

## **Negru Vodă reflected in several less known historiographic sources from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

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**Abstract:** **Negru Vodă reflected in several less known historiographic sources from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century** According to the chronicles, Negru Vodă (Black Voivode) represents a character who supposedly ruled over two small Transylvanian territories. Around 1290, he crossed over the Carpathian Mountains and moved into the extra-Carpathian area, contributing to the appearance of the first Romanian medieval state. The scarcity of the information transmitted to us prevented the Romanian historians from formulating a firm viewpoint demonstrating the solidity or the irrelevance of the evidence concerning the existence of this character. The first historiographic approaches from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though containing some historical and chronological inadvertences, managed to bring forth a series of hypotheses on which many of the important theories emitted during the last decennia have relied afterwards.

**Key words:** Negru Vodă, historiography, Făgăraș, Basarab I, Câmpulung

Negru-vodă enjoyed, as a historic character passed or not through the sieve of the popular tradition, a special attention in the specialized writings printed during the last part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

After long decennia of analysis, we can state that he has been perceived, from the very beginning, as one of the enigmas of the Romanian Middle Ages. The acceptance of his existence triggered the promotion of the theory according to which the first Romanian state, the one south of the Carpathians, was the fruit of a unifying action coming from the other side of the mountains, while its contestation meant supporting the idea that Walachia appeared as a result of an internal process of political evolution and territorial unification completed by its first leader acknowledged de facto, Basarab I.

Our present approach consists in the actualization of several of the first conceptions advanced in historiography concerning the enigmatic intra-Carpathian voivode, especially as he benefited in time of the opinions of the most reputable Romanian specialists in the Middle Ages, true school creators, who deepened the research by indicating precise directions for the continuation of the study on this problem.

The evolution of the theoretical thinking on Negru Vodă has not recorded, in time, modifications of structure but only certain variations able or not to contribute to the creation of a larger picture meant to include him in the ranks of the historical truths. Back then, just as now, the specialized literature appeared divided between the thesis promoted in chronicles and the thesis proposed based on the few existing documents that mention Basarab I as the first political ruler of the

territories between the Southern Carpathians and the Danube, indicating nothing at all about any voivode having come from Transylvania.

According to the legendary tradition, Negru Vodă is presented as the voivode of Amlaş and Făgăraş, small intra-Carpathian territories, from where he came down, in 1290, to the water of Dâmboviţa River, founding the town of Câmpulung. From here, he set out to Argeş, a place that was to become the first princely capital. Later on, his possessions will include as well the area up to the Danube by submitting the Basarab family, situated beyond Olt River\*.

The first significant historiographic approaches, though they started from the analysis of the information provided by the Walachian chronicles (“*letopiseştele muntene*”), did not try to research a larger historical context, the diverse connections between facts and apparently disparate events, which could provide as well explanations concerning the action of Negru Vodă.

During the last decennia of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bogdan Petriceicu Haşdeu supported the idea according to which the chroniclers refused to notice that Negru Vodă was but an idealization of the name of Basarab, bringing into focus the comparison with the black Tartars and the Black Cumania. For this very reason, in Oltenia this character is known by the name of Basarab, while in areas such as Muscel or Făgăraş he received the name of Negru Vodă (Bogdan Petriceicu Haşdeu, 1875).

In this way, it can be said that he was given different names according to the places that he unified under his scepter and for this reason the entire story built around Negru Vodă relies only on the ignorant dogmas of certain obscure monks and chancellors (Bogdan Petriceicu Haşdeu, 1875)

The direction suggested seemed to solve for the moment this thorny problem. Negru-Vodă was no other but Basarab I, this being the reason that led to the appearance of a folkloric tradition transmitted in a distorted form from one generation to the next.

Inscribing his position within the same coordinates, C. Kogălniceanu promoted similar ideas in a work appeared during the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, enriching the information with new elements of legend and toponymy. In his opinion, the entire confusion between Negru Vodă and Basarab relied on the tradition that the wives of

these two people had identical names, Margareta, being both catholic (C. Kogălniceanu, 1908).

Equally, for this author, the tradition kept in the catholic monastery from Câmpulung (Cloaşterul) is doubtless: Basarab is Negru Vodă, a fact that prompts him to reaffirm an older opinion, already stated, namely that for Oltenia this character is not Negru Vodă but Basarab.

In the vision of the people on the left side of Olt River, Basarab being someone strange and impressive for them, they gave him the nickname Negru Vodă. Yet, Basarab was certainly his name of baptism, a very largely spread name in those times also in neighboring territories such as Țara Hategului (C. Kogălniceanu, 1908).

Atanasie M. Marienescu wrote during about the same period, a study in which he tried to cover the entire epoch of Negru Vodă, repeatedly highlighting the idea that a people's tradition and legends represent his very history. The people cannot lie, only the chroniclers can do so when they do not have historical data and try to introduce all kind of “fantastic combinations” (Atanasie M. Marienescu, 1909).

The author accepts the existence of Negru Vodă and proposes three dates for his passage over the Carpathians (1215, 1241, 1290) bringing in support of each of these dates different historical sources. Following the analysis carried out, the biggest credibility is given to the year 1215, when Negru Vodă left the voivodate of Făgăraş and came over to the Transalpine Walachia through the pass of Bran. This was one of the first hypotheses that saw the passage of Negru Vodă on the other side of the mountains in the context of the settlement of the Teutonic knights in Țara Bârsei following the order of the Hungarian royal house (Atanasie M. Marienescu, 1909).

