to be theirs alone, so, heavily armed, they attacked first, as if they could destroy the barbarians in one blow."<sup>315</sup> The crusaders made a serious blunder in not using troops experienced in combat with the Turks in the front lines. The king was conscious of this and wanted Mircea to lead the attack, but he lacked the authority to impose his decision. According to Tritheim, "Sigismund believed that one who knew the ways and customs of the enemy and who had fought with them before should be appointed to lead the assault."<sup>316</sup> The king was not alone

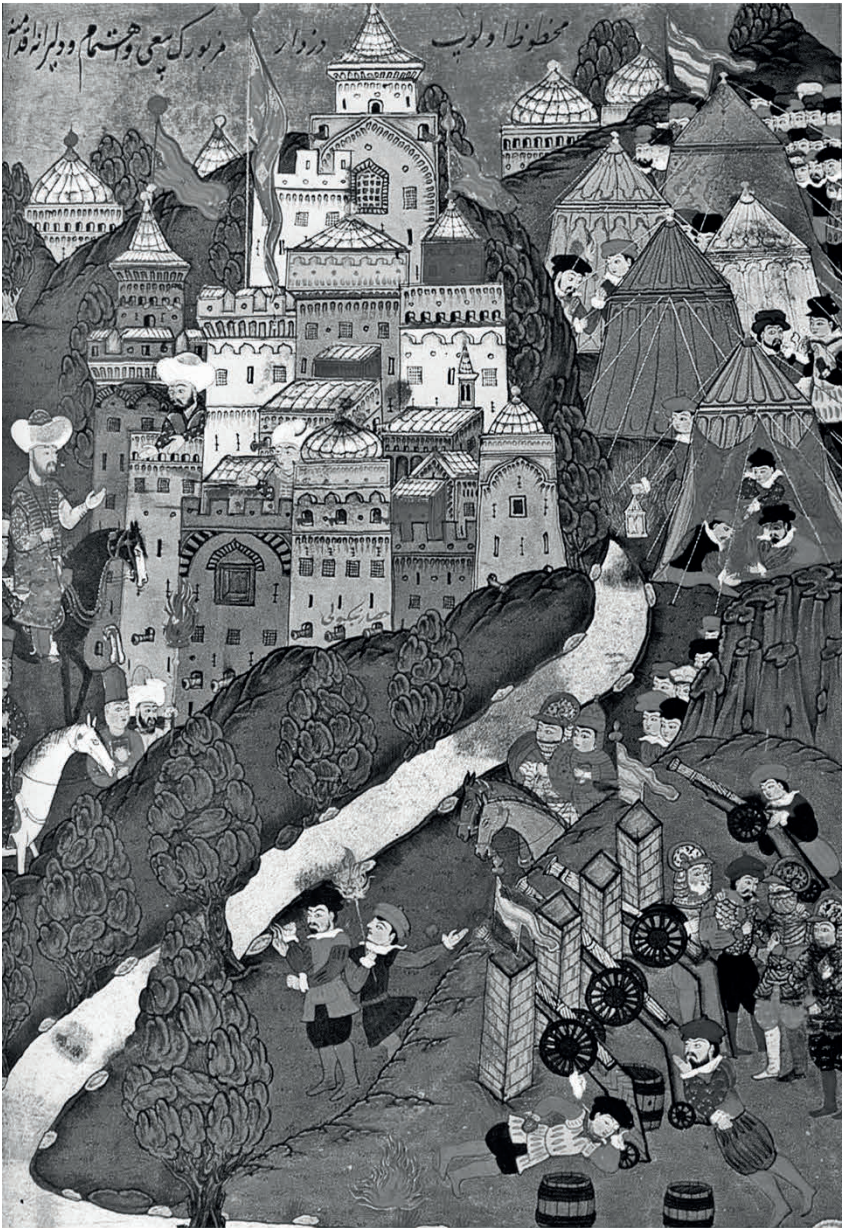
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<sup>314</sup>*Călători străini*, vol. I, p. 29.

<sup>315</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 62 (II, 75, 76).

<sup>316</sup>Quo. Papacostea, "Mircea la Nicopol," p. 697.





The Battle of Nicopolis  
Ottoman miniature by Nakkaş Osman  
*Hünernama*, 1584–88

in his desire to use experienced troops; a young Wallachian boyar who fell prisoner in the battle later recalled that Lord de Coucy “made it a habit to keep Wallachian noblemen, who knew the ways of the lands occupied by the Turks, near him as armed companions.”<sup>317</sup> But pride and arrogance won out over sound strategy and tactics.

The fateful battle occurred on September 25, 1396. With the Ottomans occupying the high ground, John of Nevers led his heavy cavalry in a charge against the disciplined troops forming the Ottoman center; the lack of coordination and discipline among the patchwork army of crusaders proved fatal. “The Celts [French] were defeated,” Chalkokondyles relates, “and they began to flee in panic and without any order. They fell over their own army while the Turks pursued them.... Seeking to cross the Danube in haste, much of the army perished in the river.”<sup>318</sup>

The battle of Nicopolis once again confirmed that the days when heavily-clad knights in shining armor would rule the battlefields of Europe were over. In his study of the battle, the Turkish historian Aziz Suryal Atiya concluded, “The victory was won by the party that possessed an unflinching unity of purpose, a strict and even ruthless discipline, prudent tactics, and wise leadership.”<sup>319</sup> Nicopolis firmly established Ottoman military superiority. It would take two centuries for Europeans to bridge the gap. Bemoaning the battle of Mohács that transpired on August 29, 1526, and sounded the death knell of medieval Hungary, Bishop Paulo Giovio wrote to the Holy Roman Emperor

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<sup>317</sup>Iorga, ed., “Cronica lui Wavrin,” p. 139.

<sup>318</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 62 (II, 76).

<sup>319</sup>Quo. Rosetti, “Care au fost adevăratele efective,” p. 735.



Charles V, explaining, “The Turks are better soldiers than ours for three reasons: first, because of discipline, which is rare among us; second, because they throw themselves into battle with fervent conviction, into the mouth of death, for they believe that each one has written on his forehead how and when he will die; and third, because the Turks live without bread and without wine, and usually rice and water are enough for them.”<sup>320</sup>

The Christian force at Nicopolis was decimated. Many were killed and others were taken captive, including John of Nevers, who bore a large share of the responsibility for the debacle, and Marshal Boucicaut. Tritheim recorded that “King Sigismund made it to the sea with difficulty and went by ship to Constantinople, escaping death. Palatine Ruppert returned to Heidelberg dressed as a poor beggar.”<sup>321</sup> Many of those taken captive, such as the young squire Johann Schiltberger, were sold into slavery. Important noblemen, such as Marshal Boucicaut and John Nevers, were ransomed for large sums of money. John of Nevers went on to become duke of Burgundy (1404-1419); his son and successor, Philip the Good (1419-1467), would become one of the most illustrious rulers of fifteenth century Europe. Sigismund fled Nicopolis aboard ships that the Venetians had sent to the Danube to provide logistical support for the crusaders as the Ottomans forced Schiltberger and other prisoners to taunt the king from the banks overlooking the river. The architect of the failed crusade made his way to the Byzantine capital, where he consulted with Emperor Manuel II, and from there to Ragusa on the Adriatic

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<sup>320</sup>Quo. P.P. Panaitescu, *Interpretări românești*, Bucharest, 1947, p. 150.

<sup>321</sup>Quo. Papacostea, “Mircea la Nicopol,” p. 698.



Battle of Nicopolis  
Miniature by Jean Colombe (c. 1475)

coast; Sigismund did not return Hungary until three months after the disaster.

Immediately following his great victory, Bayezid moved west with characteristic agility, cutting off the crusaders's escape routes through Bulgaria and Serbia. At the same time, he took Vidin and transformed the last remnants of the medieval Bulgarian state into a Turkish pashalik. Stratimir had gambled and lost when he threw in his lot with the crusaders; the last Bulgarian Tsar was captured and sent to Brusa as a prisoner where he lived out the rest of his days. Five hundred years would pass before Bulgaria would rise from the ashes and reappear on the map of Europe. Wallachia remained the only escape route open to most survivors who had avoided capture. Mircea and Stibor were among those who made their way north to Transylvania, but the appearance of Vlad Dan and his troops hindered their flight.<sup>322</sup>

Wounds Stibor suffered in the fighting at Nicopolis made his journey back to Transylvania all the more difficult, but he recovered quickly and was determined to seize the initiative, fearing an imminent Ottoman attack on Hungary.<sup>323</sup> The Transylvanian voivode could not tolerate an ally of the Sultan on the throne of Wallachia; he intended that the principality to the south remain a buffer between Hungary and the Ottoman Empire.

Taking advantage of the fact that the main Ottoman force had withdrawn south for the winter, Stibor again gathered an army, which included Mircea and his troops, and reentered Wallachia through the Bran Pass in late November 1396. Their objective was to oust Vlad I and to restore Mircea to the throne. This attack,

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<sup>322</sup>Iorga, *Istoria armatei românești*, vol. I, p. 93; docs. 99 and 101, in *DRH,D*, pp. 154-158, 160-169.

<sup>323</sup>Pascu, "Contribuțiuni documentare," p. 219.

coming so late in the year and on the heels of the disastrous defeat at Nicopolis, caught Vlad Dan unprepared. Stibor and Mircea marched through Rucăr and Câmpulung virtually unimpeded. Unable to mount a counterattack, Vlad I fled before the invaders and took refuge in the fortress of Dâmbovița, south of Câmpulung. A diploma issued by Sigismund a year later, in which he recounts Stibor's valiant deeds, recalls how the Transylvanian voivode laid siege to the citadel until "the Voivode Vlad was forced from the aforesaid fortress.... and coming out from there with his wife, his children, and with his entire entourage, he abandoned the fortress of Dâmbovița into our hands."<sup>324</sup> Vlad I and his family were taken prisoner and brought to Hungary. By the end of 1396, Mircea once again ruled Wallachia.



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<sup>324</sup>Doc. 101 in *DRH, D*, pp. 160-169.

## THE KINGMAKER

*A prince, therefore, being compelled knowingly to adopt the beast, ought to choose the fox and the lion; because the lion cannot defend himself against snares and the fox cannot defend himself against wolves. Therefore, it is necessary to be a fox to discover the snares and a lion to terrify the wolves.*

— Nicolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*<sup>325</sup>

**F**ollowing Vlad Dan's capture, Mircea worked to consolidate his hold on the principality. Potential rivals still remained at large. A Ragusan accounting ledger records that 60 perpers were given to "John, son of the late voivode Dan, arrived in Ragusa on July 28, 1397."<sup>326</sup> John likely escaped Wallachia and fled to the Dalmatian coast following the defeat of his brother Vlad I. The youngest of Dan's sons, his namesake, remained in the service of his uncle Mircea. The newly restored prince also had to fend off Ottoman raids in 1397 and

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<sup>325</sup>Nicolò Machiavelli, p. 138 (XVIII).

