

## The relations between Hungary and the principality on the right side of Olt River during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Brief observations

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**Abstract:** The Romanian extra-Carpathian area during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century is insufficiently known on the level of its political evolution, of its relations with the main power of the area, Hungary. The major event mentioned in documents is the revolt from Oltenia of voivode Litovoi, which triggered a Hungarian military campaign led by magister Georgius. There are still unelucidated aspects concerning the chronology and the consequences of this event on the process of territorial unification.

**Key words:** voivode, revolt, vassal, military campaign, diploma

The middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the first decennia after that present an area south of the Carpathians under two spheres of influence: Hungarian and Mongolian. The Olt River continued to be the demarcation line between Cumania, under Tartar leadership, and the region known as “Banatul de Severin”, “Țara Severinului” (Severin Country), under the political control of the Transylvanian Dukedom. (Sergiu Iosipescu, 1980)

The possible Transylvanian-Tartar agreement, concluded in the year 1261, sharpened this situation, prolonging the control exerted by the Transylvanian Dukedom over certain South-Carpathian territories at least until 1264, the year of the decisive military confrontation that took place at Breaza, between the armies of Bela IV and those of the freshly appointed Duke of Transylvania, Stephan V.

Within these areas situated between the Southern Carpathians and the Danube, “**Terra Lytua**” or the land ruled by Litovoi voivode represents, from our viewpoint, a particular case.

It seems to be safe from the tumultuous events of the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, consequently being able to continue its political evolution undisturbed.

According to the Diploma of the Johannite Knights, issued towards the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> decennium, the formation of Litovoi appears included in the Hungarian feudal system, which is proved by the fact that the voivode had to provide military support to Hungary. Yet, the dominion relationship should be analyzed, nevertheless, only on the level of the power exerted by King Bela IV at the moment when the diploma was issued, around the year 1247.

The fact that Transylvania was taken over by the claimer of the Arpadian crown, Stephan V, changed, from our viewpoint, this status, going even to its elimination. In this situation, a hypothesis that should be considered is the idea that the Transylvanian duke extended his influence south of the Carpathians only over the Country of Severin, which he actually defended from the Bulgarian aggression, and not

over the political formation led by Litovoi.

At the same time, it is not impossible that the principality of Litovoi may have continued to function, maybe rather on a declarative level, in a regime of dependence in relation to Hungary, the tendency of the Arpadian kingdom to pretend to have a series of rights over different formations or zones where its authority had either vanished a long time ago or had never been an effective one being well known (S. Brezeanu, 1999). The closest comparison can be found in the same well-known Johannite Diploma awarded by Bela IV, in which another South-Carpathian principality, that of Seneslau and even the entire Cumania constituted, from the viewpoint of the status of vassalage, an aspiration and not a reality for the Hungarian kingdom.

The dependence may have been limited, in the case of the principality of Litovoi, to the payment of certain financial obligations, especially as one of the reasons, mentioned in documents as well, that led to the military intervention of magister Georgius, during the last decennia of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, was represented by the non-payment of the financial debts to the kingdom.

So, freed from the Hungarian tutorship, the principality of Litovoi, which already included other political structures of a lesser extent, had the possibility of experiencing an ascending trend, accumulating enough power to extend its authority over new territories situated on the right side of Olt River as well.

The enthronement in Hungary of the minor king Ladislau IV in the year 1272 did not bring, from the very first moment, significant changes, as the Hungarian kingdom continued to impose its influence over certain territories south of the Carpathians.

Even since 1274, in the position of ban of Severin, is mentioned the nobleman Ugrinus, who, a year later, will also obtain the dignity of voivode of Transylvania, being plausible among others the hypothesis that the dominion over Făgăraș may have been obtained even before the great Mongolian invasion by the father of Ugrinus, Posa, of the Csak family.\* From this position, the ban of Severin was able to consolidate a certain authority over the extra-Carpathian political formations, especially as, by means of his family, his dominion also covered a

part of the Country of Făgăraș (Țara Făgărașului) as well (Antal Lucaks, 1999).

The ethnic tensions were going to push Hungary towards a new period of crisis, just as deep as the one recorded after the moment 1241-1242. The stake was given by the removal of the Cuman nobility from public life, in a context in which the Hungarian dynast himself had Cumanian origins on the side of his maternal relatives. The massive access of the Cumanians among the leadership of the political life had occurred even since the short reign of king Stephan V (1270-1272), married to queen Elisabeth, a noblewoman of Cumanian origin. Her son, Ladislau IV, while he was still minor, continued this process of consolidation of privileges and even adopted the Cumanian lifestyle.

