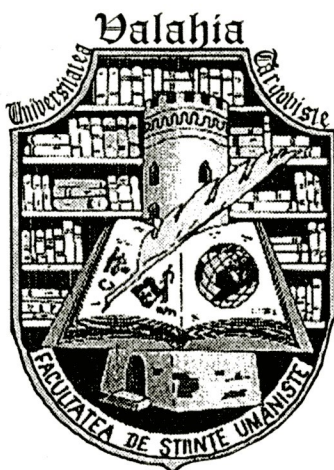


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THE ROUMANIANS AND THE LATE CRUSADE. FROM IANCU OF HUNEDOARA TO MICHAEL THE BRAVE

*Eugen Denize**

Resumen

El autor analiza en este estudio algunos problemas concernientes de la cruzada tardía y de las santas ligas que le siguieron, pero principalmente la participación de los rumanos a esta gran corriente de la historia universal. De esta manera, Iancu de Hunedoara fue el último gran cruzado, el último que condujo coaliciones anti-otomanas basadas también en ideales cristianos y su última gran cruzada, una cruzada popular, tomó lugar en Belgrado en 1456. Después siguieron las santas ligas, coaliciones basadas en la razón y en los intereses de estado de cada miembro participante. La contribución de los rumanos a estas santas ligas fue considerable, de manera que Esteban el Grande, Petru Rareș, Juan Vaivoda el Valiente y Miguel el Valiente, comprobaron que sin los rumanos este tipo de coaliciones era inconcebible. Pero si la contribución de los rumanos a las santas ligas fue grande, en cambio la ayuda que recibieron de éstas fue insignificante, algunas veces las potencias componentes de éstas volvieron en su contra, tal como hizo Rodolfo II con Miguel el Valiente. Al tomar parte a la cruzada tardía y a las santas ligas con el fin de defender su país, los rumanos tomaron parte como factor activo a uno de los grandes procesos de la historia universal.

The XVth and XVIth centuries represent for our continent the final transition under all aspects from feudalism to modernity. During these centuries powerful centralized states appeared, such as France, England and Spain, it is when the great geographical discoveries take place and Europe becomes the top of the progress of entire mankind. From the political point of view, the ideas of imperial universality and unity of the christian world lose more and more ground before the state reasons and the specific interests of each state in part. The political realism and pragmatism of the Italian states and the idea of the balance of power practiced by them, extend themselves to the very level of the entire European continent.

In what concerns the idea of crusade, it attenuates itself very much, evolving from the concept of late crusade to the concept of holy league. As a matter of fact, after ending the classical crusades (1096-1270), Europe has been threatened by the moslems only in the Iberical Peninsula, where the crusade achieved a local character involving only the christians who lived there, and in the Balkan Peninsula and Central Europe, where the threat of the Ottoman Turks was much more serious. In the Balkan Peninsula and in Central Europe took place almost all the actions of the late crusade and of the holy league in the XVth and XVIth centuries. Although it was conceived with an attacking character, the anti-Ottoman struggle, to which the late crusade and then the holy league was reduced, represented in fact the expression of the helplessness of the christian world of driving the Turks away from Europe. Because of this, the anti-Ottoman christian warlike expeditions had rather a defensive character, with the goal of limiting the Ottoman expansion. Until the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the late crusade maintained its attacking character, but after this date, any hope in this way became merely theoretical. However, the anti-Ottoman late crusade, and later, the holy league, had in its strategic and christian conception two essential components which were: a terrestrial component, in the Balkan Peninsula and at

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Down Danube, and a naval one that had to get to action in the Aegean Sea and in the straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles. In this way, the Ottoman Turks could have been cornered, their army separated in two parts because of the christian fleet's having cut the straits, and thus there was hope they might have been driven away from Europe.

On the background of this strategic general conception, the main position of the terrestrial component was due to Hungary, and the main position of the naval component was assigned to Venice. Around the king of Hungary all the other terrestrial forces had to make a coalition, as well as around Venice all the naval forces were about to form one. These christian plans and projects granted the Roumanian Countries an important place in the frame of any anti-Ottoman warlike crusaded expeditions.

All the three Roumanian Countries were centralized states, with an important human and material potential, directly threatened by the aggressive expansion of the Ottoman Empire. Because of this, the part that they would play in the different projects and plans of anti-Ottoman struggle would be much greater and far more important in reality along the XVth and XVIth centuries, than the one initially assigned to them. Analysing the known facts and data, one can withdraw the conclusion that in these centuries the Roumanian Countries played in fact a far more important part than the one of Hungary on the background of the anti-Ottoman struggle. While Hungary was having political and military ambitions also in Central Europe, and she had a stronger and stronger inland process of feudal anarchy, that would lead to its disappearance as a state, the Roumanian Countries were centralized states, well consolidated inside, flourishing from the economic point of view and ready to fight with all their forces against the Ottoman Empire, although there were moments when the threat also came from the part of the christian allies. In the century and a half that we take in consideration, all the three Roumanian feudal states took in turn, the lead of the anti-Ottoman struggle, being praised and appreciated for this by the christian powers, but helped far too less.