<sup>326</sup>Quo. P.P. Panaitescu, "Relațiile Țării Românești și ale Moldovei cu Ragusa," in *Studii*, 2:4 (1949), p. 110.

prepared for a rumored invasion in 1398, but the Turks made no concentrated effort north of the Danube at this time because Bayezid focused his attention on Anatolia. The Sultan conquered Karaman in 1398 and by 1399 most of Asia Minor, with the notable exception of Trapezunt in the east, had fallen under Ottoman domination.

Mircea's position was further strengthened when Sigismund and Vladislav I signed a peace treaty in July 1397 in which the Poles renounced their claim to the Crown of St. Stephen and recognized Hungarian suzerainty over Wallachia.<sup>327</sup> Ties to Hungary were reinforced when the king granted Mircea a royal estate in Transylvania, near Koloszvár (Cluj), which included the fortress of Huedin (Bologa),<sup>328</sup> as insurance in the event that he was forced to flee Wallachia in the face of another Turkish attack.

By 1399, Europe was again in Bayezid's center of attention and Mircea feared a new invasion. On March 23, 1399, Sigismund wrote to Count Johannes de Paszto, a former court official, ordering him to gather troops to aid Mircea in the event of an attack: "Yesterday, I received a letter from.... Prince Mircea, Transalpine voivode, written near Little Nicopolis [Turnu], telling that Bayezid himself, the Lord of the Turks, is at the city of Adrianople with a very large army, on this side of the sea, from where in five days he could easily arrive at the Danube." The king emphasized the need for swift action, declaring that "we must have no doubt and we must greatly fear that the Wallachians, finding themselves without our assistance, will not remain faithful

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<sup>327</sup>Panaiteescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 274.

<sup>328</sup>Iosif Pataki, "Ceva despre relațiile Țării Românești cu Ungaria," in *SMIM*, II, Bucharest, 1957, p. 423.



and steadfast, but will submit in a short time to the Turkish yoke. If this would happen, and God forbid that if it should, you know very well in what danger and peril our country would find itself.”<sup>329</sup> But, although Ottoman raids continued, Wallachia did not confront a major invasion at this time as the Sultan directed his resources toward tightening the noose around Constantinople.

The atmosphere in the Byzantine capital was now one of despair. Only outside help could save the remnants of the once-mighty Eastern Roman Empire. From Rome, Pope Boniface IX issued a call for a new crusade, but after the debacle at Nicopolis little interest could be roused for another such grand endeavor. Manuel II sent emissaries throughout Europe to plead for assistance to save his beleaguered Empire from falling into the hands of the Turks. In September 1399, a modicum of help arrived from France after Charles VI sent a fleet of six vessels to Constantinople under the command of Marshal Boucicaut, eager for revenge against the Turks after his capture at Nicopolis. The French broke through the Ottoman blockade, but the small force of some twelve hundred men could not save Constantinople from the Turks. Boucicaut told Manuel that he must personally travel to the West to seek help, as only in this way could he raise sufficient resources to save his Empire from Bayezid’s armies. Realizing that armed resistance was the only option left open to him, the Emperor left his capital, accompanied by Boucicaut, on December 10, 1399; Manuel spent the next three years travelling in Italy, France, and England, working against time to try to garner the men, materiel, and financial resources that alone could prevent the fall of Constantinople into Ottoman hands.

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<sup>329</sup>Doc. 105 in *DRH, D*, pp. 171-174.

While Manuel II travelled throughout Europe striving to save his Empire from the Turks, north of the Danube Mircea worked vigorously to strengthen his own position as the Ottoman threat seemed omnipresent. The Wallachian prince had not been on good terms with neighboring Moldavia since Stephen I had supported Vlad Dan against him in 1395-1396. Following Stephen's death in 1399, the Poles intervened in the principality to assure the succession of a candidate amenable to them so that Moldavia would remain in the Polish sphere of influence; their choice fell upon Iuga, a son of Roman I. But Poland faced a political crisis following the unexpected death of Queen Hedwiga on July 17, 1399.

Mircea now saw an opportunity to secure his northeastern border. In the spring of 1400 he intervened in Moldavia on behalf of another son of his former ally Roman I, Alexander. Moldavian chronicles record that "on April 23 Voivode Alexander took the throne of Moldavia, while Voivode Iuga was taken prisoner by Voivode Mircea."<sup>330</sup> In an effort to ensure good relations in the future, the two princes concluded a treaty fixing the border between their principalities.<sup>331</sup> Mircea's bold initiative in intervening in Moldavia to place Alexander on the throne paid off as peaceful relations between the two neighboring states persisted throughout the remainder of his reign.

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<sup>330</sup>Panaiteescu, ed., *Cronicile slavo-române*, p. 6; Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Cronicile României*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1872, p. 136.

<sup>331</sup>Doc. CXLVI, Ioan Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan cel Mare*, vol. II, Bucharest, 1913, pp. 330-336; Doc. 22 in Ion Ionașcu et al., eds. *Relațiile internaționale ale României*, Bucharest, 1971, pp. 129-132.





Alexander the Good  
Prince of Moldavia, 1400-1432

With Constantinople surrounded, in the fall of 1400 Bayezid sent a large force to plunder Wallachia and Hungary. They attacked Oltenia and the Banat where they met only token resistance, but as Turkish troops prepared to cross the Danube to return to Ottoman territory with their plunder and numerous captives destined to be sold into slavery, Mircea launched a surprise counterattack and nearly annihilated the invaders.<sup>332</sup>

Despite this victory, the Ottoman threat to Wallachia loomed ever larger as the alliance with Hungary proved ineffectual. Sigismund's hold on the Crown of St. Stephen had always been tenuous, but the death of Maria and the disaster at Nicopolis had made the situation even worse. The king tried to purchase the loyalty of leading nobles by giving away numerous royal holdings to his supporters; of 230 castles and estates in the Crown's possession at the end of Louis the Great's reign, Sigismund retained only 47 of these by 1407.<sup>333</sup> Nevertheless, a revolt broke out in Hungary in the spring of 1401 and the king was taken prisoner. A council of barons ruled the country for over half a year until Sigismund was restored to the throne after agreeing to marry Barbara Cillei, the daughter of one of the most powerful Hungarian landowners, Hermann Cillei. Following his liberation, the king still faced revolts in Bosnia, Dalmatia, and Transylvania. Then, in 1403, Ladislas of Naples, the son of Charles of Durazzo who had briefly held the throne of Hungary in 1385, landed on the Dalmatian coast with the full support of Pope Boniface IX, "to occupy the throne of Hungary and to set right the miserable state

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<sup>332</sup>N. Iorga, *Acte și fragmente*, vol. III, Bucharest, 1897, pp. 4-5.

<sup>333</sup>János Bak, "The Late Medieval Period" in Peter F. Sugar, ed. *A History of Hungary*, Bloomington, 1994, p. 55.

of affairs there.”<sup>334</sup> By the end of that year, Sigismund had fended off this challenge and pardoned those who had opposed him, finally restoring order in his kingdom.

The crisis in Hungary had left Mircea without his most important ally against the Turks. As a result, he apparently resumed ties of vassalage to the Ottoman Empire in 1401. Bayezid also had a vested interest in peace along the European borders of his Empire at this time; a new threat from the Orient had arisen to menace the Sultan’s Anatolian frontier. Tamerlane (1336-1405), a descendant of the great Ghenghis Khan, had rebuilt the Mongol Empire to include most of Central Asia after he seized the throne at Samarkand in 1369. By the end of the century he had defeated the Golden Horde and threatened Ottoman holdings in Asia Minor. The Mongol advance north of the Black Sea drove Tatar tribes west. Some fled to Moldavia where they fell into slavery. Other tribes came to Wallachia where Mircea allowed them to settle or to pass through the country on their way to Adrianople where they planned to join forces with Bayezid to fight the Mongols.<sup>335</sup> That Mircea facilitated the crossing of Tatar troops destined to supplement the Sultan’s army is a reflection of the peaceful relations between Wallachia and the Ottoman Empire at this time. These renewed ties of vassalage are also attested to in a memoir written by the Dominican monk John, the Archbishop of Sultanich in Anatolia, whom Tamerlane had sent to Paris to negotiate an alliance against the Ottomans: “next to the Great Sea, or Pontica, is Wallachia, a large country. It has its own prince, and

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<sup>334</sup>Doc. CCCXLVII in Hurmuzaki, ed., *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, pp. 421-423.

<sup>335</sup>Mustafa A. Mehmet, “Aspecte din istoria Dobrogei sub dominația otomană,” in *Studii*, 18:5 (1965), pp. 1102-1103.

although the Turk has captured many of them and has made them pay tribute, nevertheless, he has not imposed his rule on this country as he has on the others.”<sup>336</sup>

The year 1402 found Manuel II in Paris. He had spent the past two and a half years treating with the leaders of Catholic Europe trying to obtain help to breathe new life into his dying Empire, but he had little to show for his efforts. Time was of the essence as the Ottoman noose tightened around the Byzantine capital and it increasingly seemed as if the Emperor would never again see his homeland. Constantinople stood on the brink of capitulation. But just when things looked their bleakest, the relief that Manuel had desperately sought arrived like manna from heaven.

On July 28, 1402, the armies of Tamerlane and Bayezid met in battle on the Chubuk plain near Ankara. Some have claimed that Mircea, as a vassal of the Sultan, participated in person alongside Bayezid's forces at the battle of Ankara, but the evidence to support this claim is derived from a translation of an Ottoman chronicle that confuses the Wallachian prince with Serbian ruler Stephen Lazarevich,<sup>337</sup> known to have fought bravely alongside the Sultan against Tamerlane. Although there is no compelling evidence that Mircea personally took part in the battle, Orudj bin Adil recorded that when Bayezid set out to confront Tamerlane, “he brought with him numerous soldiers, among them *akingi* and *Cerahori* [mercenaries], as well as soldiers from Wallachia. He gathered the army of Laz and the Serbian one, also taking along Laz-oglu [Stephen Lazarevich].”<sup>338</sup>

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<sup>336</sup>*Călători străini*, vol. I, p. 39.

<sup>337</sup>Aurel Decei, “A participat Mircea cel Bătrân la lupta de la Ankara?” in *RIR*, VII (1937), p. 355.

<sup>338</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 49.



Battle of Ankara, 1402



This well-informed Ottoman chronicler, who was born around the time of these events, clearly distinguishes between the Wallachian and Serbian troops in the Sultan's army, thus providing convincing evidence that Mircea at least sent a contingent to fight alongside the Ottomans at Ankara.