One of the oldest studies dedicated exclusively to the character Negru Vodă belongs to I. C. Filitti, who started his analysis with an ample presentation of the general background of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The author considers that the Hungarian kingdom penetrated in the territory on the right side of Olt even since 1233 when king Bela IV gave count Conrad the area of Țara Loviștei, situated between the Carpathians, Olt and Lotru (I. C.

## *Negru Vodă reflected in several less known historiographic sources from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century*

Filitti, 1924). Starting from this document\*\* is advanced the idea that the Hungarian domination will gradually include all the Walachian area, having as center the town of Câmpulung, where by the year 1300 was buried the last Hungarian count. The falsity of these hypotheses will be demonstrated throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in different studies and works on which we are not going to insist in the present paper.

I. C. Filitti considered that the establishment of the power of the Basarab family over Câmpulung should be understood in connection with the fortification of Făgăraș by the Hungarians by 1300. With it, the Hungarian rule was extended on two more fortified cities as well, namely Cetățeni and Rucăr, the last being built during the respective times with the purpose of blocking the eventual expansion of the Hungarian kingdom.

In conclusion, during Basarab I, “Țara Neagră” (the Black Country) was freed, namely the present-day counties Dâmbovița, Prahova, Buzău and the Southern Wallachia up to the Danube, which were conquered from the Black Tartars (I. C. Filitti, 1924).

That is why we should see in Basarab the only unifier and deliverer, and in the pretended Negru Vodă just a creation of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, invented by the voivode Matei Basarab on the occasion of the restoration of the princely church from Câmpulung.

The document emitted by Matei Basarab\*\*\*, based on the chronicle kept from Negru Voievod, is considered to be a fake by the author of the respective paper. The fact that it had been kept only as a copy in the register of the monastery from Câmpulung demonstrates that the priests showed to Matei Basarab only an act from the time of the second voivode of the Basarab dynasty, Nicolae-Alexandru. The terms “the grandson of the late Negru voivode” (“nepotul răposatului Negru voievod”) is perceived in this way as a simple addition made by the priests (I. C. Filitti, 1924).

For this very reason the author of this study finds it at least mysterious that in another charter given by Matei Basarab, on December 6, 1636, the act from Negru Vodă, does not appear mentioned anymore, though the entire context required it (I. C. Filitti, 1924).

Shortly after that, two works dedicated to Negru Vodă came somehow in reply to the study mentioned above. D. Stănescu admitted the

existence of this voivode, yet working strictly on the information included in the Chronicle of Cantacuzino (“Letopisețul Cantacuzinesc”), and gave him the main merit for the appearance of the Walachian state (D. Stănescu, 1925).

In exchange, Nicolae Argeș brought into the historians' focus a different argumentation compared to the one that had been advanced previously in the specialized literature. From among the main ideas, we will remind the one that the name of the father of the first Walachian voivode, namely Tihomir, has been kept in toponymy by the village Tihomiri from Mehedinți County, and the supposition that he became head of the Walachian voivodate only in 1290 (Nicolae Argeș, 1925).

This is maybe the strongest argument for which in the above-quoted study, Tihomir is identified as Negru Vodă, neglecting the written evidence that does not designate Tihomir not even with the title of voivode.

The association between Tihomir and Negru Vodă will gain more and more adepts. Beginning with the last two decennia of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will develop the idea of the Cuman and even Petcheneg origin of Tihomir (Thocomer according to documents) and of his son Basarab I.

Another hypothesis repeated recently in the Romanian historiography was the taking over of the estates Făgăraș and Sâmbăta, in 1292, by the former Transylvanian voivode, Ugrinus, held according to the tradition by Negru Vodă. The loss of the intra-Carpathian territories imposed therefore the moving out of the legendary voivode in Muntenia and the creation of Walachia.

Octavian Popa published between the Two World Wars in Brasov a paper dedicated to the Transylvanian voivode, where he mentioned that Ugrinus never controlled any estate in the land of Făgăraș. He acquired these lands only based on certain false documents and being favored by the new sovereign of Hungary, Andrew III (Octavian Popa, 1935).

The Hungarian king will arrive in Transylvania in front of a considerable army and having Ugrinus by his side, who should be seen as one of the most important royal favorites. This is the opinion of the author, according to which Ugrinus acquired without efforts the respective estates. They had not been ruled by Negru Vodă

## *Radu Cârciumaru*

but it is not impossible that in this context there may have existed a rivalry between Ugrinus and the nobleman Roland Borșa (who was also a faithful subject of Andrew III) who did not see with good eyes the presence of another favorite of his master around his estates (Octavian Popa, 1935).

So, within the general analysis of the historical process represented by the appearance of the medieval State of Walachia, we can distinguish as well aspects that have been less discussed in the general or special works published so far. That is why, in our brief presentation, we have tried to highlight exactly the fact that such opinions, emitted between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, constituted a real basis on which new directions developed in the study of the issue of the existence of Negru Vodă.

So, the presentation and re-analysis of certain older opinions should not be seen as a meaningless approach, especially as the action of the “supposedly” intra-Carpathian voivode continues to be defined as one of the great controversies of the Romanian historiography.

*\*Istoria Țării Românești (1290-1690). Letopisețul Cantacuzinesc (The History of Walachia: 1290-1690. The Chronicle of Cantacuzino), critical edition edited by C. Grecescu and D. Simionescu, București, 1960, p. 2.*

*\*\* Documente privitoare la istoria românilor culese de Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, vol. I, partea 1 (1199-1345) (Documents concerning the*

Romanians' history gathered by Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, tome I, part 1, 1199-1345), edited by N. Densușianu, București, 1887, p. 127.

*\*\*\* Documenta Romaniae Historica, B. Țara Românească (Walachia), XXXI, București, Ed. Academiei Române, București, 2003, p. 123.*

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