In the mid XVth century, Iancu of Hunedoara and Transylvania took the lead of the anti-Ottoman struggle. Coming from an old family of Roumanian princes, Iancu of Hunedoara was however and first of all the son of his own deeds. After a life full of struggles and victories against the Turks in 1456 he was proclaimed by the Pope Calixt IIIrd (1455-1458), as *the bravest defender of Christ-fortissimus athleta Christi* (Hurmuzaki, II, 2, p. 61-62; Lupaş, 1940, p. 79-101). As he continued the policy of Mircea the Ancient, Iancu of Hunedoara proved to the entire christian world the fact that the Roumanian Countries were truly a key element of any plan of anti-Ottoman crusade, not only because of its geographical position, but also especially because of their obvious aspiration and will to start the fight.

If the christian powers did not take advantage of the Ottoman disaster from Ankara in 1402 and of the attempts of Mircea the Ancient to undermine for good the Ottoman Empire (Werner, 1978, p. 14-18; Panaitescu, 1944, p. 296-297; Papacostea, 1986, p. 23-33), once he became a voivode of Transylvania, in 1441, Iancu of Hunedoara showed himself determined to try again to drive the Sublime Porte away from Europe and for this purpose to form a coalition with as many christian states as possible. The Transylvanian voivode had two options and these were (Iorga, 1915, p. 185; Rázsó, 1973, p. 89) : the great solution, that on the basis of re-assuming the ideal of crusade, it stipulated the union of all the christian princes under the leadership of the Pope, and the little solution, that was actually put into practice, but proved itself insufficient, by the reunion of the efforts of all the people directly threatened by the Turks. Because of this, Iancu of Hunedoara felt the acute

necessity of realizing a common front of anti-Ottoman struggle of the three Roumanian Countries, that he actually managed to unite for a short period of time in a State formula of feudal type (Pall, 1963, pp. 1049-1072; idem, 1976, p. 447-463; idem, 1978, p. 443-453; Mureşan, 1968, p. 139-145; Dan, 1974, p. 43-44; Gemil, 1991, p. 122).

The anti-Ottoman struggle led by Iancu of Hunedoara, that we consider as the last true crusader, has two stages that are : an attacking one which starts in 1442 and ends up in 1448, and a defensive one, from 1448 till 1456. During the first stage, Iancu of Hunedoara tried to drive the Turks away from Europe, organizing for this purpose a few extremely important military expeditions. Thus, in 1442, he defeated on the river Ialomiţa, the beilerbei of Rumelia, Shehabeddin (Mureşan, 1968, p. 76-80; Dan, 1974, p. 94-104; idem, 1972, p. 51), towards the end of the year 1443 and the beginning of 1444 he organized "the long campaign", that was a hard blow for the Ottoman domination in Europe (Nicolau, 1925, p. 47-52; Mureşan, 1968, p. 86-92; Dan, 1974, p. 104-113), in November 1444 he was defeated at Varna because of the lack of cooperation from the part of the Venetian fleet (Pall, 1941, p. 144-148; idem, 1944, p. 102-120; Panaitescu, Stoicescu, 1965, p. 221-231; Ţvetkova, 1971, p. 28-56), and in October 1448 at Kossovopolje (Iorga, 1926, p. 13-27; Rusu, 1987, p. 213-222). The failure of the attacking campaigns of Iancu of Hunedoara are due, mainly, to the lack of cooperation of the great christian powers of the time. Poland, Venice, Alphonse the Vth of Aragon and Naples, Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, the papacy and even the Hungarian aristocracy did not help him when he needed. Even more, the emperor Frederic the IIIrd of Habsburg did everything he could to take advantage of the repeated absences of Iancu of Hunedoara in order to consolidate his own positions in Hungary. His only concession was the one of making some peace treaties to allow the Transylvanian voivode and Hungary's governor to set out against the Turks, knowing that he was not threatened by a blow behind his back.

After 1448 Iancu of Hunedoara could not organize attacking campaigns against the Ottoman Empire anymore. In 1453, when Constantinople was conquered by the Turks, he could not help the byzantine capital (Pall, 1969, p. 619-638) at all, leaving the Venetians and the Genoans to struggle alone exactly the way they had left him the years before. Iancu of Hunedoara had made peace with the sultan, between 1451-1452, peace that settled a balance of power between Hungary and the Ottoman Empire in the region of Down Danube, balance that he didn't want to spoil knowing that he didn't dispose of the necessary forces in order to start a new anti-Ottoman expedition.

After 1453, the ones who would start the attack would be however the Turks, the sultan Mehmed the IInd wished to conquer Belgrade, the key of entire Central Europe. In August 1454, an Ottoman army led by Feriz bei was defeated by Iancu of Hunedoara at Krušenać, in Serbia (Mureşan, 1968, p. 183), and in the summer of 1456, after a long lasted siege, he managed to defeat the Turks in Belgrade and to close down their way towards Central Europe until 1521. In Belgrade, Iancu of Hunedoara fought with an army that was made up in its majority of popular elements, among which an important part was played by the Roumanians. Thus, in the same way the crusades started in 1096, by an expedition of the poor, they also ended with an expedition of the poor that replaced the runaway nobles in front of Belgrade's brick walls. Started with enthusiasm, the crusades also ended with enthusiasm, the kind of enthusiasm that arises from the aspiration of the little and the many to save the christianity from the fierce assaults of the Sublime Porte.