In any event, the battle resulted in an overwhelming victory for Tamerlane. Bayezid himself fell captive and in one swift blow the Mongol ruler brought the mighty Ottoman Empire to its knees. Chalkokondyles could only explain the shocking Turkish defeat by saying that "Bayezid, having achieved unmeasured power, was humbled by God so that he would not continue with thoughts of such great power."<sup>339</sup> The blockade of Constantinople dissipated almost immediately. Tamerlane's victory postponed the fall of Byzantium to the Turks for another half a century. Bayezid committed suicide in captivity in March of the following year and a civil war broke out among his sons, each of whom sought to impose his rule over remnants of the Empire. Manuel II, having received the welcome news of the Ottoman defeat while in Paris, made his way back to the imperial capital, where he arrived in June 1403, still hopeful that a concerted Christian military effort could be organized to finish off the Turks.

The outcome of the battle of Ankara abruptly terminated Mircea's dependence on the Ottomans. He saw an opportunity to recoup some of his losses of the previous decade, but with the unstable political situation in the region, Wallachia still needed a reliable ally. With Hungary in disarray, Poland represented the most viable alternative. The death of Hedwiga in 1399 had destabilized Poland, but the situation had greatly improved by

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<sup>339</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 79 (II, 109).

1401 when Vladislav I concluded an alliance with his cousin Vitold, grand duke of Lithuania. Alexander the Good, Mircea's protégé in Moldavia, had renewed that principality's ties of vassalage to the Polish Crown on March 12, 1402,<sup>340</sup> and he now facilitated a reconciliation between Mircea and Vladislav. They revived their previous alliance and, in 1403, Mircea granted trade privileges in Wallachia to merchants from Lemberg and throughout Poland and Lithuania.<sup>341</sup>

The Wallachian prince now moved to take advantage of the situation in the Danube basin where the troubles in Hungary and the Ottoman Empire had created a power vacuum. When war broke out between Genoa and Venice in 1403, Mircea sided with the Venetians who had previously aided his father Radu in his war with Louis the Great. Since their long war with Dobrotitsa, the Genoese had controlled Kilia (Lykostomo), the strategically important fortress and port city located on the northern branch of the Danube River near the outlet to the Black Sea.<sup>342</sup> Mircea now seized Kilia from the Genoese. Meanwhile, at the beginning of 1404, the Venetians destroyed the Genoese fleet at Mondon, thus assuring that Kilia remained in Wallachian hands. Mircea also appears to have recovered Turnu around this time and worked to secure the left bank of the Danube, constructing a stone fortress at Giurgiu.

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<sup>340</sup>Doc. 171 in Costăchescu, *Documentele moldovenesti*, vol. II, pp. 621-622.

<sup>341</sup>Doc. DCLII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, pp. 824-825; and Doc. 1 in Hajdeu, *Archiva istorică*, vol. I, part. 1, Bucharest, 1865, pp. 3-4; see also Doc. 7 in Ionașcu, et al. eds, *Relațiile internaționale*, pp. 94-95.

<sup>342</sup>Nicolae Iorga, *Studii istorice asupra Chilie și Cetății Albe*, Bucharest, 1899, pp. 60, 274.

Now that the Ottoman threat had diminished with the defeat and capture of Bayezid at Ankara, little interest could be roused in the West for a campaign that Manuel II hoped would deliver a coup de grâce to the forces of Islam. Nor did Tamerlane express any interest in finishing off the Ottomans. The Mongol Emperor returned several Anatolian states such as Karaman and Sinope to their former rulers, but he left the Ottomans with many of their possessions in western Anatolia over which he only claimed suzerainty; of Bayezid's sons, Isa was appointed Emir of Brusa, while Mehmed continued to govern Manisa, just as he had done under his father. Another of Bayezid's sons, Suleiman, escaped after the battle of Ankara and made his way to Adrianople where, with the help of Grand Vezir Ali Çanderli, he proclaimed himself Sultan and effectively ruled the European portion of the Empire.

To consolidate his position, Suleiman came to an agreement with the Byzantines; prior to Ankara, the Emperor had been a vassal of the Sultan, now Suleiman accepted Manuel II as his sovereign. The peace was sealed by the newly-proclaimed Sultan's marriage to the Emperor's daughter. In addition, Suleiman released Byzantine prisoners and restored Thessalonika, certain Aegean Islands, and Black Sea ports up to Varna to the Greeks. For his part, Manuel II, realizing that he could not expect significant aid from the West, embraced this arrangement which offered the Empire a new lease on life.

Although now an ally of Byzantium, Suleiman's relations with other Christian states in southeastern Europe, most notably Wallachia, deteriorated. Disputes along the Danube, raids by the *akingi*, and Mircea's desire to recover lost territories such as Dobrudja, led to renewed conflicts. Because of the escalating Ottoman peril, Mircea again drew closer to Hungary where Sigismund now had firm control of the situation; in the spring of



1404, the king wrote to Philip, the duke of Burgundy, telling him, among other things, that the voivode of Wallachia had reported new victories against the Turks.<sup>343</sup> To strengthen ties between Hungary and Wallachia, the king placed the fortress of Bran under Mircea's authority;<sup>344</sup> Sigismund probably did this to compensate for the fact that help from Hungary had been slow to arrive in Wallachia on previous occasions. Persistent difficulties in financing the defense of the kingdom's southern border also compelled the king to entrust Mircea with the maintenance of this strategic point. Today a museum of medieval history, the picturesque Bran Castle is one of Romania's most frequented tourist attractions and visitors from all over the world are invariably deceived into believing that it is Dracula's castle. In reality, although Mircea controlled the fortress throughout the remainder of his reign, neither his son, Vlad Dracul, nor his grandson, Vlad the Impaler, ever had possession of Bran Castle which had reverted to Hungarian control by the time they ruled Wallachia.

A common interest in opposing Ottoman expansion drew Wallachia and Hungary ever closer. In the fall of 1406 Mircea visited the venerable Abbot Nicodim at Tismana where he granted a diploma confirming the monks's fishing and pasturing privileges. Interestingly, the prince mentions that he issued the document "as My Majesty was going to Severin to meet with the king, then I arrived at the monastery in the month of November, on the 23nd day, together with all the abbots of the monasteries

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<sup>343</sup>Doc. CCCLIII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, p. 429.

<sup>344</sup>Ioan Mosoiu, *Branul și Cetatea Branului*, Bucharest, 1930, p. 14; Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, pp. 194-194.

and all My Majesty's boyars."<sup>345</sup> In frail health, Nicodim was not among those who accompanied Mircea to Severin to meet Sigismund. He died a month later at the monastery he had founded.

Undoubtedly, plans for a new campaign against the Turks dominated the agenda of the conference at Severin. Sigismund took several initiatives around this time to prepare for war with the Ottomans. As a defensive measure, he ordered the Saxon cities in Transylvania to build new fortifications or to improve existing ones. The king also drew Bayezid's most dependable Christian ally, Serbian despot Stephen Lazarevich, who, along with the Byzantines, had made peace with Suleiman, into the anti-Ottoman alliance. Finally, he appointed one of his most reliable and trustworthy lieutenants, Filippo Scolari, as count of Temes, making him responsible for the defense of Hungary's frontier with the Ottomans.

Born in Italy in 1369, Filippo Scolari, better-known as Pippo de Ozora or Pippo Spano, came from a poor noble family of Florentine merchants. He studied in Germany and then travelled to Hungary as an assistant to the Italian merchant Lucca della Pecchia who procured luxury goods for the Bishop of Strigoni, the highest ranking Catholic Church official in the kingdom. As Florence held a virtual monopoly over commerce in Hungary during this time, it is no surprise that young Pippo remained there to handle the bishop's accounting matters. At Strigoni, in 1395, he met the king. Impressed by the young Italian, Sigismund took Pippo to his court where he experienced a meteoric rise. In 1398, he married Barbara de Ozora, the daughter of a leading Hungarian

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<sup>345</sup>Doc. 32 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 70-71.

nobleman, and began calling himself Pippo de Ozora. Fiercely loyal to his benefactor, Pippo helped to free the king from prison and later saved Sigismund's life during the rebellions of 1401-1403. In recognition of his services, in 1404 the king named him count of Temes and in 1408 ban (in Hungarian, ispan) of Severin, from which his sobriquet, Spano, is derived. He went on to accumulate numerous other titles and he became a member of the regency council that governed Hungary during Sigismund's absence. He promoted Italian culture in Hungary. The Italian painter Masolino (1383-c. 1447) figured among those who spent time at his court. He also introduced Italian architectural designs in the churches and fortresses he built. A highly intelligent man with a talent for foreign languages, Pippo Spano was also a capable military leader; in 1407-1408 he distinguished himself in the campaign against the Turks in Bosnia.<sup>346</sup>

Sometime after his meeting with Sigismund at Severin, probably in coordination with the Hungarian offensive in Bosnia, Mircea launched an attack on Ottoman positions along the left bank of the Danube, recapturing the stronghold of Silistra and most of Dobrudja north of Varna. Suleiman's position had become vulnerable after the death in 1407 of his gifted Grand Vezir Ali Çenderli, the power behind the throne and the man responsible for preventing a debacle and holding the European portion of the Empire together following the disaster at Ankara. A Greek inscription from 1408 found in the city recalls how Mircea

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<sup>346</sup>Ioan Hategan, "Banatul și începuturile luptei antiotomane," in *RdI*, 31:6 (1978), pp. 1027-1031; Adolf Ambruster, "Un aliat italian al domnilor români: Pippo Spano," in *MI*, XI:2 (1977), p. 43.



Pippo Spano

“liberated Silistra from the Turks.”<sup>347</sup> The Wallachian prince hoped to recover the lands of Dobrotitsa which he considered his rightful inheritance; the capture of Silistra was a step in this direction. It soon became apparent that significant help from Hungary to achieve these objectives was not forthcoming. Affairs in the West preoccupied Sigismund. In addition, Hungary once again began to press its claim to Severin, long a source of dispute between the two neighboring countries. As a result, Mircea abandoned his alliance with Sigismund.

The break occurred at some point during 1408. In December of that year Sigismund established a new crusading society, the Order of Dragon. The 24 founding members included Pippo de Ozora and Serbian despot Stephen Lazarevich, both key figures in the struggle against the Ottomans. Mircea is notably absent from the list. The only plausible explanation for this is that the king of Hungary and the prince of Wallachia were no longer in good relations at this time. Had things stood differently, Mircea may have become the original Dracula. Another indication of this change is that earlier in 1408 the king regarded Kilia, which Mircea controlled, as a reliable base against the Turks; after the break, Sigismund began making plans to conquer the strategic Danubian port.<sup>348</sup> But the king was increasingly drawn away from

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<sup>347</sup>Quo. *Istoria Românilor*, vol. IV, p. 187; Anca Ghiată, “Aspecte ale organizării politice în Dobrogea,” in *RdI*, 34:10 (1981), p. 1888; and Andrei Pippidi, “Sue une inscription grecque de Silistra,” in *RESEE*, XXIV (1986), pp. 323-332 who argues that Mircea recovered Silistra in 1403 and that it remained under Wallachian rule until 1419.

<sup>348</sup>Florin Constantiniu and Șerban Papacostea, “Tratatul de la Lublău (15 martie 1412)” in *Studii*, XVII:5 (1964), p. 1138.

affairs in southeastern Europe following his election as Holy Roman Emperor in 1410.