The first signs of the period of political instability are felt, first of all, in Transylvania, where the Saxons of Transylvania, apparently without a clear justification, devastate the town of Alba-Iulia and set the Church of the Holy Archangel Michael on fire. The event is recorded in two documents, of 1277 and 1278, respectively, from which we find out about the destructions caused by the Saxons of Transylvania, the reason of the revolt remaining unclear.\*\* The other moment will occur south of the Carpathians, where the voivode Litovoi annexes certain possessions dependent on the Hungarian State.

The moment when the two actions were triggered (1277 ?) cannot be a random moment; it has to be judged in the context of the war between Hungary and Bohemia\*\* and, why not, even in the context of the revolt of the Bulgarians from the Banat of Macva, against the Hungarian nobility. The document confirms the help provided by Ladislau IV, to the Roman-German king Rudolf I, against Bohemia, and also the fact that the Hungarian army was made up of no less than 16000 Cumanians, a number that is eloquent, in a way, for the balance between the different forces of the kingdom as well.

The considerations concerning voivode Litovoi are, even at present, far from reaching a satisfying level for the historical research. The explanation resides in the fact that the information on this character are extremely scarce, being grouped in two diplomas, emitted

## The relations between Hungary and the principality on the right side of Olt River during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Brief observations

by the Hungarian Chancery several years after the events occurred. For this reason, in historiography there continues to persist a long series of questions, such as: is voivode Litovoi one and the same person as the Litovoi mentioned in the Diploma of the Johannite Knights three decennia before?; when and under what circumstances did the confrontation between the extra-Carpathian voivode and magister Georgius (the representative of the Hungarian power) exactly take place?; can his action be considered as the first landmark of the territorial unification process in the area south of the Carpathians?; did the Hungarian restoration actually occur “de facto” over the territories annexed by Litovoi?

Concerning the first issue, the hypotheses formulated have not been able to reach a common denominator. The opinions focused on the age of Litovoi can incline the balance in favor of the supporters of the idea that we are dealing with another voivode, bearing the same name, maybe even a direct descendent of the one mentioned as well by the Diploma of the Johannite Knights, by the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The lack of precise information, confirmed by documents, obliges one to adopt a reserved attitude, which should take into account both of these variants.

Another very important problem that has not yet been fully elucidated is that of the date when Litovoi's revolt and implicitly the punishing action led by magister Georgius occurred.

The Diploma emitted in 1285 by king Ladislau IV confirms only that the action of the voivode south of the Carpathians took place when he was still minor, so during an interval comprised between 1272 and 1278\*\*, the main reason of the conflict being the occupation by Litovoi and his brother of certain territories that belonged to the kingdom.

In general, the Romanian historiography accepted the interval 1277-1279 for the deployment of the Hungarian expedition on the other side of the Carpathians, although the period itself still continues to deal with a series of chronological uncertainties. In this case we have in view two aspects, which cannot be omitted from the framework of our debate.

The first is related to the real age of the

dynast Ladislau IV. Born, according to all the possibilities, in the year 1262, he was no longer a minor at the moment of the conflict with Bohemia (S. Iosipescu, 1980). So, if we respect *ad litteram* the information provided by the document emitted in 1285, then, the action of voivode Litovoi and, implicitly, that of magister Georgius can be looked for also before the year 1278.

The second relevant aspect is represented by the nomination in 1276 of a Hungarian administrative leader for the comitat (country) of Hațeg\*\*, territory considered as belonging, for several decennia, to the political formation led by Litovoi. A series of opinions, expressed in the Romanian historiography (Ștefan Pascu, 1971), situate the main confrontation between the two parties in the country of Hațeg, based on the fact that in the respective area there is a water, namely Bârbat River, and a village by the same name (the most probable it has been attributed in honor of the Romanian voivode taken prisoner by the Hungarian army, in the very area of this territory). The last decennia have brought into actuality this issue, a new hypothesis being formulated, which indicates as starting point for the expedition of magister Georgius the area of Severin (T. Sălăgean, 2003).

So, it is necessary to highlight that the chronological elements related to the deployment of the Hungarian expedition south of the Carpathians, are not, not even to this day, fully clarified. For this reason, we consider that the actual military action could have taken place even after a series of diplomatic negotiations, covering a shorter or longer period, which finally failed, especially as this could explain, to a certain extent, the ambiguity present in documents concerning the exact date when the event occurred.

