

Vlad the Impaler at the Beginning of His Second Reign. Short Considerations on Some Aspects of External Politics

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Résumé: Vlad l'Empaleur, devenu pour la deuxième fois prince régnant de la Valachie (1456-1462), devra faire face à une situation externe difficile. Le danger représenté par l'Empire Ottoman a obligé l'Etat Valache, au milieu du 14^e siècle, à adopter une attitude de duplicité dans sa politique extérieure. Ainsi, certaines sources documentaires indiquent le fait que le voïvode, Vlad Țepeș, a commencé à payer tribut à l'Empire Ottoman dès la fin de l'an 1456. L'échec des négociations avec la Venise et la Hongrie en vue de l'appui du front anti-Ottoman établi dans la zone du Bas Danube, a obligé le prince régnant valache à résister s'appuyant seulement sur ses propres forces pendant la campagne déclenchée par le sultan Mehmed II contre la Valachie en 1462.

Key words: Ottoman Empire, tribute, commercial blockade, suzerainty

Abstract: When he became ruler of Wallachia for the second time (1456-1462), Vlad the Impaler had to deal with a difficult external situation. The danger represented by the Ottoman state by the middle of the 14th century forced the Wallachian state to adopt a ambiguous attitude in its external politics. Accordingly, some documentary sources indicate that the ruler of Wallachia, Vlad the Impaler, started to pay a tribute to the Ottoman Empire from the end of 1456. The failure of the negotiations with Venice and Hungary for support against the Ottoman front established in the area of the Lower Danube forced the Wallachian ruler to resist relying only on his own forces during the campaign started by the sultan Mehmed II against Wallachia in 1462.

When he became ruler of Wallachia for the second time, at some point between April 15 and July 3, 1456 (C. Rezachevici, 2001), Vlad the Impaler had to deal with a difficult external situation. Forced to maintain its alliance with Hungary, Wallachia had to represent, along with the Hungarian Kingdom, the last stronghold of the anti-Ottoman front at the Lower Danube, a stronghold benefiting, at least declaratively, of the attention of two great Occidental powers: the Papacy and Venice (Ș. Andreescu, 1998.).

The victory won by Iancu de Hunedoara at Belgrade, during the summer of 1456, compelled the Ottoman Empire to leave aside its plan of conquering Central Europe, and thus the sultan Mehmed II focused his efforts on the conquering of the last remains of the Byzantine Empire and on the consolidation of his reign in Serbia.

The High Porte did not neglect the political and economic subordination of the Black Sea Basin. During the summer of 1454, an Ottoman fleet had been sent on the Black Sea to remove any suspicions concerning the announced commercial blockade that had to be put in place against Moldavia and against the Genovese Colony of Caffa.

The pressure of the Ottoman Empire was pushing Moldavia towards signing a capitulation act, especially as throughout the period of the Moldavian-Turkish negotiations, Poland's attitude could have been characterized as indifferent.

The beginning of the conflict with the Teutonic Order, on January 22, 1454, and the incorporation of the Prussian territories, on March 6, 1454, was equivalent with a change in the direction of expansion of the Polish Kingdom, which shifted its attention from the Black Sea zone towards the Baltic Sea area, and, given these new coordinates, Poland's anti-Ottoman politics became a closed chapter (§. Papacostea, 2001).

Moldavia's political, economic and diplomatic isolation will determine the reigning prince Petru Aron to sign the act of submission for his country on October 5, 1455, and to start the payment of an annual tribute to the High Porte amounting to 2,000 ducats.

The regulation of the relations with the Moldavian state was requiring, as soon as possible, a ceasing of the commercial blockade. By an act emitted at the order of Mehmet II, on June 9, 1456, the Moldavian merchants regained the right to sell their merchandises on the Empire's territories: "The order given through the royal sign is that, beginning from now, making peace with the bey of the Moldavian country, voivode Petru,... I removed the enmity between us, and I ordered the merchants from his territories, from Akerman, to come with their boats and trade with the inhabitants from Edirne, from Brussa and from Istanbul. On their coming and going, none of my beys, soldiers and servants are allowed to bother them or to cause any damage to their goods"ⁱ.

The difficult political circumstances determined Vlad the Impaler to act from the very first moment firmly in order to consolidate the anti-Ottoman front. Thus, on September 6, 1456, the Wallachian ruler concluded a vassal treaty with king Ladislaw of Hungaryⁱⁱ. However, its formal character and the proclaimed fear of the Turkish danger indicate the hurry to sign this act. In front of the increasing Turkish pressure, Wallachia needed security guarantees that could only be offered, in the respective political context, by the traditional ally of the Wallachian state: the Hungarian Kingdom.

In the letter sent to the inhabitants of Braşov on September 10, 1456, this aspect can be noticed even more clearly, as Vlad the Impaler was highlighting the Ottoman missions arrived in Wallachia in order to try to obtain Wallachia's neutrality in the case of certain plundering actions in Transylvaniaⁱⁱⁱ. However inconsistent the Turkish initiatives might have been, for the moment the Wallachian state did not enjoy a sufficiently solid external position to ignore such signals and to adopt a straightforward attitude in this matter. In fact, the politics of the Wallachian state, concerning the Ottoman Empire and Hungary, had been for about half a century an ambiguous one, and an immediate renunciation to this system of coordinates promoted by the former reigning prince Vladislav II was not possible.

Even if our thesis is supported only by a few sporadic references, it seems that, at a diplomatic level, Wallachia probably accepted the Ottoman suzerainty at the end of 1456, this suzerainty being translated, according to the information from the chronicle of the Serbian soldier from the Turkish army Constantin de Ostroviţa, by the regular payment of a tribute: "This son of Dracula came two years in a row at the emperor's court to bring the tribute, according to the agreement"^{iv}.