The alliance with Hungary having failed, Mircea sought security by renewing ties with its rival, Poland. Through his aunt, the Bulgarian Tsarina Ana, wife of Stratimir of Vidin, Mircea was a distant relative of the Polish king via the latter's marriage to his first wife, Hedwiga.<sup>349</sup> In an undated letter to Vladislav I, Mircea refers to him as his "parent" (in Slavonic, *roditel*), a term of respect used to reflect virtually any degree of kinship, and added, "I am yours, and my children, as many as there are, are your children and grandchildren as they are mine."<sup>350</sup> In 1409, the Wallachian prince renewed trade privileges for merchants from Lemberg and throughout Poland and Lithuania.<sup>351</sup> On February 6, 1410, Vladislav Jagiello validated his previous treaty with Mircea.<sup>352</sup> They concluded a new agreement on May 17, 1411, while Mircea inspected his recently-constructed fortress at Giurgiu and closely monitored the situation south of the Danube, where his protégé Musa had recently seized power, pledging mutual assistance against "the raids and hostile attacks of the king of Hungary, his vassals, or any of his subjects."<sup>353</sup> The new theatre of war between Hungary and Poland was in the north where, beginning in 1409, the Teutonic Knights, aided by Sigismund, fought against Vladislav I and his Lithuanian allies. The decisive battle in this conflict took place at Tannenberg (Grünwald) on July

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<sup>349</sup>Pavel Chihaiia, *Din cetățile de scaun ale Țării Românești*, Bucharest, 1974, p. 182.

<sup>350</sup>Doc. DCLIII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, p. 825.

<sup>351</sup>Annex II in Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 353.

<sup>352</sup>Annex III in Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 354.

<sup>353</sup>Doc. 115 in *DRH, D*, pp. 186-187.



15, 1410, where the Poles won a great victory; they decimated the Knights's cavalry and the Grand Master himself laid dead on the battlefield before Sigismund's troops could arrive to help their allies. As a result of this victory, Lithuania, fearing that Poland had now grown too strong, began to assert its independence. With their alliances in disarray, Poland and Hungary reached a stalemate and returned to the negotiating table.

With Hungary and Poland at war in the north, Mircea faced the Ottoman threat alone. Suleiman continued his policy of hostility toward Wallachia and sanctioned frequent raids by the *akingi* against the principality. Unable to obtain help from European states, Mircea renewed his contacts with rulers along the Black Sea coast of Anatolia, especially those of Karaman and Sinope, who had a common interest in opposing Ottoman aggression. With the civil war between Bayezid's sons now in full swing, the wily prince sought to turn the situation to his advantage.

When Mircea began his diplomatic offensive, the Ottoman Empire was split in two; Mehmed, who had defeated his brother Isa, ruled in Rum and Suleiman in Rumelia. Another of Bayezid's sons, Musa, had been captured with his father at the battle of Ankara. Tamerlane freed Musa when Bayezid committed suicide and allowed him to take his father's body to Brusa for proper burial. Musa allied with his brother Mehmed for a time, but later fled to Karaman where he awaited an opportunity to stake his own claim. Meanwhile, Suleiman, claiming to be the one true Sultan, attacked Mehmed and the two struggled for control of Asia Minor.

According to the Ottoman chronicler Mehmed Neshri, Mircea "very much weakened by the *akingi* in Rumelia," sent emissaries to Karaman in 1409 and began negotiations with Musa, offering



to support him against Suleiman.<sup>354</sup> Ottoman sources maintain that the initiative belonged to Mircea. Another chronicler, Kodja Husein, cites a fanciful letter the Wallachian prince purportedly sent to Musa at Karaman: “Upon your fortunate arrival, I will hand over to you all my wealth, and I have a daughter, as beautiful as the moon, and she will be your slave, and we will serve you with all we have in my country, with wealth and with people.”<sup>355</sup>

Byzantine chroniclers, on the other hand, claim that Musa initiated the contact. Dukas writes that the Ottoman prince crossed the Black Sea to Wallachia and “Meeting there with the Voivode Mircea, he told him who he was and from where and why he came,”<sup>356</sup> while Chalkokondyles adds that “Musa came to Wallachia by sea from Sinope. He negotiated with Mircea, offering him land and revenues in exchange for help.”<sup>357</sup> If Musa came seeking Mircea’s assistance, then it is likely that he was still acting in concert with his brother Mehmed at this time, for the latter had much to gain by attacking Suleiman in Europe so as to force his withdrawal from Anatolia. But, although Mehmed stood to benefit as well, the most probable explanation remains that Mircea encouraged Musa’s ambition and enticed him to come to Wallachia. The prince had used his diplomatic ties with the emirs along the Anatolian coast in the past to coordinate anti-Ottoman strategy. Also, the marriage of Musa to one of Mircea’s daughters, recorded by Ottoman chroniclers, is confirmed in a letter from 1411 sent by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Eftemie II, to a

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<sup>354</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 114.

<sup>355</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 443.

<sup>356</sup>Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină*, Bucharest, 1958, p. 122 (XIX, 1).

<sup>357</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 114 (IV, 171).

Russian prince.<sup>358</sup> Finally, with Hungary and Poland at war, Mircea needed help against Suleiman; what better way to obtain it than to find an ally in the Turkish camp.

Having accepted Mircea's proposal, Musa left Karaman and "returned to Isfendiar [Sinope]," Neshri continues, "and from there, taking a ship, he crossed to Wallachia. The bey of Wallachia, being very pleased, received him with respect and honor and feasted him and gave him many gifts. After this, giving him his daughter, he made him a prince in his land."<sup>359</sup> While negotiations to bring Musa to Wallachia were underway, the Byzantines, Suleiman's staunch allies, got wind of Mircea's plans and conspired against the Wallachian prince. Chalkokondyles attests to the hostile relations between Mircea and the Greeks at this time, revealing that "here in Byzantium, they received a son of Mircea and they promised him that they would bring him to the throne with the help of their friend Suleiman."<sup>360</sup> The son referred to here is probably one of the several illegitimate children spawned by Mircea whom Chalkokondyles tells us "had relations often with his mistresses."<sup>361</sup> In any event, Mircea foiled the plot to oust him by seizing the initiative. As preparations for the offensive against Suleiman progressed, the prince intensified his diplomatic efforts to gain support for his plans to intervene in the Ottoman civil war, sending emissaries to Venice in May 1410;<sup>362</sup> Mircea had been on good terms with the Republic of St. Mark

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<sup>358</sup>N. Șerbănescu and N. Stoicescu, *Mircea cel Mare*, Bucharest, 1987, p. 30.

<sup>359</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 114.

<sup>360</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 114 (IV, 171).

<sup>361</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 64 (II, 78).

<sup>362</sup>Panaiteescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 317.

since their collaboration in the war against Genoa in 1403-1404. Meanwhile, Serbian Despot Stephen Lazarevich also pledged military assistance.

“Mircea gladly received Musa,” Chalkokondyles continues, “and provided for his needs and gave him an army, including Wallachians led by Dan [Mircea’s nephew].”<sup>363</sup> These preparations did not go unnoticed. Dukas relates that “The western pashas, who defended the areas along the Danube, found out about Musa’s arrival in Wallachia and wrote to Suleiman about what happened and told him that if he would not quickly cross over to the Thracian parts, Musa will take the West as his inheritance.”<sup>364</sup>

When everything was ready, Musa and Dan traversed the Danube at Mircea’s stronghold of Silistra, where there were no Ottoman forces to hinder their crossing, and invaded Rumelia in early summer of 1410. They encountered only token resistance as they advanced south to Adrianople and joined with Stephen Lazarevich; Musa then entered the Ottoman capital where he proclaimed himself Sultan. Meanwhile, Suleiman, heeding the advice of his lieutenants, gathered his army and crossed the Straits back into Europe to confront Musa’s challenge. The two armies met in battle at Cosmedion, in the Golden Horn, on June 15, 1410. Suleiman defeated Musa and his allies and drove them back to Adrianople where he won another victory over his brother on July 11 and recaptured the capital. Musa and Dan now fled to Wallachia to regroup and to consult with Mircea.

In the months that followed, Musa courted the beys and pashas of Rumelia from his base in Wallachia, determined to win

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<sup>363</sup> Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 114 (IV, 171).

<sup>364</sup> Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină*, p. 122 (XIX, I).

them over to his cause before launching a new attack. He found a receptive audience. The loss of Ali Çenderli had taken its toll. Chalkokondyles explains that “Suleiman became apathetic and was only interested in revelries so the state of affairs became unstable. Thus, his highest officials became disappointed in him.... And the Greeks sent emissaries to him and they advised him not to neglect everything and to party all the time as his throne is in danger and not at all secure in the face of his brother. But he did not pay attention to any of this.”<sup>365</sup>

Having secured important allies in Suleiman’s camp, Musa, with Mircea’s support and with Dan and a contingent of Wallachian troops at his side, launched a second invasion of Rumelia in February 1411. Once again, Adrianople was the objective. Musa took the capital with relative ease on February 11 after many of Suleiman’s officials abandoned him and went over to his brother. Suleiman fled toward Constantinople to seek help from his Byzantine allies, but he was captured and killed en route. The ruler of the small principality north of the Danube had successfully placed his candidate on the throne of one of the most powerful empires of his day. Mircea’s bold foreign policy initiative had born fruit.

Mircea remained Musa’s closest ally throughout the Ottoman prince’s brief reign. The Wallachian prince used his close relations with Venice to mediate a treaty of alliance between the new Sultan and the Republic of St. Mark. A Venetian chronicle records that “This Musa got along better [than other sultans] with the Christians and with the Venetians who regularly came to his

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<sup>365</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 115 (IV, 174).

lands.”<sup>366</sup> In recognition of his support, the new Sultan turned over several cities on the left bank of the Danube to the Wallachian prince.<sup>367</sup>

But victory for Mircea meant defeat for Byzantium. Manuel II lost his closest ally with the death of Suleiman and the crafty Emperor now sought ways to strike back; he opened negotiations with Mehmed who continued to rule the Asian part of Bayezid’s former Empire from Brusa. Musa, meanwhile, hoping to deal Byzantium a decisive blow, now laid siege to Constantinople. A decade had passed since Ottoman troops had surrounded the walls of the imperial capital and nearly forced its capitulation, but in the ensuing years the Byzantines had strengthened their defenses and the city could easily withstand an assault by a Turkish force far less powerful than in the days of Bayezid. Mircea continued to back Musa and Wallachian troops led by his nephew Dan participated in this siege of Constantinople. Under the walls of Byzantium, Dan’s own princely ambitions awakened. Dukas records that Mircea’s nephew, “found himself with Murad in the expedition against Constantinople and, as one who was prepared for any act of war, he himself accompanied the Turks in reconnaissance and he secretly went about the city.” Hoping to obtain Byzantine support, Dan deserted and, “making himself known to the Emperor, he took part in the Byzantine attacks and demonstrated great courage against the Turks.”<sup>368</sup>

The Byzantine chronicler apparently confuses Murad II’s siege of Constantinople, which began in June 1422, with that of

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<sup>366</sup>Quo. Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 317.

