

Trade and handicrafts in the urban areas in the political circumstances of the 17th and 18th centuries

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Abstract: Moldavia's economy during the 17th and the 18th centuries it's more and more affected by the needs of the suzerain power which consolidates its position as a primordial pole in the orientation of the productive activities. The requests of The Ottoman Porte (concerning grain, cattle and other animal products) which are growing as they try to keep the integrity of the empire, impose a more important role for the grain and cattle forming economy in the area between the Carpathians and the Danube. A consequence of this reality is the birth of the great boyard's and monastic estates, a process which began a century before, having many consequences on the economy in general and especially on the limitation of the processing degree of some raw materials. The importance of the Romanian Countries for the Ottoman Empire in this context, the underestimation of the Romanian products sold on the Ottoman market, paying in nature (grain and cattle) some debts of some voivodes, or for the annual tribute paid to the Porte, plus the needs of the Ottoman army hired in different military missions, all these made the court and the suzerain power to be both interested in expanding the feudal estates that will produce for satisfying the Empire. This situation will become permanent during the 17th century, manifesting itself more significantly during the following century.

The beginning of the trade controlled by the Ottoman Porte becomes visible even from the last part of the XV-th century, in the same time with the closing of the access ways to the sea trade traffic. After the imposing of the domination it follows the stage of a preferential regime for the sale of the products needed by Constantinople. Moreover, in the 17th century, the Porte will initiate a real commercial monopoly on the vital considered products. This observation is supported and suggested in a stipulation of the treaty made between Vasile Lupu and the Sultan Mahomed the IV-th in 1634: "Moldavia's trade will be open for all the trading nations. However, the Turks will prefer any nation to buy the products from the country, and they will haggle willingly in the harbors of Galați, Ismail and Chilia..." (Acte și documente, 1889, p. 6-7). In addition to the existence of this huge market the Ottoman Empire, which, in spite of having an imposed character and not at all profitable for Moldavia's economy, it presented the advantage of a long lasting and safe market, the Moldavian rulers, aware of the importance of the commercial move, that will bring income to the treasury, they will try to strengthen the ties with other areas of interest. In this direction there is the treaty made between Ștefan Comșa and the king of Poland in 1612 and the one between Gheorghe Ștefan and Alexei Mihailovici, the Russian tzar in 1656, representing the continuation of some older attempts to enlarge the trade area of the East-Carpathian principality. In the same time, the commercial ties with Transilvania continue, although they don't reach the intensity of those in the last centuries, Brașov being over classed by Bistrița.(L.Lehr, 1960). These contacts may be the result of same rulers' wish to overstep the

strict bounds of the Ottoman restrictions (C. Șerban, 1979). Despite the efforts, the reorientation of the external Moldavian trade towards the suzerain power entailed the weakening of the ties with the traditional partners (N. Ciocan, 1988), and as a first consequence there was the decay of some urban settlements engaged in a trade relationship with Transylvania or North and Central Europe (Baia, Siret, Tg. Trotuș and partially Suceava) and the increasing of some cities role such as Iași, Focșani, Galați (Șt. Ștefănescu, 2000). The main commercial route follows the line of the Prut river, namely Botoșani-Iași-Vaslui-Bârlad-Galați.

One can say that the change of the external trade coordinates, through the nature of the involved product categories and from the resources point of view (the result is the tendency of the feudal estates to expand with the help of the ruler's interested in assuring a relationship system to sustain them in the, ever so changing, relationship with the Porte) gave an advantage to the ruling feudal class, to the prejudice of the urban proper traders, whose activity is more and more limited to the internal market. The boyard's representatives are those who gather large amounts of money, being able even to lend to the voivodes, and we'll find them near the religious settlements as main militants in the absorption (also with the help of the rulers) of the markets in the centre of the cities which they hired out to the local traders.