After this date, the late crusade would turn itself into holy league, better said, into a modern alliance based on the specific interests of each participating state. From the point

of view of the Roumanians, however, the anti-Ottoman struggle would have the same significance, the one of saving the state and the being of the people. Although they were also crusaders, the Roumanians did not fight against the Turks as crusaders first of all. They fought having been driven hard, forced to do everything in their power in order to defend their country and being. It is true that they tried to do this when different anti-Ottoman coalitions were outlining themselves or were already in action, but sometimes they also had to fight when these coalitions did not exist. Generally speaking, all these christian coalitions considered the Roumanian Countries as indispensable allies, that could have made their own efforts easier, but that did not need too much help. Most of the times, the help reduced itself to mere words and symbols. Regardless of this aspect, it is important the fact that, taking part to the anti-Ottoman christian coalitions, late crusades or holy leagues, the Roumanian Countries joined with all their force one of the great currents of the universal history of the XVth and XVIth centuries.

The descendant of Iancu of Hunedoara in what concerns the anti-Ottoman struggle in the Roumanian space was Vlad the Impaler, the voivode of Wallachia. This one took over the reign with the help of the Transylvanian voivode and, from its very beginning, he offered to help Hungary in the struggle against the Turks (Hurmuzaki, XV,1, p. 45-46). Unfortunately, the new king of Hungary, Matia Corvin, was much less interested in the anti-Ottoman struggle, his ambitions being directed towards Central Europe. Because of this, he did not support his ally, Vlad the Impaler, when the Ottoman attack called for this, in the summer of 1462, in contrary, he arrested and detracted him in front of the entire christian Europe. Vlad the Impaler fought very bravely against the Turks, but was forced to do this in a less favourable moment, when the sultan Mehmed the IInd was not being threatened by any other part. (Denize, 1995, p. 371-387). The sultan's expedition against Wallachia in 1462, took place only one year before the most important Turkish-Venetian war started. Because of this, the struggle of Vlad the Impaler stirred only a limited interest through the other christian powers, that were however much more receptive to the propaganda of Matia Corvin, according to which the voivode of Wallachia was being accused of all mischiefs. It is certain the fact that the victorious fight of Vlad the Impaler saved Wallachia from its turning into pashalic, and helped Hungary a lot in keeping the balance of power with the Ottoman Empire in the region of Down Danube.

Contemporary with Vlad the Impaler, Stephan the Great was undoubtedly the most outstanding personality of medieval Moldavia. Surrounded by powerful and aggressive enemies, Stephan the Great's Moldavia had to face, first of all, the danger represented by the Ottoman Empire.

Taking over the reign in April 1457, with the help of his cousin Vlad the Impaler, Stephan the Great joined from the very beginning the Hungarian and Wallachian political axis that, in the tradition of Iancu of Hunedoara, had a strong anti-Ottoman character, even though this character grew considerably blurred after the death of the Transylvanian hero. This could be one of the explanations of the two - year conflict that opposed Stephan the Great to Poland, conflict ended with the treaty of Overchelăuți (4th of April 1459) (Bogdan, 1913, p. 266-268; Papacostea, 1978, p. 477), close to Hotin. Besides personal reasons and the ones of internal consolidation of the reign, related to the presence of Petru Aron, the assassin of his father and the voivode that he removed from the throne, on the territory of Poland, Stephan, by striking Poland, was actually striking the Polish and Turkish political axis, that had been created once with the removal of the nucleus of the external policy of Poland from the region of the Black Sea to the region of the Baltic Sea (Papacostea, 1974, p. 446-

448). Let's not also forget that the intersected interests of Poland and the Ottomans represented the main external factor that forced Moldavia to accept the payment of the tribute to the Sublime Porte (Papacostea, 1974, p. 460-461).

The first actions of external policy of Stephan the Great prove nevertheless, the fact that, from the very beginning and all along his entire reign, he paid special attention to the danger that was prefiguring in a more and more threatening way at the southern borders of the country, without neglecting however the dangers coming from the other borders that did not have though, the same intensity as this one. Therefore, it is not surprising that, by attacking the northern border, he had in regard the southern one.

The first plain hostile action of Stephan the Great directed against the Turks, was the conquest of Kilia in 1465 (Ureche, 1958, p. 92; Panaitescu, 1958, p. 111; Iosipescu, 1982, p. 645-647). It is true that the Turks could not respond at once, but the conquest of Kilia made by Stephan the Great lay at the origins of the long-lasting conflict between him and the Ottoman Empire, conflict directly related to the dominion over the Down Danube, as an economic and military extension of the Black Sea (Papacostea, 1982, p. 610).