<sup>367</sup>Iorga, *Chestiunea Dunării*, p. 161.

<sup>368</sup>Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină*, p. 252 (XXIX, 7).

Musa in 1411. But in the summer of 1422 Dan arrived in Hungary from where, with Sigismund's help, he prepared to take the Wallachian throne from Radu Praznaglava who enjoyed Ottoman support. In addition, all the evidence we possess ties Dan to Musa, not to Murad. The would-be prince remained in Byzantium, which was hostile to Mircea, hoping for an opportunity to press his claim to his father's throne. But the removal of his enemy Musa remained the Emperor's immediate concern. After a debacled attempt to raise up Suleiman's young son Orhan against Musa that ended with Salonika also coming under seige, Manuel II reached an understanding with Mehmed. Aided by the Byzantines, Mehmed crossed the straits into Europe in the summer of 1412 and attacked Musa at Adrianople. But the Anatolian ruler met with defeat and hastily retreated to his stronghold in Asia Minor.

Despite this reprieve and Mircea's unwavering support, Musa's hold on Rumelia began to weaken. Relations with Serbia deteriorated when the new Sultan refused to honor promises to Stephen Lazarevich to turn over lands in Macedonia. But Musa's domestic policy proved even more damaging. Influenced by the radical Sheik Bedreddin Mahmud, one of the most brilliant intellectual figures of his day, the new Sultan alienated many of the Ottoman elites who had helped him overthrow his brother Suleiman. Musa appointed Bedreddin as *kadiasker*, a military judge and the highest ranking official in the Ottoman judiciary. The sheik preached an ideology of social equality and religious tolerance which, together with Musa, he sought to put into practice. This did not sit well with Ottoman aristocrats who frowned upon Musa's good relations with Christian states such as Wallachia and Venice and rebelled against the new Sultan's practice of confiscating the wealth of large landholders and promoting ordinary men to high positions. These policies created

widespread unrest among the Ottoman elites; Chalkokondyles affirms that they “were unhappy with the authoritarian rule of Musa and crossed over to Mehmed.”<sup>369</sup>

Capitalizing on his situation, Mehmed launched a new invasion of Europe in the summer of 1413. The two brothers met in battle at Çamurlu, not far from Sofia, on July 5. Musa fought bravely, but was vastly outnumbered and Mehmed emerged victorious. Musa fled toward the Danube, hoping to reach Wallachia where, with Mircea’s help, he could rebuild his forces, but he was captured, taken to Mehmed, and then strangled.<sup>370</sup> For the first time since the days of Bayezid the Thunderbolt, both the Asian and European parts of the Ottoman Empire were united under a single ruler. The Ottoman civil war had effectively come to an end.

Mircea now faced a precarious situation. Although Musa was captured before he could reach Wallachia, some of the officials loyal to him managed to cross the Danube to safety. Orudj bin Adil records that “Musa had a subject called Azep who, fleeing, went to Wallachia.”<sup>371</sup> Another of those who escaped was Sheik Bedreddin. Having aided and abetted Mehmed’s enemies, Mircea realized the need to prepare for renewed Ottoman attacks on his principality. Already in the summer of 1412, when Mehmed first challenged Musa, the Wallachian prince had sent emissaries to Hungary to participate at the Congress of Buda to discuss the renewal of his alliance with Sigismund. On this occasion, plans for a new anti-Ottoman campaign were discussed, which included

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<sup>369</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, pp. 117-118 (IV, 178-179).

<sup>370</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 120 (IV, 183).

<sup>371</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 51.





Sultan Mehmed I

the restoration of Bulgaria, but Mircea had no interest in joining such an effort so long as Musa retained his hold on Rumelia.

The events that followed the defeat of the Teutonic Knights at Tannenberg compelled the Wallachian prince, who as late as May 1411 had renewed his alliance with Vladislav I against the Hungarian king, to seek an accommodation with Sigismund. Negotiations between Poland and Hungary resulted in the Treaty of Lublau, signed on March 15, 1412. This treaty ended the conflict between the rival kingdoms and established the basis for their future cooperation. A significant clause in the treaty refers to Moldavia. Hungary recognized the preeminence of Polish interests in Moldavia, first established in 1387 when Peter Mușat accepted the suzerainty of the Polish king, but obligated the principality east of the Carpathians to contribute military support to the anti-Ottoman struggle led by the king of Hungary. In the event of non-compliance, the two regional superpowers secretly agreed to divide Moldavia between them.

The agreement does not mention Wallachia as it was an Ottoman ally at this time, but the treaty does stipulate Hungary's claim to Kilia, then in Mircea's possession.<sup>372</sup> Kilia interested Sigismund not only strategically, as a base of operations against the Ottomans, but also economically, because of its importance as an outlet for German merchants from Transylvania to participate in the prosperous eastern trade and to challenge the commercial monopoly in the Orient held by the Venetians with whom

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<sup>372</sup>Doc. CCCCI in Hurmuzaki, ed., *Documente*, vol. I, part 2, pp. 483-487. See also Constantinescu and Papacostea, "Tratatul de la Lublău"; and P.P. Panaitescu, "Legăturile Moldo-Polone în secolul XV și problema Chilieii," in *Romanoslavica*, III (1958), p. 99.

Sigismund fought for control of the Dalmatian coast.<sup>373</sup> In any event, after Musa's defeat Mircea hastened to come to terms with Hungary. The two countries renewed their former agreements and, on August 6, 1413, the Wallachian prince confirmed trade privileges for merchants from Braşov.<sup>374</sup>

When he resumed the alliance with Hungary, Mircea agreed to send one of his sons as a hostage to Sigismund's court. This was a common practice at the time to ensure the loyalty of a vassal to his suzerain. The term hostage is somewhat misleading; the so-called hostage lived and worked at his sovereign's court and enjoyed all of the honors and privileges due to someone of his rank and stature. The Wallachian prince chose to send his son Vlad, perhaps not yet in his early teens, to the court of the Hungarian king. A diploma issued by Sigismund on March 19, 1430, makes reference to "Layko [Vlad], son of the late, renowned, and great Mircea, voivode of our Transalpine land, raised at our court."<sup>375</sup> Although it is possible that young Vlad was sent to the Hungarian court as early as 1404-1408 when Mircea enjoyed good relations with Sigismund, 1413 is a more probable date as the king likely required some guarantee from Mircea after the breakdown of their previous agreement. Vlad presumably adapted easily to his new environment as his mother, Mara, came from a powerful Hungarian landowning family. The experience of growing up at Sigismund's cosmopolitan court certainly benefitted young Vlad and prepared him for his future role as prince of Wallachia; he had the opportunity to learn foreign languages, participate in Western

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<sup>373</sup>Şerban Papacostea, "Kilia et la politique orientale de Sigismund de Luxembourg," in *RRH*, XV:3 (1976), pp. 421-436.

<sup>374</sup>Doc. 120 in *DRH*, D, pp. 197-198.

<sup>375</sup>Doc. 172 in *DRH*, D, pp. 273-274.



Mircea's wife Mara



feudal society, and observe political dealings at the court of one of Christian Europe's most powerful rulers.

As Mircea braced himself for the Sultan's wrath, Mehmed worked to consolidate his hold over the newly-won European portion of his Empire. He rewarded the Byzantines and the Serbs who had helped him to defeat Musa. The new Sultan restored all of the lands and privileges that Suleiman had accorded to the Byzantines and, like his brother, Mehmed also accepted the Emperor as his nominal suzerain. According to Dukas, the Sultan sent emissaries to Manuel II, instructing them to "Go and say to my father, the Emperor of the Romans, that, with the help of God and the collaboration of the Emperor, my father, I have taken my parental inheritance. From now on I am and I will be obedient to him as a son to a father, for I am not ungrateful and I will not appear in the eyes of anyone as an ingrate..."<sup>376</sup> Meanwhile, Mehmed did not forget that Mircea supported Musa against him and determined to punish the Wallachian prince. Chalkokondyles notes that the Sultan "sent an army against Dacia [Wallachia] and plundered this country. And the prince of Dacia, sending emissaries to him, concluded a peace treaty on the condition that he bring the tribute that he owed to Emperor Mehmed."<sup>377</sup> The Byzantine chronicler refers here to raids by the *akingi* which forced Wallachia to resume paying tribute to the Ottomans for the first time since the days of Bayezid the Thunderbolt. Mircea also gave up control of the Ottoman cities on the right bank of the Danube that Musa had granted to him earlier.

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<sup>376</sup>Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină*, p. 132 (XX, 1).

<sup>377</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 120 (IV, 183).

While diplomatic maneuvering and the resumption of tribute payments managed to buy Mircea a reprieve from Ottoman assaults, the prince did not abandon his kingmaking ambitions. Suleiman's son Orhan, who the Byzantines had originally raised against Musa, fled toward Wallachia after Mehmed's victory, hoping to find support there for his imperial ambitions, but before he could reach the Danube he was captured and brought before his uncle who had him blinded and then sent him to Brusa. Having settled affairs in the Balkans, Mehmed set out against his enemies in Asia Minor, intent on recovering territories lost after the battle of Ankara. Faced with renewed Ottoman aggression, the Emirates on the Anatolian Black Sea coast intensified their long-standing diplomatic contacts with Wallachia and other Christian countries, hoping to find a way to fragment Ottoman power once again. Before long, a new pretender to the Ottoman throne surfaced claiming to be Mustafa, another son of Bayezid, presumed to have perished at the battle of Ankara.

While Ottoman and Byzantine chronicles, favorable to Mehmed, portray Mustafa as an imposter, it cannot be ruled out that he was truly Bayezid's son. In any event, he managed to present himself as a legitimate contender for the throne. The Anatolian Emirs supported him as an alternative to Mehmed, while many of those who had backed Musa rallied to him; most important among these was Sheik Bedreddin who seems to be the one who convinced Mustafa to stake his claim. Mehmed Neshri records that Bedreddin boasted: "he is my disciple and he revolts for me."<sup>378</sup>

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<sup>378</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 117.

Since the days of Musa, Bedreddin stood at the forefront of a revolutionary religious and social movement. Educated at such important centers of learning as Konya, Cairo, and Mecca, Bedreddin Mahmud was one of the leading scholars of his time, writing numerous books on philosophy, theology, and Islamic law. He preached a form of pantheism and promoted religious tolerance, seeking to break down the barriers between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism; he also advocated the redistribution of wealth and notions of collective property. There can be no doubt that Bedreddin awakened Mustafa's ambitions and that his movement provided the base of power from which the pretender launched his challenge to Mehmed.