By establishing such a context, even the mention of Petru as administrative leader of the comitat of Hațeg, at 1276, can be regarded, not necessarily as the direct result of the victory of magister Georgius against Litovoi and Bârbat, but as a response reaction to the aggression triggered by the two against certain areas dependent on the Arpadian crown. It is not impossible that Hațeg itself may have been the territory disputed by the two parties, especially that the term used by the document to designate the area over which Litovoi had extended his

influence “**ultra alpes**”, is quite unclear from a geographic viewpoint.

The action led by magister Georgius is a successful one, at least from the perspective of the military victory that caused as well the death of Litovoi, stopping, in this way, one of the revolt acts begun in the territories from the margin of the kingdom.

In exchange, the political and territorial consequences of the victory obtained on the battlefield seem to be much less significant. Even though both of the leaders of the action of non-submission are annihilated, the elite of the local society south of the Carpathians manage to ransom the one remained alive: Bărbat, the brother of the former voivode.

The Hungarian documents do not provide any mentions concerning the sum paid to bring Bărbat back to the extra-Carpathian territories. Even though this seems to have occurred after ample diplomatic negotiations, the financial contribution rather represents a significant war reimbursement, which included the freeing of Litovoi's successor and his reinstallation as leader of the formation south of the Carpathians. The Hungarian authorities do not manifest any particular interest in the territories occupied by Litovoi, which are actually not mentioned precisely. The Hungarian royalty does not seem concerned by recovering these possessions, but rather by obtaining some revenues from them from the vassal Bărbat (T. Sălăgean, 2003).

Important is the fact that the two documents do not refer to any modifications introduced by the Hungarian crown in the formation situated on the right side of Olt, similar to the ones contained in the Diploma of the Johannite Knights. The territory annexed by the voivode Litovoi may have been part of those territories entrusted by the royalty, according to the medieval custom, as gift to some noblemen, other than their own subjects. Consequently, if Litovoi had presented the king with the revenues he was entitled to, implicitly recognizing his sovereignty over the respective area, there would have been no more conflict (Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, 1957).

Both in the document of 1285, as well as in the one of 1288, is presented a relationship of vassalage, rather formal, of the principality of Bărbat, translated in the payment of a tribute,

without mentioning any other military or political obligations.\*\*

The fact that there is no precise information on the territories of the kingdom taken over by Litovoi, which had caused the start of the military conflict, can be interpreted as a victory for the extra-Carpathian formation, as an important step in the process of politico-territorial unification carried out south of the Carpathians.

Going along the same line of reasoning, we can advance the idea that the victory obtained by magister Georgius was not followed by a complete restoration of the Hungarian rights over the area; such an evolution might rely on at least two arguments.

First, a few decennia ago, in the Romanian historiography, there appeared a new theory related to the events in which the south-Carpathian voivode was involved (P. P. Panaitescu, 1969). It tried to prove that Litovoi relied, when triggering his action, on a Tartar military support as well, provided by prince Nogai himself. In our opinion, Litovoi must at least have hoped for a Tartar support, especially as the extension of the power of Nogai becomes a reality from the moment when the bans of Severin disappear from the documents and the Mongolian prince obtains the protectorate of Vidin. The obvious Tartar dominion instituted in the area of the Lower Danube during the second part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century agrees with this hypothesis, especially as, for the above-mentioned period, at least on the left side of Olt, the Mongolian influence must have played an important role.

The comparison with the situation of the first decennia of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, when the alliance between Basarab I and the tsar Mihail Șişman may have been completed by a Tartar support, may be perfectly plausible in the present context as well, especially as a less important political formation, such as the one of Litovoi, would have found in the alliance with the Mongolian power the only way of freeing itself from the tutorship of the Hungarian crown. Back then, just like now, the reopening of a conflict with the Golden Horde represented a sufficient reason for Hungary to adopt a compromise solution that would not involve, in the case of the political formation led by Bărbat, anything else

## **The relations between Hungary and the principality on the right side of Olt River during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Brief observations**

but the simple recognition of the Hungarian suzerainty. 2001).

The second motivation could have been represented by the ample process of decumanization of Hungary, in which a leading role was to be played by the Holy See itself.

The first step was made in the year 1278, when Pope Nicholas III appointed bishop Philip as apostolic envoy of Hungary, Poland, Lodomeria, Galicia, Rama, Croatia, Dalmatia and Cumania.\*\*

Obviously, the main mission this high official had been entrusted with regarded Hungary, but, besides solving the problem of the Cumanians of the kingdom, the apostolic envoy had the task of consolidating Catholicism as well, especially in the margin territories, directly menaced by the Mongolian force. A good example, concerning this duty, was preserved in documents. The letter of Pope Nicholas III to Bishop Philip, of October 7, 1279, highlights the very interest of the papal institution for the former bishopric of Milcovia and for the Franciscan brothers living in the region, as well as the desire of recreating the important local religious forum (G. Moisescu, 1942). It is not impossible that this religious propaganda itself may have postponed the taking of firm measures south of the Carpathians.