Although the Ottoman Empire did not react immediately against Moldavia, under the military aspect, Stephan the Great was however fully conscious of the fact that the real confrontation, the one that was about to decide the destiny of his country, would be exactly with this great power, that had very precise political objectives in Europe. Far beyond the payment of the tribute, that did not affect Moldavia's autonomy, the Ottoman expansion represented a much greater danger, that came from the determination of the Porte to turn the Black Sea into its appendage and to subordinate the products of the Pontic countries to its own economic and military necessities (Gemil, 1991, p. 134; Kortepeter, 1973, p. 3-4). The attempt to impede, in coalition with all the other anti-Ottoman powers, the turning of this perspective in reality was the main mobile of Stephan the Great, joining the struggle against the Turks (Gemil, 1991, p. 39). Tightly connected to this aspect was the more obvious one of the struggle for the control of Down Danube (Papacostea, 1975, p. 22). The moment that Stephan the Great chose for his open joining the anti-Ottoman (Gorovei, 1979, p. 145-149) war corresponded to the most critical stage of the struggle between the sultan Mehmed the IInd and his European and Asiatic adversaries (Iorga, 1915, p. 375-376; Papacostea, 1982, p. 614-615). The war of Stephan the Great for the control of Down Danube made part of a far greater battle, that counted among its main objectives the restoration of freedom in the Pontic region.

Once he joined the war, Stephan the Great tried to set out a simultaneous cooperation both with the Asian enemies of the Turks, as well as with the European ones, with Venice, that had already been at war with the Turks for about ten years and was the most interested in finding new allies, but also with Matia Corvin, who was also interested in impeding the expansion of the Ottoman Empire.

About the war, or better said, the wars of Stephan the Great with the Turks, I have written at length in a study that appeared in the review "Studies and materials of medieval history" (Denize, 2001, p. 3-15). Making an abstract of this study we can consider that the undeclared war between the two parts burst out in the winter between 1468 and 1469, but until 1474, it got limited to some harassments of a lesser or greater importance. During this time, Stephan the Great tried to achieve the anti-Ottoman action unity of Moldavia and Wallachia, but in 1473 he refused to pay the tribute to the sultan anymore and thus he directly defied him. Mehmed the IInd, as he was very busy with the fights against Uzun Hasan, the shah of Persia devoted to the Turks, whom he hardly managed to defeat for

good in August 1473, left Stephan the Great's challenge with no answer. Also busy with the war against Venice, and as the main military actions in 1474 took place against the Venetian possessions on the Albanian coast, especially against the town of Scutari, Mehmed the IInd hoped that Stephan the Great would not be so determined anymore, so as he shouldn't be forced to open a new front against Moldavia. But the voivode of Moldavia, knowing that the sultan was being confronted with mighty adversaries both in Asia, as well as in Europe, and as the anti-Ottoman league was formed around Venice, he refused to start paying the tribute again. Very angry, the sultan thoughtlessly ordered the army of Soliman Pasha to rise up the siege over the town of Scutari and to start a winter campaign against Moldavia. As we know, Soliman Pasha was completely crushed at Vaslui, on the 10th of January 1475.

This is how the wars between Moldavia and the Ottomans started, that for a whole were actually four in number. The first one took place between 1474 and 1479 (1481), the second one between 1481-1483, the third one between 1484-1486 and the fourth one between 1499-1503. Except for the third war, started by the Turks, all the other ones were started by Stephan the Great under the circumstances of some anti-Ottoman coalitions. In 1473, when he stopped paying tribute to the Porte anymore, this one was already trapped in a long-lasting war with Venice and its allies; in 1481, when he attacked Wallachia and got the victory from Râmnic (the 8th of July), in Italy, they were making preparations for the so-called "Otranto crusade", that had as a main goal the Turks' driving away from this town, and in 1499, when he started his last war against the Turks, in Europe there was already a holy league made up of Venice, France, Spain, Hungary and the Pope.

As a result, except the year 1484, when the Turks attacked him by surprise, Stephan the Great chose himself the moment of his major confrontations with them. Even in 1473-1474, when his first war with the Turks started and when the sultan had postponed this war better than a year, the main cause of the war was the refuse of Moldavia's voivode of the tribute payment due to the Porte. Being a political man and a brilliant strategist, Stephan the Great did not choose at random the moments when he decided to start a war with the Turks. He made this by taking in consideration very well the international political situation, the existence of some holy leagues and anti-Ottoman coalitions. Only the fact that they existed was of great help to him and made his military effort much easier, as the sultan's troops were driven away on different war fronts. It is true that during his wars with the Turks, Stephan the Great, Moldavia's voivode received only little military support from his allies. Those who helped him, were, like always, his neighbours, Poland and Hungary, but their help was completely not enough. In exchange, by taking part to the anti-Ottoman struggle in moments when the Turks were being attacked from more sides at once, Stephan the Great helped a lot the christian coalitions, in fact, he considerably helped them to reduce their military efforts.