By the beginning of 1415, diplomatic efforts to organize support for Mustafa's bid for the throne were in full swing. On January 20, the Venetian Senate received two emissaries from Mustafa, one Turk and one Greek, asking for help against Mehmed. But the Venetians, reluctant to become directly involved in the conflict so as not to jeopardize their commercial interests in the Levant, recommended that Mustafa first obtain the support of their ally Mircea in Wallachia and promised some assistance should he succeed.<sup>379</sup> The Emirs of Anatolia, especially the rulers of Karaman and Sinope, facilitated contacts between Mustafa and Mircea in the spring of 1415, but here again, observes the Ottoman chronicler Idris Bitlisi, Bedreddin played a key role, "as earlier, through his ties to Musa Çelebi, he was friends with the prince of Wallachia."<sup>380</sup> As a result, Mustafa followed in Musa's footsteps; he left Karaman for Sinope and from there traveled by boat to

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<sup>379</sup>Iorga, *Acte și fragmente*, vol. III, pp. 6-7.

<sup>380</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 162.



Wallachia. His arrival in the capital of Argeş is recorded in a diploma granted by Mircea confirming ownership of the villages of Beala and Preslop to a boyar named Vlad and his relatives, issued “in the month of June, on the 10th day, in the year 6923 [1415] and indiction 8, at the time when Mustafa Çelebi arrived.”<sup>381</sup>

Mircea had once more committed himself to the role of kingmaker. Chalkokondyles recounts how “Mustafa crossed into Dacia [Wallachia] and, remaining there for a long time with 300 men, he made contact with the leading Turks, negotiating separately with each of them.”<sup>382</sup> Mircea placed Wallachian troops at Mustafa’s disposal and the pretender soon began leading raids south of the Danube. A report from Ragusa, dated August 18, tells that Mustafa, within two months after his arrival in Wallachia, launched attacks on Bulgaria and had won over two Danubian beys to his cause.<sup>383</sup> But despite some successes, most notably winning over Tineit, the Bey of Nicopolis, to his cause, Mustafa failed to gather the kind of support among the Ottoman elites that Musa had amassed against Suleiman. Chalkokondyles explains that “he did not achieve anything as Mehmed, among other things, was a decent man and he knew how to treat well the leading Turks, being of a gentle nature; and he declared outright that Mustafa is not the true child of Bayezid.”<sup>384</sup> Another reason that the Ottoman aristocracy in Rumelia did not flock to Mustafa was their wariness

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<sup>381</sup>Doc. 38 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 80-82.

<sup>382</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 130 (IV, 203).

<sup>383</sup>Aurel Decei, *Istoria imperiului otoman*, Bucharest, 1978, pp. 78-79; Gemil, *Românii şi otomanii*, p. 97.

<sup>384</sup>Chalcocondil, *Expuneri istorice*, p. 130 (IV, 203).

of his association with Bedreddin and the radical reforms advocated by the Ottoman cleric.

Although Mustafa garnered limited support among the Ottoman elites, his ties to the popular Bedreddin won him the loyalty of many ordinary Muslims. The threat became so serious that Mehmed abandoned his campaign against Karaman in the early summer of 1416 and prepared to return to Rumelia to quell the unrest; Mehmed now readied for a full-scale attack and ordered the Ottoman fleet to the Danube to prevent Mustafa from crossing. At this point, Venice intervened on behalf of Mircea's protégé. On May 29, 1416, the Venetian fleet commanded by Pietro Loredano entered the Dardanelles and decimated the Turkish fleet at Gallipoli, sinking 27 of their ships; the result of the battle ensured the naval supremacy of the Republic of St. Mark for decades to come.<sup>385</sup> Although it benefitted the plans of Mircea and Mustafa, Venetian involvement was motivated above all by the desire to protect its trade monopolies. They displayed little confidence in the Ottoman pretender's eventual success and by July the Republic had concluded a new peace treaty with Mehmed I.

As Mustafa prepared to cross the Danube, Sheik Bedreddin, the true architect of the revolt against Mehmed, joined his disciple in Wallachia. Bedreddin arrived in the principality after the suppression of a failed revolt in Aydîn intended to keep Mehmed pinned down in Anatolia while Mustafa launched his attack in Rumelia. They now laid plans for a two-pronged offensive in Europe; Mustafa was to lead his forces south to Thessaly, while

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<sup>385</sup>Decei, *Istoria imperiului otoman*, p. 77.

Bedreddin stirred up unrest in Dobrudja and Bulgaria, with the intention of leading his followers south to join with Mustafa. The Ottoman chronicler Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi confirms that Bedreddin “had an agreement with *Börüklüge* [Mustafa].”<sup>386</sup>

With preparations now complete, and the Danube crossing secure from interference as a result of the Venetian victory at Gallipoli, Mustafa launched his invasion accompanied by troops provided by Mircea. By now Mehmed had reached Adrianople where, Dukas informs us, “he found out that Mustafa, with Tineit [the bey of Nicopolis], had crossed the Danube, having Wallachians with them and not a small army of Turks and that they were heading for Thessaly.”<sup>387</sup> Things did not go well for the pretender. Mehmed inflicted a decisive defeat on the invaders and Mustafa and Tineit fled to Salonika where they sought refuge among Mehmed’s Byzantine allies. The Sultan laid siege to the city, demanding that the rebels be turned over to him. This provoked the most serious crisis in Ottoman-Byzantine relations since Mehmed had accepted Manuel II as his suzerain and both sides eagerly sought to avoid a conflict. Dukas purports that the Emperor wrote to the Sultan saying, “I, as you well know, have promised you to be like a father to you and you like a son to me.... I will honor my oaths, but you do not want to honor them.... As for the refugees, there can be no talk and my ears cannot hear of turning them over to you; for this would no longer be the doing of an Emperor, but that of a tyrant... But because I am committed to being as a father to you, I swear to you by God... that the refugee Mustafa and his companion Tineit will be kept under guard for as

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<sup>386</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. II, ed. Mihail Guboglu, Bucharest, 1974, p. 133.

<sup>387</sup>Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină*, p. 154 (XXII, 3).

long as you rule and as long as you live on this earth.”<sup>388</sup> Mehmed took the Emperor at his word and averted a crisis.

Although he had eliminated Mustafa as a potential threat, the Sultan’s problems in the Balkans persisted. While his disciple was trapped at Salonika, Bedreddin, with Mircea’s assistance, had set out from Silistra and, preaching his gospel of social equality, incited the first peasant uprising in Ottoman history. Holding to the plan established with Mustafa, he gathered a ragtag force of some 3000 men in Dobrudja and Bulgaria and proceeded to march on the Ottoman capital. But these rebels proved no match for veteran Turkish troops. Before reaching Adrianople, Bedreddin was defeated and captured; the Ottoman cleric was then taken before Mehmed at Serres who ordered him hanged on December 16, 1416.<sup>389</sup> Having crushed the rebellion, the Sultan now made plans to deal with Wallachia, where Mircea had been a thorn in his side since the days of Musa.

While the alliance with Hungary had secured Wallachia’s northern frontier and allowed Mircea to direct his attention south of the Danube, he received little help from the king in his efforts to overthrow Mehmed I. The Sultan remained on peaceful terms with Serbia, another Hungarian ally, and had taken no aggressive action against the kingdom. More importantly, Sigismund, having assumed the added role of Holy Roman Emperor, had to set right affairs in Europe before turning his resources against the Turks. Nor were the Byzantines any longer clamoring for aid against the Ottomans thanks to the good relations prevalent between Manuel and Mehmed. Sigismund had by no means abandoned his dream

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<sup>388</sup>Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină*, pp. 156, 158 (XXII, 5).

<sup>389</sup>Gemil, *Românii și otomanii*, p. 98.

of leading a great crusade against the Turks, but he set it aside for the moment to direct his attention toward healing the divisions within Christian Europe. With this goal in mind, in November 1414, the Holy Roman Emperor announced the convocation of a Church Council at Constance in Switzerland.

Addressing the Council on July 13, 1415, Sigismund outlined a program intended to bring peace and unity to Europe: to resolve disputes within the Church, such as the movement led by the reformer Jan Huss in Bohemia; to settle the Great Schism; to end the long war between England and France; and, finally, to achieve the union of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. The participants at the Congress included a delegation from Wallachia, as well as the neighboring principality of Moldavia. A memoir by Ulrich von Richenthal, a participant at the Council, mentions that a boyar named Dragomir or Tugomir represented Mircea at Constance.<sup>390</sup> This may be Dragomir from Șegarcea, listed among the witnesses in the prince's diploma dated June 10, 1415, mentioned earlier in connection with Mustafa's arrival in Argeș.<sup>391</sup> Ulrich also noted the presence of delegates from several Wallachian cities with Catholic communities who had accompanied Dragomir: Argeș (Ergx), Câmpulung (Langnaw), Turnu (Zürm), Târgoviște (Newmarckt), and others whose names cannot be identified with certainty.<sup>392</sup> Although the Wallachians played a minor role at the Church Council, their presence there reflected the Holy Roman Emperor's awareness of Wallachia's importance for realizing the

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<sup>390</sup>Constantin I. Karadja, "Delegații din țara noastră la conciliul din Constanța (în Baden) în anul 1415," in *ARMSI*, series III, VII (1927), p. 63.

<sup>391</sup>Doc. 38 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 80-82.

<sup>392</sup>Annex in Karadja, "Delegatii din țara noastră la conciliul din Constanța," p. 82.

objectives he presented before the representatives of Christendom gathered at Constance.

One of the first items on the Council's agenda was to address the crisis in Bohemia, provoked by the growing reform movement led by Jan Huss (1369-1415). A precursor of the Protestant movement launched by Martin Luther a century later, Huss preached against the corruption and abuses of the clergy and advocated a return to Christianity's more humble origins. His movement also embraced social and political aspirations, awakening Czech patriotism in protest against German control of the Church in Bohemia. Huss had been inspired by the Lollard movement in England, led by the Oxford scholar John Wycliffe (c.1320-1384), which had played an important role in the great peasant uprising in England in 1381. Wycliffe condemned the doctrine of transubstantiation and opposed monasticism and the privileges of the priesthood and the Church hierarchy, arguing that individuals had direct access to God; as a result, he favored the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. The Czech reformer developed these ideas to the great consternation of the religious and secular leaders of Europe.

With the memory of the violent popular uprising in England still vivid, the hierarchs of Christendom resolved to put a quick end to the stirrings in Bohemia. Huss accepted an invitation to discuss his views on Church reform before the Council after having received a personal guarantee of safe conduct from Sigismund, but the overture was merely a ruse. After his arrival at Constance, Church officials seized Huss, placed him on trial for heresy, and condemned him to burn at the stake. They naively believed that his execution would stifle the threat he represented to the political and religious establishment.

The next task before the Council was to restore unity within the Catholic Church by ending the Great Schism. With rival popes in Rome and Avignon since 1378, the Council of Pisa had tried to resolve the dispute in 1409 by electing a new pontiff, but in the end the rift only deepened as the appearance of a third Pope further divided Catholic Europe. On this issue, the efforts of the Council of Constance proved more fortuitous. The delegates representing the rival factions set aside their differences and, with the election of Martin V as Pope in 1417, the Great Schism came to an end.