The obvious involvement of the Holy See in the internal Hungarian problems is also recorded by several documents, of which we will select three.

The first includes the demand of the sovereign Ladislau IV (probably also as a result of some pressures coming along a religious line) to gather the Cumanian population and to situate in on the middle course of Tisza or around Mureş and Criş on condition that they receive the Catholic religion\*\*. The second act (also dating from 1279) contained a reproach made by Pope Nicholas III against the Hungarian king, who had not respected his oath about the Cumanians. In reality, the context of the arrival of the papal letter was much more serious, the papal nuncio Philip of Fermo had been imprisoned, given in custody to the Cumanians, and even his assassination was plotted. The Hungarian nobility will also take action, by sequestrating the king who in this way sees himself forced to accept the reconciliation with the papal nuncio (Ş. Turcuş,

2001). Finally, the last document marked the victory of the papal institution in front of the royal crown, as, within it, Ladislau the Cumanian promised to the apostolic envoy of Hungary that he would execute all the orders of the Holy See against the heretics. The document comes on the background of an older promise made by the mother queen herself, originally a noble Cumanian, to the apostolic envoy, that she would drive away the heretics from her lands. For this reason, it is not impossible that the pressures for the solution of the Cumanian problem may have come, for the Hungarian dynast, starting from the year 1280, from within his own family.\*\*

Such a development naturally imposed the triggering of the military hostilities. The duplicity of the Hungarian king, during the last few years, in front of a Cumanian nobility too little inclined to cede the privileges they had obtained, was preparing such an outcome. About the triggering of the Cumanian revolt within Hungary (the Cumanians being led, according to all possibilities, by duke Oldamyr), as well as on the victory obtained by the royal armies, in the battle from lake Hod (1282) we find out from several donation documents awarded by king Ladislau IV and queen Elisabeth, to the diverse Hungarian noblemen who took part in this war during the period 1283-1285.\*\*

Even after the victory obtained, the serious problems Hungary was faced with did not end. The military success was to bring only a short period of relative peace, interrupted, a few years later, by Ladislau IV himself, who rejected the Catholic religion, adopting the Cumanian lifestyle. A suggestive episode for the political oscillations of the Hungarian king can be found as well in the relationship between the latter and the Transylvanian voivode Roland Borşa. Although he was among the noblemen who contributed the most to the victory from lake Hod, Roland Borşa will be demitted from the leadership of Transylvania, shortly after these events. Reappointed in his former position beginning with 1284, he will enter a new conflict with his sovereign, who replaced him a year later (T. Sălăgean, 2007). Coming back to power in 1288, possibly without the support of the royalty, Roland Borşa will be one of the noblemen who plotted the assassination of Ladislau IV at

Cheresig, in 1290.\*

In the extremely tense context depicted above, we are convinced that the transformations appeared in the extra-Carpathian area did not represent a priority for the kingdom, even under the circumstances of the defeat of the revolt triggered by Litovoi. The mention of the very victory of magister Georgius from the other side of the Carpathians appears in documents only a few years after the actual deployment of the events, which makes us believe that the true impasse was represented by the tension generated by the Cumanian nobility, the entire Hungarian politics being focused on the solution of these conflicts.

The serious internal problems present in Hungary could only have come in support of the political formation led by Bărbat, who consequently benefited of an undisturbed evolution, in the very direction of the accomplishment of the territorial union in the area on the right side of Olt.

So, the Oltenian core, the dynasty Litovoi I-Litovoi II-Bărbat, along with the much vaguer Muntenian core, Seneslau-Tochomerius-Basarab I, were going to give birth to the great principality of Wallachia (Ioan Aurel Pop, 2011). The identification of the evolution of the formation on the right side of Olt River, both internally and in relation to the Hungarian power, remains the key of the deciphering of an essential stage in the process of appearance of the first Romanian Medieval State. A period characterized by documentary scarcity, for the historical writing, means a mixture between real and imaginary, between documentary logic and the use of deductive methods. So, any contribution becomes useful for the reconstruction of such a historical "puzzle". The south-Carpathian territories, during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, perfectly match these coordinates.

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**The relations between Hungary and the principality on the right side of Olt River during the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Brief observations**

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