However, we must add that the wars between Stephan the Great and the Turks had an inevitable character, because they had to solve the conflict between the Ottoman Empire, the master over almost the whole Black Sea region, and the last christian state that still had access to this sea, Moldavia, that had come to the head of its power. The problem of the dominion over the two fortresses in southern Moldavia, Kilia and Cetatea Albă was the most important stake of these wars, the Turks being unable to rule safely the Pontic region and the one of Down Danube as long as they did not rule over the two fortresses. The importance of the two fortresses is also pointed out by the fact that for conquering them, in 1484, a sultanal military expedition was necessary. This one had as

unique objective their complete separation from Moldavia. The conquest of the two fortresses in 1484 indicated a real landmark on the background of Moldavia's political relations with the Ottoman Empire. With all the efforts that he would make, Stephan the Great could never conquer back Kilia and Cetatea Albă. This fact would subsequently lead to a constant modification of the position of his country in relationship with the Porte, and would initiate a process of a gradual more and more vassalage towards this one, until the catastrophe in 1538.

It was natural for a great power in full expansion, such as the Ottoman Empire, to succeed in enforcing its own point of view in front of a smaller power, such as Moldavia. In spite of everything, and including the territorial losses, Stephan the Great managed to preserve Moldavia's independence and left as inheritance to the descendants a powerful country that was respected by all the christian powers for its contribution to the anti-Ottoman struggle.

If Iancu of Hunedoara was a creator of anti-Ottoman crusades and Vlad the Impaler never had the chance to use any anti-Ottoman coalition or holy league, Stephan the Great was a real master in how he knew to use the holy leagues formed during his reign. He perfectly realized that the anti-Ottoman struggle could not have been led successfully by a country only, such as Moldavia. In order to be victorious it was necessary the full participation and with all efforts to the anti-Ottoman christian coalitions, condition that was also available for all the other christian powers. Powerful states, such as Venice, Hungary and even Spain, not to mention the papacy, could easily realize that the Ottoman Empire couldn't have been successfully defeated unless they made a coalition. These coalitions however, did not have a powerful religious support anymore, because the modernity had enforced the reason and the state interest. Therefore, these coalitions could only rely on the reunion of the interests of different states, and Stephan the Great understood that very well by constantly trying to promote Moldavia's interests, as he would subsequently turn his country into an essential element of any anti-Ottoman coalition or holy league. At the same time, and being a modern monarch, contemporary of Henry the VIIth, Louis the XIth, Ferdinand the Catholic and Maximilian the Ist, Stephan the Great understood that Moldavia could also be defended by making some agreements with the Porte, and he urged his descendant, Bogdan the IIIrd to do so (Ureche, 1958, p. 121; Neculce, 1982, p. 168). Unfortunately, his descendants were left behind by the greatness of the historic events and therefore they were unable either to fight against the Turks or to make peace treaties with them.

When Petru Rareș, the illegitimate son of Stephan the Great took over Moldavia's throne, it was a very difficult moment under the aspect of his country's external situation. The circumstances of his enthroning made it easier for the Ottomans to get involved into the problem of voivodal succession to the throne in the Roumanian Country that lay in Eastern Carpathians. If this turn of events did not obviously affect yet Moldavia's autonomy, it marked however the beginning of a gradual process of the Porte's getting in control over the country (Gemil, 1978, 1, p. 139). Therefore, the efforts that Petru Rareș made from the very beginning in order to prepare the anti-Ottoman struggle were determined by the will of defending Moldavia's sovereignty and of eliminating the new element that modified the relations between Moldavia and the Ottomans, element that came up once with his enthroning. Unfortunately however, the changing of the ratio of forces in Central and South-Eastern Europe, determined by Hungary's fall in 1526, put an obstacle in attaining this objective, despite the intense political, diplomatic and military

activity of Moldavia's voivode. The attacking of Poland in 1531 (Hurmuzaki, I, Supliment 2, p. 23-24; Iorga, 1925, p. 195; Gorovei, 1982, p. 84-85; Ursu, 1912-1913, p. 429-441; Corfus, 1964, p. 321), the assassination of Aloisio Gritti, who was sent by the sultan to settle the Turkish-Austrian border in 1534 (Decei, 1974, p. 108; Simionescu, 1975, p. 1210), and the refusal of Soliman the Magnificent's proposal in 1536, of helping Zápolya with 6000 men in exchange of pardon granting (Ciurea, 1973, p. 151; Ciobanu, 1985, p. 167) determined the Porte to decide Petru Rareș's replacement from the throne (Gorovei, 1982, p. 87).