The drive for Christian unity also entailed efforts to heal the schism between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches that had divided Christianity since the Pope and the Patriarch had excommunicated one another in the eleventh century. The Council of Pisa had taken a step in this direction when it elected a Greek Pope, Alexander V, on June 5, 1409. On Christmas day of that year, Byzantine Emperor Manuel II had written to the new Pope, expressing his conviction that a union of the two Churches might now be possible.<sup>393</sup> Such hopes quickly vanished with the death of Alexander in May of the following year and the election of the depraved John XXIII as his successor.

By the time the Council of Constance took up the question of reuniting the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, Manuel II enjoyed excellent relations with Sultan Mehmed I and Church unity, an idea abhorred in the Orthodox world since the sack of Constantinople in 1204, did not rank high on the Emperor's agenda. But Manuel was a shrewd ruler and the vicissitudes of politics had taught him always to keep his options open. While he hesitated to commit to the union of the Churches, the Emperor

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<sup>393</sup>Minea, *Principatele române și politica orientală a împăratului Sigismund*, p. 144.



proposed that Catholic wives be found for his sons John and Theodore as a first step in this direction. While the Greeks skirted the issue, the Catholics, as demonstrated by the condemnation of Huss at the outset of the Council, showed no interest in compromise or reform, thereby impeding any sincere effort at restoring unity between the two Churches. Richenthal places the blame for the failure to make headway on this question at Constance squarely on the shoulders of the Roman Church: "If the Catholic Church would have reformed then," he wrote in his memoir, "the Orthodox Church would have united with her and the schism between East and West would have thus come to an end."<sup>394</sup>

Despite these setbacks, the Council of Constance did take a symbolic step toward the union of the Eastern and Western Churches. The highest-ranking Orthodox prelate to make the journey to Switzerland was the Metropolitan of Kiev, Gregory Tamblac, who had been sent to the Council by his sovereign, Grand Duke Vitold of Lithuania, an active proponent of Church unity. Tamblac was a Bulgarian cleric, born and educated at Trnovo where he studied under the venerable Patriarch Evtimiy. After the fall of Bulgaria in 1393, he went to Serbia and then to Constantinople where entered the service of the Patriarch. When Constantinople formally recognized the Church in Moldavia at the beginning of Alexander the Good's reign, Tamblac was sent to the principality to oversee its organization. He remained in Moldavia for several years at the Monastery of Neamț, the most important religious center in the principality during this period, and gained a reputation as an important theologian. At some point, he entered

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<sup>394</sup>Quo. Karadja, "Delegații din țara noastră la conciliul din Constanța," p. 77.

into a dispute with his superiors at Constantinople. He then went to Lithuania where Vitold had him invested as Metropolitan of Kiev.<sup>395</sup> Tamblac arrived at Constance on February 17, 1418, as the Council neared its close. Backed by the grand duke of Lithuania and the king of Poland, he formally submitted the Orthodox Church in the lands ruled by Vitold and Vladislav to the Church of Rome in a solemn ceremony in the presence of Sigismund of Luxemburg on February 25.<sup>396</sup> Nevertheless, this union was symbolic and fleeting. The Council registered no significant progress in bridging the gulf between Orthodoxy and Catholicism.

Although the Council had ended the Great Schism, it could not heal the divisions within Catholic Europe. Sigismund, despite travelling to London and Paris, failed to mediate an end to the conflict between England and France, and the Hundred Years' War dragged on until 1453, the year Constantinople finally fell to the Turks. Nor did the burning of Huss end the dissension in Bohemia. The Hussite movement was driven underground for a time, but in 1419 it erupted into a full-scale revolt against imperial and papal authority that would preoccupy the Emperor until the end of his reign. Sigismund had intended for the Council of Constance to remedy the ills plaguing Christianity in hopes that he could then organize a great crusade to banish the Turkish infidels from Europe and eventually from the Holy Land as well. In this regard, the Council proved an utter failure. For Wallachia, it meant that no grand coalition would materialize to remove the

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<sup>395</sup>P.P. Panaitescu, *Alexandru cel Bun*, Bucharest, 1933, pp. 16, 18.

<sup>396</sup>Constantin I. Karadja, "Portretul și stema lui Grigorie Tamblac," in *AARMSI*, series III, XXVI (1943-1944), p. 145.

imminent danger posed by the Ottoman presence along the Danube.

The failure of Mircea's plans to oust Mehmed now left Wallachia exposed to the Sultan's fury. With the Council of Constance and efforts to mediate the conflict between England and France preoccupying Sigismund, no significant Hungarian assistance could be expected to help defend against the inevitable attack. In addition, Mircea's most important Anatolian allies had also submitted to Sultan. Once again, Wallachia stood alone against the might of the Ottoman Empire. Mehmed, meanwhile, having executed the rebel leader Bedreddin and having reached an agreement with Manuel II to neutralize Mustafa, now prepared to lead his armies, which included contingents from Karaman and Sinope, north against Wallachia at the beginning of 1417.

Mehmed did not set out on a campaign of conquest against the principality north of the Danube, but rather on a punitive expedition. Dukas specifies that the Sultan intended to punish Mircea for his support of Mustafa and that he "plundered and burned and caused great damage."<sup>397</sup> The Ottomans had no strategic or military interest in conquering Wallachia at this time. The objectives of the campaign were to recover Dobrudja and to secure the Danube border against further attacks, to punish Mircea for his aiding Mehmed's opponents, and to force Wallachia once again to recognize Ottoman suzerainty and to resume the payment of annual tribute to the Porte. To achieve these goals, the Sultan's army seized Dobrudja and dispersed along the Danube, attacking strategically important fortresses held by the Wallachians. One by one, the Danubian citadels of Isaccea, Ieni-Sale, Silistra, and

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<sup>397</sup>Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină*, pp. 160 (XXII, 6).

Turnu fell into Turkish hands. Dobrudja remained under Ottoman rule for the next 460 years. Meanwhile, according to an anonymous Ottoman chronicle, “Sultan Mehmed stopped on the banks of the Danube, besieged the fortress of Giurgiu, and sent the *akingi* into Wallachia. They gathered much plunder,”<sup>398</sup> and, the Turkish chronicler Sa’adeddin adds, “captured strong boys and beautiful young girls.”<sup>399</sup> Mircea could do little to oppose the numerically superior Ottoman forces attacking from several directions. He retreated before the invaders so as to keep his army intact, taking refuge in the mountains.

His position now untenable, another Ottoman chronicler, Kodja Husein, records that Mircea “sent a letter of submission and apology, together with tribute for three years. He also sent along the renowned emir Minnet-bey, who was a man of Musa Çelebi.”<sup>400</sup> Minnet-bey is probably the official Orudj bin Adil refers to as Azep, a name simply meaning military leader. While it is possible that Mircea sent Minnet-bey as an emissary to negotiate on his behalf, it is more likely that Mehmed demanded that he hand over Musa’s adjutant to eliminate another potential threat. By sending tribute for three years, Mircea compensated the Sultan for the period since 1414 when he had last paid tribute. In so doing, Ashik-Pasha-Zade writes that the Wallachian prince “completely submitted and sent his sons to serve at the Porte.”<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>398</sup>Quo. N. Iorga, “Cronicele turcești ca izvor pentru istoria românilor,” in *ARMSI*, series III, IX (1928-29), p. 5.

<sup>399</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 307.

<sup>400</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 445.

<sup>401</sup>*Cronici turcești*, vol. I, p. 85; Mehmed Neshri also records that Mircea sent his sons to serve at the Porte, *ibid*, p. 116.

The sons Mircea handed over to the Sultan as hostages to guarantee his future good conduct were presumably Radu and Alexander.

Having achieved the objectives of his campaign, Mehmed now adopted the added title of *Gazi*, meaning warrior for Islam; prior to setting out against Wallachia, the Sultan had not led his armies against a Christian state, a prerequisite to earn this designation.<sup>402</sup> Mircea, having failed in the role of kingmaker and lacking outside help to continue the anti-Ottoman struggle, now had to accept the inevitable and to resume his status as a vassal of the Sultan. In so doing, he protected the principality from unauthorized Turkish raids and brought peace to his land.



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<sup>402</sup>Nagy Pienaru, "Relațiile lui Mircea cel Mare (1386-1418) cu Mehmed I Celebi (1413-1421)," in *RdI*, 39:8 (1986), p. 784.



Seal of Mircea the Old

## THE GREAT VOIVODE MIRCEA

*“the bravest and most able of Christian princes,”*

— Leunclavius<sup>403</sup>

**D**uring Mircea’s long reign, the organizational structure and administrative apparatus of the principality reached maturity. Like his predecessors, he also paid great attention to the Church, the backbone of the young state. He confirmed the possessions and privileges of existing monasteries such as Tismana, Vodița, Codmeana, and Snagov, and added to these. Tismana, founded by Nicodim during the reigns of Vladislav and Radu, remained the most important monastery in Wallachia. Mircea’s generous donations to Nicodim’s monastery included several villages, with exemptions from royal taxes and works, mills, including that “which My Majesty’s mother, Princess Kalinikia, bequested to the monastery at Bistrița, which

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<sup>403</sup>Johannes Leunclavius, *Historia Musulmana Turcorum de monumentis ipsorum exscripta*, Frankfurt, 1591, f. 418.



previously belonged to the Archimandrite Bacea,” and revenues due to the royal treasury from the newly-established copper mines at nearby Bratilova leased to Chiop Hanosh.<sup>404</sup> Monasteries built during Mircea’s reign included Cozia, Bradeș, Vișina, Dealul, Glavcioc, Strugalea, Govora, Bolintin, and Sărăcinești.

Of the monasteries raised by Mircea, Cozia was far and away the most important. In his first diploma for the newly-established monastery, dated May 20, 1388, the prince declared that “My Majesty decided to raise from its foundation a monastery in the name of the Holy Trinity... at the place called Călimănești on the Olt, which was previously the village of My Majesty’s boyar Nan Uboda, who with love and with zeal, respecting the wishes of My Majesty, donated it to the aforementioned monastery.” He provided it with several villages, exempted from royal taxes and works, mills, fisheries, annual endowments of food and clothing from the royal reserves, 300 *salase* of Gypsies (meaning approximately 2000 slaves),<sup>405</sup> revenues generated from customs taxes collected at Genune,<sup>406</sup> and exemptions from all customs taxes applicable to the monk’s trading activities throughout the country.<sup>407</sup> In May 1413, the prince commissioned Master Hanosh at Bratilova to forge a bell for the monastery inscribed “in the days

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<sup>404</sup>Doc. 14 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 33-36.

<sup>405</sup>Docs. 9, 10, 17, 20, 25, 26, 27, and 28 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 25-30; 42-45, 47-49, and 58-65. A *salasa* was a Gypsy household comprised of a family or an extended family.