Another side of the problem consists in the massive control of the trade for the Ottoman Empire, with products, generally in a raw state, control which couldn't stimulate a handicraft production concentrated at the same level on the export. It's true that the local handicraftsmen's activity could cover the demand of the internal market, and we can introduce here the urban traders who become the representatives of a more and more varied trade, with local or foreign products, raw or processed. On the other hand, we mustn't neglect the lack of balance, aggravated by the same political circumstances, between the sums obtained for the products sold in the Ottoman Empire and the ones offered for the imported goods which were sensibly bigger. The deficit will be covered, partially, by the constant voluminous and certain character of the commercial activities with the Porte, to which we can add the above mentioned contacts to reactivate certain trade routes.

However, at the urban centers' level, from the commercial point of view, the 17th and the 18th centuries witness essential changes which can be defined as real qualitative leaps in the urban economy. The trade stabilization tendency which loses its itinerant character through the developing of the stable urban centers, certified by the increasing number of the stores and markets for the handicraft goods and food, the beginning of the traders' organization into guilds, as the increasing of the number of towns with weekly markets (L. Lehr, 1960) made more active especially by the external or transitory move of the merchandise, these are signs for giving an impulse to the exchange relationships, against the background of a diversity of crafts.

The extension and consolidation of the internal market beginning with the 16th century, and especially during the 17th century, has as a background the increasing importance of the commercial move in the cities, in the same time with the decreasing of the local village or estate markets (C. Șerban, 1964). This way, the urban centers become important markets for the goods, which the boyards, the villagers and the church's representatives refer to. This phenomenon can be explained only by the fact that, in this period, the towns concentrate the biggest part of the commercial activity of the country, imposing themselves as fix centers, a reality attested by the large number of documents (N. Iorga, 1903) which mention the increasing number of the stalls, the custom-houses or of the streets specialized in selling certain goods : "the shoes selling street", "The flour selling street" (E. Pavlescu, 1939: 272-275), "the fish selling street" (L. Lehr, 1968: 29).

The foreign travelers are impressed by the abundance and the diversity of the goods on the markets in the Moldavian cities. So, besides the periodical market, a more important role

was gained by the permanent city market, which was formed of the stalls used for storing and selling goods (C. Șerban, 1964). This kind of situation was found in Iași, which, beginning from the second half of the 17th century, became the main economical and political centre of Moldavia (V. Neamțu, 1968). The intensifying of the commercial activity led to a territorial expanding of trading area through the appearance of the second market which appears in the documents as “the upper market” unlike the old market called “the big market” or “the Russian street”, or sometimes else “the lower market”. The same thing could be noticed in centers like Suceava or Botoșani (C. Șerban, 1970).

An exact image of the goods sold in a stall from Iași in the second half of the 17th century is shown in a debt register (C. Turcu, 1955) from 1679: fabric, silk, cloth from Ardeal, from Flanders, Turkish cloth, home-made cloth, clothes (traditional skirts, belts, jackets), raw or worked-up metal, food, leather, harness pieces, etc. Besides the variety of goods, we can notice the presence of the raw materials side by side with the final products, some of them imported, and among the buyers, we can find boyards, traders, craftsmen and even villagers. The source shows a concentration of the exchange activities in the hands of the traders, to the craftsmen detriment, who gradually give up the trade activity, but who participate a lot in providing the stalls with local products.

A proof of the important role of the cities into Moldavia’s commercial life is the increasing number of the weekly markets which took place on different days in order not to be superposed and to interfere with the activity of the other markets in the neighborhood, the ruling institution taking a definite position on this matter. So, in the case of Siret and Suceava which were in the same area, the market day was, for the first town, on Tuesdays, and for the second, on Thursdays (P. Cocârla, 1991). Organizing these weekly markets regularly is a sign of Moldavia’s active participation to the external and transitory trade, where the cities had a special role, and it also shows the character of polarity factor of some urban centers reported to the feudal estates. The appearance of the information about the associations or traders’ or the carter’s guilds is found in a direct relationship with the intention to make a counterpart from the urban traders against the interferences of other traders. They tend to individualize themselves, or better said, to become professionally better comparative with the representatives of the other social classes involved, more or less, in commercial activities. In some 17th century documents from Țara Românească, the discussion may be extended to Moldavia, the chief of the traders together with the other members of the guild took over some of the attributions of the judge and of the town councilors, especially the judicial ones, confirming once again the special role of the traders for the life of the towns simultaneously with the weakening of the chosen representatives’ power.