The transformation of the relations with the Ottoman Empire did not have immediate consequences. If for Moldavia the Turkish pressure was felt more intensely, as it had an important economic component as well, Wallachia continued to be integrated in a system of relations established with Hungary and the Ottoman power through the treaty from Adrianopol of 1451 (E. Denize, 2003). However, this status did not restrict the Romanian ruler's liberty of action, as he continued, one way or the other, his Christian politics.

The acceptance of the Turkish suzerainty led to a conflict with Hungary, which wanted Wallachia's position to be one of open hostility in the relations with the High Porte. One of the first pieces of evidence concerning the existing situation of tension at the level of the relations between the two states is represented by the document of December 17, 1456, in which King Ladislaw was asking the inhabitants of Braşov to help the candidate Dan-Vodă to occupy the Wallachian throne, as Vlad the Impaler had broken the promises he had made to Hungary^v.

Beyond the protectionist economic measures introduced by Wallachia for the powerful centers from the South of Transylvania, the attitude of the Hungarian King can be analyzed as well, in our opinion, in the light of Vlad the Impaler's renunciation to a firm anti-ottoman politics, especially as Hungary was increasingly pressed by the Occidental powers to reopen the hostilities against the Ottoman Empire.

Being under a double suzerainty, namely a Hungarian-Ottoman suzerainty, regardless of whether it was declared or not, the Wallachian state acted energetically on the side of the Christian front, for the first time on Vlad the Impaler's order, during the spring of 1457.

The military expedition from Moldavia, to which the Romanian voivode did not participate, intended the enthroning of Stephen the Great, the main candidate supported by Iancu de Hunedoara during the last years of his life. There are still different opinions concerning the date when Stephen the Great could have entered Moldavia, some significant historians considering that the second part of the year 1456 marks the start of the military action (§. Papacostea, 2001). From the perspective of the Wallachian state, the moment was much more favorable, as the voivode Vlad the Impaler had not yet completely adjusted his relations with the Turkish power and had sworn to be faithful to King Ladislaw V in the anti-Ottoman fight.

Regardless of this action's chronology, it underlines the fact that Vlad the Impaler remained a ruler that was faithful to the principles accumulated during the years of pilgrimage at Iancu de Hunedoara's court, and the politics he begins with demonstrates the clear anti-Ottoman direction that the Wallachian voivode will develop after 1459.

Starting from these premises, we can state that the lack of success of the Wallachian anti-Ottoman actions and, implicitly, the removal of Vlad the Impaler from the throne were influenced by two evolutions in the area of the international relations, having deep implications as well on the Romanian zone.

First of all, we refer to the attitude of Venice, which, after the fall of Constantinople, chose to adopt a neutral position in its relations with the Ottoman Empire. The position of lagoon city was clearly first of all expressed in the letter sent to the papacy on October 30, 1458, which underlined the fact that Venice would not act against the Ottoman Empire without a well-consolidated system of alliances in place (E. Denize, 1995).

Very significantly, the following step took place a year later, in the council from Mantova, where Venice required, in exchange for its participation to an eventual anti-Ottoman coalition, the payment of all the war expenses, the sending of 8,000 people to equip his navy and the organization of 50,000 horsemen and of 20,000 pedestrians that would have had to march towards Hungary (N. Stoicescu, 1976).

The unacceptable conditions led to no practical finality for the plans of crusade promoted by Pope Pius II and to no help from the Occident for the anti-Ottoman front situated on the Danube boundary.

The second moment that rubbed the Wallachian state of a reliable ally in the fight against the Turks was determined by the complications that had appeared for Hungary in central Europe.

The German Emperor Frederic III of Habsburg, by means of the tutorship exerted on his nephew, Ladislaw V, the Hungarian king, had the intention of reuniting Austria, Stiria, Carintia, Carniola, Hungary and the Czech country, thus creating an empire able to successfully fight the West European countries (I. Căzan, 2004).

The arrival of king Matei Corvin on the Hungarian throne determined the accentuation of the conflict, which reached its climax in 1459 when Frederic III was chosen king of Hungary with the help of a strong internal noble party (Ș. Papacostea, 2001).

Under these circumstances and menaced by an attack from the Roman-German Empire, Matei Corvin maintained only at a declarative level the idea of an anti-Ottoman action together with Wallachia, despite the subsequent pressure coming from the Papacy and from Venice.

All this time, Vlad the Impaler firmly went through all the necessary stages for the organization of the country in order to start an open conflict with the Ottoman Empire, being convinced of the fact that at the moment of the decisive confrontation he would at least be able to rely on the military support offered by the Hungarian kingdom.

To conclude, we can say that it was mainly the international political conjuncture of the first years of reign that acted against the Wallachian ruler who saw himself gradually pushed, against his will, into an unequal conflict with the Ottoman power, a conflict that finally led to Wallachia's more and more obvious subordination to the High Porte during the second half of the 15th century.

¹ România *Documente străine despre români* (Foreign Documents Concerning the Romanians), ed. II, București, 1992, p. 54-55

¹ Hurmuzaki, vol. XV/I, Buc., 1911, p.45.

¹ Hurmuzaki, vol. XV/I, Buc., 1911, p.45.

¹ *Călători străini despre țările române* (Foreign Travellers on the Romanian Countries), vol. îngrijit de M.Holban, București, 1968, p.126.

¹ Hurmuzaki, vol. XV/I, Buc., 1911, p.47.

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