Under these circumstances, when he had no more choice, Petru Rareș got firmly on the side of the Habsburgs (Simionescu, 1977, p. 100). On the 4th of April 1535 in Iași, Rareș made an alliance treaty with Ferdinand of Austria (Hurmuzaki, II, 1, p. 91-94; Aretin, 1806, p. 210-216; Constantinescu, 1978, p. 77), treaty by which he firmly engaged himself to the anti-Ottoman struggle by military means. Quite fast, in 1537, a Turkish-Venetian war started and the Republic of the lagoons managed to form on the 8th of February 1538 a holy league whose co-participants were also Carol the Vth and the Pope Paul the IIIrd (*I libri commemoriali...*, VI, 1903, p. 231-232;). After only a few days, on the 24th of February, a peace and collaboration treaty was made in Oradea between Ferdinand of Austria and Ioan Zápolya (Goos, 1911, p. 66-85; Neagoe, 1976, p. 392). In this treaty, Petru Rareș was automatically included, as he had made an alliance with Ferdinand of Austria (Gorovei, 1982, p. 145). Thus it was created, in theory at least, a large anti-Ottoman coalition, that extended itself from Moldavia, throughout Hungary, the Habsburgic Empire Venice and Rome, until Spain. If we take in consideration the naval activities of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and the danger that Persia represented, it seemed that the Ottoman Empire had been trapped inside of a wide circle of alliances that threatened to strangle it. But this is just a first impression that proves itself baseless if we analyse it concisely. The large anti-Ottoman coalition, like any other similar coalition, had its own weaknesses that were much more important than its advantages.

While the holy league was being undermined by endless contradictions and the mistrust between its members, the sultan Soliman the Magnificent started his own preparations for a great military expedition in 1538, in order to break up the foreshadowing surrounding of the Ottoman Empire and to prove to all the christian forces reunited against him, that he was the stronger one. The sultan's great military campaign against Moldavia in 1538, represented the main action of a military and political plan that took place and was coordinated in a huge geographical space, with the only purpose of rejecting the christian coalition and extension of Ottoman dominion.

Being warned about the preparations made against him (Gemil, 1978, 2, p. 153), Soliman the Magnificent decided to start a strong military and political attack, that was aiming all the regions of major interest for the Ottoman Empire : Europe, the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean (Gemil, 1978, 2, p. 154; Decei, 1978, p. 184-186; Braudel, 1986, p. 144). The sultan chose Moldavia to be the main striking point (Gemil, 1978, 2, p. 153; Gemil, 1987, 3, p. 291-312), because, on one hand, this country was very important for its economic, military and human potential in the framework of the sultan's vast plans of expansion throughout Europe. On the other hand, Petru Rareș and his country were politically isolated, surrounded only by enemies and having far allies who were little willing to fulfil their promises. In the sultan's conception, striking Rareș was supposed to affect the whole christian coalition that was not enough consolidated, and to

strengthen the Ottoman positions in Moldavia, but maintaining however, the relations with Poland.

Deciding to attack Moldavia, Soliman the Magnificent payed less attention to the anti - Venetian front (Longo, 1877, p. 120-125), allowing the Venetian fleet that was being helped by the one of the Pope to start a few isolated attacks in the Aegean Sea (Gemil, 1978,2, p. 157). In exchange, Moldavia's voivode, was being confronted with a triple threat, the one of the Turks, the Tartars and the Poles, and he had no ally to turn to. After he managed to drive away by diplomatic or military means the Polish and Tartarian threats, Rareș fell however in front of his strongest enemy, the sultan Soliman the Magnificent. Without even starting a fight, left by the great boyar families of the Gănești and the Arburești, Moldavia's voivode witnessed the destruction of his army and was forced to exile himself, on the 14th of September 1538, accompanied by only 150 loyal men (Constantinescu, 1978, p. 91; Gorovei, 1982, p. 153). The next day, the sultan entered Suceava triumphantly.

Rareș's exile was bitter and he was compelled to make many compromises, to tread on his pride, to accept a humiliating ceremony in exchange of his sultan's naming back on the throne of Suceava. During his second reign, Rareș confronted himself with the problem of recovering the territories in southern country conquered by the sultan in 1538. Because of this, he firmly joined again, but only with financial means, the anti - Ottoman actions that Ioachim of Brandenburg was preparing for the year 1542 (Maître, 1701, p. 22; Papiu-Ilarian, 1864, p. 13-15). Rareș payed huge sums of money, that he would never recover again, and in what concerns Ioachim of Brandenburg's action that had as main objective the conquest of Buda, it ended up with a lamentable failure.

Petru Rareș's reign undoubtedly represented a turning point in the history of medieval Moldavia. Soliman the Magnificent, who had as main objective of his expansion the Central Europe, wished to have the flanks secured and the Roumanian Countries made part of the right flank of the Ottoman attack. Because of this aspect and the few other ones mentioned above, he was forced to neutralize Transylvania and to subordinate more strictly Moldavia and Wallachia. The holy league of the christian powers, made in 1538, was neither capable to help the Roumanian Countries, nor to stop the Ottoman attack. The naval battle of Prevesa, in 1538, indicated the beginning of the Ottoman dominion over the Mediterranean Sea. In 1541, Buda and the whole Central Hungary were turned into pashalic, the threat against Central Europe becoming even greater. Under these circumstances, history can reproach Petru Rareș only his not knowing how to attract Poland on his side, but if he had succeeded in this attempt, he definitely coldn't have stopped the changing of Moldavia's status in relationship with the Ottoman Porte.