The above mentioned changes can only have a common denominator, namely the increasing degree of specialization and variation of the crafts. From this point of view the 17th and 18th centuries are dominated by two major phenomena: the increasing importance of the market production, comparative with the bespoke production (confirmed by the great number of workshops, stalls, cellars in the centre of the towns), as well as the separation of the production from the circulation (Șt. Olteanu, 1959).

About the crafts practiced in towns it’s written in many documents. In the metallurgy we can find blacksmiths (Dima “the blacksmith” from Galați), farriers (“Dumitru the farrier” from Iași), coppersmiths, locksmiths (Clica the locksmith from Iași), wire makers, bell founders, blade smiths, etc. The development of the towns, the construction of the civil and religious buildings, the construction of the buildings connected with the economic activities led to the development of the wood and stone crafts (stonecutters, bricklayers, brick makers, joiners, carpenters) having specialized subdivisions (Șt. Olteanu, 1959). A more and more important role is taken by the local craftsmen, comparing them with the ones over the mountains, having an older tradition concerning their contribution to the appearance of the

Moldavian towns, the leaders of the country asking for their help more for their quality of advisors. A special development is that of the leather processing activity (V. Neamțu, 1951), especially if we think that the main activity was the cattle breeding (M. Lazăr, 2000) and we may add the request of the suzerain power for wild animals' skins as obligations imposed to the Moldavian leaders. We can see an increasing degree of specialization, in the 17th –18th centuries are mentioned furriers, skimmers, boot makers, shoemakers, leather dressers, belt makers, sole-leather makers, hatters in centers like Iași, Suceava, Huși, Cotnari, Tg. Frumos, Vaslui, Galați, Orhei, Tg. Neamț, Roman, Dorohoi or Focșani. There are a lot of documents that write about the Moldavian craftsmen skills in the leather processing activities. These documents speak about an intense trade and even about the export of the final products to Transilvania. The textile crafts are present in the urban area: weavers, drapers, dyers, tailors, lace makers. In fact, an important source that sends us clues about this craft is the above mentioned debts register. There we can find not only imported textile products but also local final products (traditional skirts, belts and jackets). The presence of the tailors among the debtors, allows us to come up with the idea that the trader becomes the main element both in providing the raw materials and selling the processed stuff, the craftsman being more and more relieved of the selling task. The diversification and the growing number of the food crafts are in a close relationship with the growth of the consume capacity of the Moldavian centers which have a socially, ethnically and professionally heterogeneous population, served by millers, bakers, butchers, brewers, etc. (V. Neamțu, 1971). The architectural and cultural transformations which happen in the Moldavian towns, during this period, especially in Iași where we can notice the concern of some leaders like Vasile Lupu or Miron Barnovski, lead to the development of the art crafts: house painters, especially foreign, goldsmiths, clockmakers and typographers. In the pottery activity there is a qualitative evolution superior to the preceding period. In the same time there are crafts as shaving, soap making or glass manufacturing. Simply mentioning them wouldn't be really valuable if we didn't consider the refining of the needs of the urban categories, to which these products or services were destined. These products were especially for the high society. So, we can notice that the crafts become more and more specialized, some of them developing from the main branch, some of the crafts being brand new.

Regarding the productive activity, the 17th and the 18th centuries mean a concentration in the urban area of practicing different crafts as compared to the feudal, boyard's or monastic estates. The representatives of the last begin a real race for owning the spaces or the buildings inside the towns, either by donation or by buying them. The reality is shown by the existence of the "narrow streets", called by the main craft practiced there, and by the construction of the slums (E. Pavlescu, 1939). Their setting is not casual but conditioned by the possibility of taking advantage of the urban area for each craft. "The farrier's slum" from Iași (*Buletinul Ioan Neculce*, 1925: 176) is at the outskirts of the town, for safety reasons (avoiding devastating fires), but also for economical reasons (an easier contact with the peasants that needed this services) (Șt. Olteanu, 1959). The centre of the shoe makers' industry from Iași, will be moved from the west area, after the first half of the 17th century in the north-east of the town, for commercial reasons the new place assuring a faster selling of the products. This kind of concentration of occupations is certified, some of them later, in other centers such as Suceava, Bârlad or Roman.