<sup>406</sup>Doc. 37 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 78-80.

<sup>407</sup>Doc. 30 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 66-67.

of the Great Voivode John Mircea and Voivode Michael.”<sup>408</sup> Mircea made Cozia the most important monastery in the land after Tismana. By the mid-fifteenth century, Cozia had surpassed Tismana as the most important monastic center in the land and, after the fall of Constantinople, the abbot of the monastery founded by Mircea on the banks of the Olt became the successor of the metropolitan of Wallachia.<sup>409</sup>

Following the example of his grandfather and his uncle, Mircea also supported the principal center of Orthodox monasticism at Mount Athos, especially Cutlumuz, which he referred to as “our monastery.”<sup>410</sup> Continuing the religious policy of his father Radu, Mircea also fostered the Catholic Church in Wallachia, keeping it independent of the Church in Hungary and directly dependent on the Holy See. Rome continued to appoint Italians to head the diocese in the principality. As we have seen, the prince sent a sizeable delegation to participate at the most important Church Council of the epoch at Constance. Mircea also rebuilt the Catholic monastery at Târgoviște that had been destroyed during Bayezid’s invasion of Wallachia in 1394, and his Catholic wife Mara is credited with having helped to raise the Church of St. Mary in the same city.<sup>411</sup>

Limited information has survived about Mircea’s family. An undated diploma for the Monastery of Snagov confirms the

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<sup>408</sup>Minea, *Principatele românești și politică orientală a împăratului Sigismund*, p. 110.

<sup>409</sup>Kurt W. Treptow, *Vlad III Dracula*, Iași, 2000, pp. 90-91.

<sup>410</sup>Iorga, “Muntele Athos în legătură cu țerile noastre,” pp. 464-465.

<sup>411</sup>Cristian Moisesescu, *Tîrgoviște: Monumente istorice și de artă*, Bucharest, 1979, p. 90.

donation of a village in the Buzău River valley by Mircea's brother Jupan Staico;<sup>412</sup> the title jupan, implying that he was a high-ranking boyar is derived from the Slavonic word zupan, used to designate a leader of village communities. Later documents mention another brother, Stan, who served in the royal council under Mircea's sons Radu, Alexander, and Vlad Dracul.

Mircea's wife, Mara, came from the powerful Toma family in Hungary, with extensive holdings in the southwestern part of the kingdom around Lake Balaton. Mara was a relative of Ladislas de Losoncz, who served as voivode of Transylvania from 1376 to 1391.<sup>413</sup> Radu the Wise conceivably arranged for the marriage of his younger son to a relative of the influential Transylvanian voivode during a lull in the conflict with Hungary or as part of a peace accord. On February 2, 1400, Sigismund wrote to Mircea's wife, the princess of Wallachia, ordering her to rectify abuses committed by the administrators of her estates in the county of Zala against residents of the market town of Kesztel.<sup>414</sup>

At least four sons resulted from Mircea's marriage to Mara – Michael, Radu, Alexander, and Vlad – all of whom ascended to the throne at different times following the death of their father. Mircea had designated his eldest son, Michael, as associate ruler as early as 1391, when he was still a child, bestowing upon him the title of voivode.<sup>415</sup> He did this to keep the throne within his bloodline and to ensure a smooth transition of power upon his death. As he reached adulthood, Michael took on increasing

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<sup>412</sup>Doc. 34 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 73-74.

<sup>413</sup>Iosif Pataki, "Ceva despre relațiile Țării Românești cu Ungaria," pp. 427-428.

<sup>414</sup>Annex I in Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, pp. 351-352.

<sup>415</sup>Doc. 15 in *DRH, B*, vol. I, pp. 36-39.



Mircea the Old  
Votive Painting from the Monastery of Cozia

responsibilities, having his own royal residence at Târgoviște which became the second capital of the principality.

Many have considered the other sons, Radu, Alexander, and Vlad, as illegitimate because Mircea only mentions Michael in his diplomas and Chalkokondyles asserts that he had several illegitimate children, but this assumption is incorrect. Although they are not mentioned in chancellery documents, there was no established formula at this time for listing all legitimate male offspring in official acts. Michael is mentioned because of his role as associate ruler, not because he is Mircea's only legitimate son. In his letter to King Vladislav of Poland cited earlier, Mircea refers to "my children, as many as there are,"<sup>416</sup> certainly implying the existence of several legitimate male offspring. There is a mistaken belief that both legitimate and illegitimate male children had an equal claim to the throne during this period, but this was not the case at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Furthermore, if Radu, Alexander, and Vlad had been illegitimate, it would have negated their value as hostages. Thus, along with their older brother, Radu, Alexander, and Vlad were legitimate offspring of Mircea and his Catholic Hungarian wife Mara. In addition to these four sons, we also know of two daughters; one, as we have seen, married the Ottoman Sultan Musa, while the other, Anna, married one of the leading nobles of Serbian Despot Stephen Lazarevich.<sup>417</sup>

Of Mircea's children, Vlad ultimately proved the most important. Although he would only obtain the throne in 1436, Vlad, who became known as "Dracul" following his induction into

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<sup>416</sup>Doc. DCLIII in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, vol. I, part. 2, p. 825.

<sup>417</sup>Șerbănescu and Stoicescu, *Mircea cel Mare*, p. 30.

the Order of the Dragon by Mircea's on again off again ally Sigismund of Luxemburg in 1431, ruled his country in a manner very similar to his father. He carefully juggled relations with the neighboring superpowers of the day in an effort to maintain the independence of his land. But the growth of Ottoman might, which ultimately resulted in the fall of Constantinople in 1453, made the situation of his principality even more precarious. Yet neighboring Hungary and not the forces of Islam would ultimately lead to his downfall as he suffered execution at the hands of John Hunyadi, Royal Governor of Hungary in 1447.

Vlad's namesake, his second born son, Vlad the Impaler, the grandson of Mircea, would become known to history as Dracula. He would rule the principality on three separate occasions – 1448, 1456-1462, and again in 1476. He inherited the military prowess of his famed grandfather who he would refer to in documents issued by his chancellery, recalling the “days of the great voivode Mircea” as the seminal point in the history of the Transalpine land.

Mircea the Old died of natural causes on January 31, 1418 – something remarkable in itself in this land surrounded by hostile enemies. The funeral procession carrying the earthly remains of Wallachia's most distinguished ruler since Basarab left the capital of Argeş and made its way to Râmnicu and then up the Olt River valley to the Monastery of Cozia, which he had founded. The great voivode Mircea was laid to rest there on 4 February 1418. His tomb remains a venerated site for his people and is still visited by thousands each year.

Michael succeeded his father as prince, but the smooth transition of power that Mircea had envisioned proved ephemeral. With the Ottomans and the Hungarians both intent on maintaining Wallachia in their respective spheres of influence, Mircea's successors readily found outside help to press their individual

claims to the throne. The lack of primogeniture meant that, from a legal standpoint, each had an equal claim to his father's inheritance, and the neighboring powers did not hesitate to exploit this in their own interest. The stage was now set for a long period of intermittent civil war of which his son, Vlad Dracul, would eventually become one of the main protagonists.

Although a period of great turmoil followed the death of Mircea, this resulted from the unfortunate situation of the principality, fated to be trapped between East and West, between Christianity and Islam, rather than any failings of the prince himself. In reality, only a ruler of incredible skill, such as Mircea, could maintain a degree of independence in this land surrounded on all sides by hostile actors. His diplomatic acumen, combined with his military prowess, made Mircea among the greatest leaders his land would ever know. One contemporary, the Serbian chronicler Constantine Costenetski, admired the Wallachian prince, referring to him as "the great and autocratic Voivode John Mircea."<sup>418</sup>

In the centuries to follow, Wallachia suffered repeated invasions by foreign armies and the corruption and betrayal of many of its own leaders. It would eventually unite with the neighboring Romanian principality of Moldavia in 1859 to form modern Romania. The third great Romanian land of Transylvania joined this union in 1918. Though all of this, the legacy of the great Prince Mircea the Old endured and continues to endure to our own day, revered as one of the greatest Romanian rulers in all of history.



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<sup>418</sup>Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, p. 205.



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## ABBREVIATIONS FOUND IN THE NOTES

AARMSI = *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii istorice*

AII = *Anuarul Institutului de istorie*

AIIA = *Anuarul Insitutului de istorie și arheologie*

AIIN = *Anuarul Insitutului de istorie națională*

ARMSI = *Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii istorice*

ARMSL = *Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii literare*

BCIR = *Buletinul Comisiei istorice a României*

BCMI = *Buletinul Comisiunii monumentelor istorice*

CI = *Cercetări istorice*

DIR = *Documente privind istoria României*

DRH = *Documenta Romaniae Historica*

MI - *Magazin istoric*

RA = *Revista arhivelor*

RdI = *Revista de istorie*

RESEE = *Revue des études sud-est européennes*

RHSEE = *Revue historique du sud-est européen*

RI = *Revista istorică*

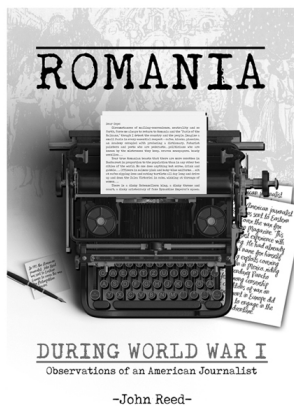
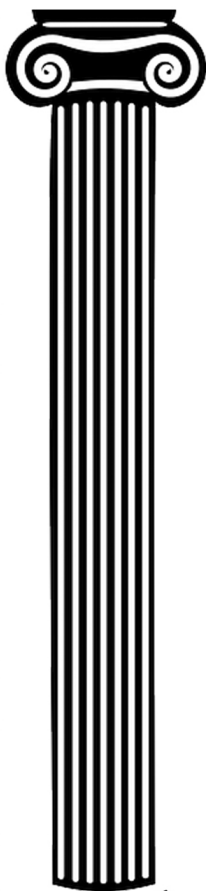
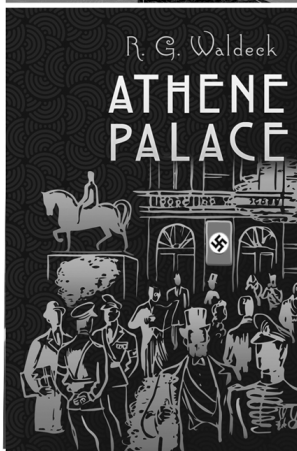
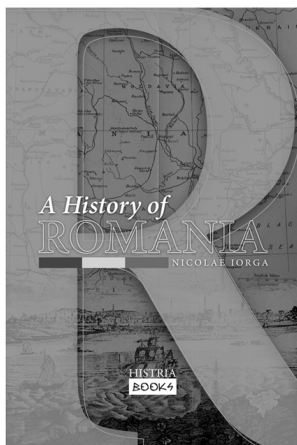
RIAF = *Revista pentru istorie, archeologie și filologie*

RIR = *Revista istorică română*



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