In what concerns John Voivode the Brave, his anti - Ottoman struggle was directly determined by the confrontation between the christian powers and the Ottoman Empire, although it took place out of any alliance with the holy league that was valid between 1571-1573 (I libri memoriali..., VI, 1903, p. 321-323; Romanin, 1914, p. 301-301; Musatti, 1937, p. 435; Ferrara, 1961, p. 254-263; Djuvara, 1914, p. 106-113).

Being under the pressure of the naval disaster from Lepanto, on the 7th of October 1571, but also under the pressure of the currency crisis that the Empire was going through (Beldiceanu, 1957, p. 70-86), the Turks demanded the Moldavian voivode, on the 21st of February 1574, to double the tribute from 35000 to 70000 ducats (Berza, 1957, p. 12-13; Giurescu, 1966, p. 136-138). Being refused they started the military expeditions against Moldavia, expeditions that would last two month, from the 14th of April to the 14th of June

1574. The battles of Jiliște, Brăila, Tughina, Catatea Albă and Cahul-Roșcani were fierce. They were the cause of many important losses for the Turks, but despite all this they could not stop them from getting the final victory. It is also worthy of notice the fact that these fights took place only little time before the last great Mediterranean military campaign of the Turks, the one that started on the 13th of July 1574 and was directed against the Tunis ruled over by the Spaniards (Diccionario, 1969, p. 882).

In this way, although he had no agreement with the holy league or any other of its co-participating powers and fighting for defending his own country, John Voivode the Brave brought about many considerable difficulties to the Ottoman Empire, especially by delaying the campaign in the Mediterranean Sea. Once again it was proved that the Roumanian Countries represented an essential element of any anti - Ottoman coalition, and that such coalitions could not be conceived and put in practice without taking them in consideration.

If we take a look over the entire XVIth century, we can realize that all the anti - Ottoman holy leagues and all the coalitions directed against the sultans in Constantinople were actually made with the participation of the Roumanian Countries, as they became sometimes the main field of the military operations, exactly the way it happened with Moldavia in 1538. And if the XVIth century began with Stephan the Great's anti - Ottoman struggle, it would also end with the same glorious struggles of Michael the Brave.

Taking over the reign of Wallachia in the autumn of 1593, Michael the Brave had from the very beginning two major objectives : the anti - Ottoman struggle, for the freedom of his country, and the struggle for the state unity of all the Roumanians, as he knew that a powerful and unitary Roumanian state would make the re-establishment of the Ottoman dominion impossible.

If the anti - Ottoman struggle led by Michael the Brave was mainly based on causes of internal matters (Maxim, 1977, p. 482; idem, 1979, p. 1761; idem, 1980, p. 247-250; idem, 1994, p. 3-46; Berza, 1958, p. 61; Murgescu, 1994,1-2, p. 40-47, 4, p. 15-20; idem, 1995, p. 243-253), we must not lose sight of the international political context that undoubtedly created the favourable conditions for this struggle's starting and taking place. In this context, and although in a different measure, the Habsburgic Empire and Spain had the most important part, in the framework of the christian coalition. For the space inhabited by the Roumanians, the defining element of the external situation continues to be the contradiction between the Ottoman Empire on one hand, and the Austrian Habsburgs, supported by those from Spain, on the other. Not to mention Poland's taking back the Pontic pretensions that were led, *de facto*, by chancellor Jan Zamoyski, and the endless forays of the Tartars (Caccamo, 1971, p. 255-281; Kortepeter, 1973, p. 5-6; Abrahamowicz, 1974, p. 19-31; Corfus, 1975, p. 483-498).

The three great powers had specific interests in the Roumanian space, but with no exception, all of them represented serious threats directed against the international status of the Roumanian Countries, against their internal autonomy and their territorial integrity. Thus, the Habsburgic Empire was trying to form a large anti - Ottoman bloc that would include Spain, the Italian states, Poland, Russia, Sweden and even England and Persia. Its main direction of expansion against the Turks had firstly as main objective the Danubian, Carpathian and Pontic space, especially Transylvania, but also Moldavia and Wallachia. Because of this, outstanding personalities, such as Sigismund Báthory, first, and then, Michael the Brave were paid great attention, as each one of them, in his own way, tried to

restore the unity of the ancient Dacia (Stănescu, 1975, p. 501-502; Căzan, 1994, p. 1183-1195; Andreescu, 1993, p. 511-537).

In what concerns Poland, she felt threatened by an eventual alliance between Moscow and the Habsburgs and she tried to form the so-called "oriental barrier" by an alliance with Sweden and the Ottoman Empire (Stănescu, 1975, p. 503-504). In this way, any attempt to reconstitute Dacia and the political unity of the Roumanian space, especially under the protection or in alliance with the Habsburgs, exactly how it also happened with Sigismund Báthory and Michael the Brave seemed dangerous and had to be eliminated as being a major obstacle in front of Poland's good relations with the Ottoman Porte.