Even if we only consider these two aspects (a larger specialization of the crafts and the defining of some areas in the centre of the town where they were practiced) we can suppose that in the 17th and the 18th centuries the balance between the bespoke production and the production for the market decisively inclined towards the last one. To support this statement there are documents which confirm the fact that, in addition to the taxes, fines or usury, the guild's fund was also maintained by a part of the sums that came from selling the products in

specially made places. In “The guild’s regulation of the furriers, the tailors, the barbers, the drapers and of the skinners from Roman” from 1641 there is the obligation for the members to contribute with a certain tax per stall, representing the part collected by the chief (E. Pavlescu, 1939). In Iași the skinners had the obligation “to have 5 or 6 stalls on a street, where to sell the sheepskin coats” (Th. Codrescu, vol. 4). These are, without a doubt proves of the crafter’s concern to sell on the market, in the same time with the raise of the production.

These changes that were made in the urban area, changes in the commercial movement concerning directly the formation of a stable, permanent market, manifested through the great number of stalls or storing places, these changes, we say, have to be correlated with the ascending evolution of the merchandize production. In the same time, many of the crafters continue with selling their products, combining the two activities as producers and traders, but as the time goes by, during the 17th and the 18th centuries the traders begin to monopolize the trading activity, a reality which has already been mentioned. That’s how we can explain the presence of the boot makers, the tailors, the drapers, the furriers as debtors to stall from Iași in 1679 (possible for the raw materials they bought from there), and we also find them as suppliers, judging by the mentioned processed products (C. Turcu, 1955). The coexistence of the crafters and the traders integrated into the capitalization action contribute to the emergence of some professional organizing forms which are superior to the previous stage, when they pass from the companionship-like associations to the guilds, by introducing some clear regulations and reorganizing them in order to dominate the urban market in a very strong way (C. Șerban, 1964).

The process was hurried by the interferences of the Ottoman domination regime, the tendency being directly proportional with the weakening of the representing power of the urban population facing the taxes established by the central authority. So, the producers feel the absence of an administration which to be capable to protect them and they try to substitute it by being more united. For this period, we have a lot of references about guilds, chiefs or managers of the crafters fact that makes us think of a superior step of the productive activity structure: farriers, coppersmiths, coopers, boot makers or shoemakers, skinners, belt makers, sole-leather makers, tailors, drapers, butchers, goldsmiths, torch bearers, who we meet in the main Moldavian centers, but especially in Iași. The formation and the consolidation of the urban guilds of traders or crafters represented an answer of the economically active social class, an answer that was needed because of the interference of the occasional competitors and also because of the different requests of the political and the administration specter. We have to keep in mind that the 17th and 18th centuries are characterized by substantial changes in the productive urban life, the most important change being the biunivocal relationship-the extension of the production for the large consume – permanent market.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- “Acte și documente” = Acte și documente relative la istoria Renașterii României publicate de D.A.Sturdza și C.Colescu Vartic, Vol. I București;
- “AIIAI” = Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie “A.D.Xenopol”, Iași;
- “AȘUI” = Analele Științifice ale Universității “Al.I.Cuza” din Iași;
- Buletinul “Ioan Neculce” = Ioan Neculce. Buletinul Muzeului Municipal, Iași;
- N.Iorga “Studii și Documente” = N.Iorga, Studii și documente cu privire la istoria românilor;
- “Th.Codrescu, Uricariul” = Theodor Codrescu. Uricariul. Colecțiune de diferite acte care pot servi la istoria românilor;
- “SCȘ” = Studii și cercetări științifice;
- “SCȘI” = Studii și Comunicări Științifice, Istorie, Iași;
- “SMIM” = Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie, București;
- “Studii” = Studii. Revista de Istorie.