After a long war with Persia (between 1578-1590), the Ottoman Empire finally hoped, that by starting a war against the Habsburgs in the centre of Europe, it would set up for good the rivalry with them in its favour and would conquer new territories. The Ottomans also hoped that in this way they would get new sources of income to cover the holes of the treasury. But, despite all the flaws of the christian camp, the "long war", that started on the 4th of July 1593 (Hammer, 1837, p. 265-329; Kortepeter, p. 130-133; Decei, 1978, p. 262-263), and hardly ended up in 1606, did not lead to the fulfilment of the Ottoman hopes. It ended up with a blank peace, that settled the maintaining of the pre-war territorial *statu quo* and stipulated a relationship of full equality between the two powers.

Taking advantage of this war, on the 13th of November 1594, Michael the Brave started the anti - Ottoman struggle by killing all the creditors in Bucharest and all the Turks in the country, without having an agreement with any christian power, and he was almost immediately imitated by Moldavia's voivode, Aron the Tyrant (Panaitescu, 1936, p. 109-113; Sârbu, 1976, p. 99-101; Decei, 1975, p. 458). Thus, Giurgiu, Cetatea de Floci, Hârşova, Silistra, Brăila, Tighina, Kilia, Ismail and Babadag were attacked and burned. Important victories were obtained in the battles from Putineiu, Stăneşti, Şerpăteşti and the one near Rusciuk. Practically the whole Danube line was turned into a front line.

The rising of the Roumanian Countries against the Turks represented a great danger for the Porte, especially in the conditions in which the Porte was at war with the Habsburgs. The danger was foreshadowing itself on two as important directions : the threat over the right flank of the Ottoman front, that was uncovered in the face of the attacks started by the Roumanian Countries, and the threat over the supplies of food and other products of Constantinople (Hurmuzaki, III,1, p. 471; IV,2, p. 193, 198; XII, p. 24; Giorănescu, 1940, p. 107; Tappe, 1964, p. 79), the Ottoman capital, as well as over the supply of the Ottoman trade with Poland (Iorga, 1901, p. 25; Veress, 1933, p. 229-231). These serious threats forced the Turks to put the war from Hungary on the second plan and to direct all their forces against Wallachia (Xenopol, 1915, p. § 39).

Then, the 1595 campaign followed when the grand vizier Sinan Pasha intended to turn Wallachia into pashalic. The brilliant victory from Călugăreni and the military campaign of the united forces of the three Roumanian Countries in the autumn of that year, crushed the Ottoman forces and upset the grand vizier's plans from being put in practice. The next following years, the warfare between Michael the Brave and the Turks got fiercer, the Turks suffered more and more losses and Wallachia practically became independent.

In spite of all his victories, the holy league that came into being when the war in 1593 started and that was made up of Emperor Rudolph the IInd, the Pope Clement the VIIIth and the duke of Tuscany, Ferrara and Mantova as the participation of Spain was

reduced only to financial and military support with mercenaries, did not recognize Michael the Brave as one of its members. The Emperor preferred to negotiate with prince Sigismund Báthory, who was Roman Catholic of religion and quite easy to manipulate, while Michael the Brave was considered to be only Sigismund Báthory's vassal.

The situation would completely change when Moldavia got under the sphere of Poland's influence, and Sigismund Báthory would leave Transylvania to his cousin, the cardinal Andrei Báthory, Poland's man. Facing this change, Rudolph the IInd needed someone to turn the situation upside down and that someone was no one else but Michael the Brave. At his turn, Wallachia's voivode was in a quite delicate position, as he was everywhere surrounded by enemies and under the given circumstances, an alliance with the Emperor was necessary to him.

In such conditions, Michael the Brave was able to get to the accomplishment of the second objective of his reign, the unification of the three Roumanian Countries. He accomplished this objective very quickly, as in only a few months a powerful state entity started to foreshadow in the space inhabited by the Roumanians (*Documenta Romaniae Historica*, 1975, p. 529). The being of a powerful Roumanian state would have been a certain guarantee of impeding the Ottoman expansion towards Central Europe and would have also ensured a steady balance of power in the region of Down Danube. But the perspective of such a state worried more the christian powers than the Turks, as at the time they did not have the necessary capacity to take action against this new state. The Emperor, as well as the Poles regarded the existence of a powerful Roumanian state as an unsurmountable obstacle in front of their own expansion plans, and not as a reliable ally in the anti - Ottoman struggle. Under these circumstances, the two christian powers took action together against Michael the Brave, succeeding thus to destroy his far too less consolidated political work. This was a very clear and final proof of the fact that the holy leagues had nothing holy themselves, that they were alliances of some states with perfectly well defined objectives and that these states did not hesitate to ally themselves even with the Turks when their interests dictated them to do so.

At the end of this study we cannot omit the fact that the Roumanians played a foreground part in the framework of the late crusade and of the holy leagues that followed. Thus, they joined a great current of the universal history, the one of the oriental problem during its defensive period between the XVth and XVIth centuries. In this way the Roumanians also contributed to the shaping of an important segment of the universal history, they proved that they could also make history actively and not just stand it passively.

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