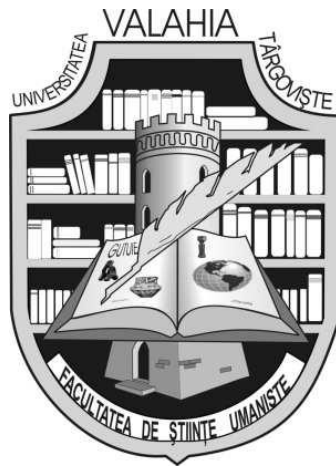


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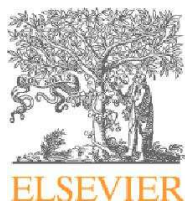
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Mercenaries of German Origin in the Armies of Moldavia and Wallachia in the 17th-18th Centuries: Dragons Called *Drăgani* or *Nemți*

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Abstract: With the establishment of Ottoman rule over Wallachia and Moldavia in the middle of the 16th century, the Romanian princes were not allowed to maintain numerous armies. During the 16th-17th centuries, the military forces of the two Romanian Principalities were reduced considerably. For this reason, the Wallachian princes were forced to resort to the services of foreign mercenaries, including those of German origin (better known as Saxons), called dragons, and *drăgani* or *nemți* in the folk language. They are referred to in the middle of the 17th century, first in Moldavia, at the end of Vasile Lupu's reign (1634-1653), then in Wallachia during Constantin Șerban's reign (1654-1658). The number of these mercenaries recruited from the Transylvanian Saxons was relatively small: from a few dozen to a maximum of 200 soldiers. They were organized in military units (*steaguri*) led by captains (*iuzbași*) and were required to guard the two Princes' Courts in Iasi and Bucharest. Dragons or *drăgani* were indispensable from the ceremonies that took place, on various occasions, at the Royal Court. The Romanian Princes granted them a monthly pay, as well as apparel every year, on Easter and Christmas. After 1821, these mercenaries of German origin were no longer present in the armies of the two Romanian Principalities.

Keywords: Wallachia, Moldavia, Prince's Court, German mercenaries, dragons.

In the middle of the 17th century, the domestic historical sources confirmed the existence of foreign mercenaries of German origin (Saxons), who came from Transylvania. In those days they were known as "nemți" or under the popular name of *drăgani* (dragons) (E. Lința, 1964, p. 198; N. Stoicescu, 1968, p. 202; O. Sachelarie, N. Stoicescu, 1988, p. 173; R. Sin, 2009, p. 169).

We learn from the Moldavian chronicler Miron Costin that 100 German mercenaries led by a Polish captain attended the Prince of Moldavia during the Battle of Finta (17/27 May, 1653). He was defeated in the battle (M. Costin, 1958, p. 153).

On July 11, 1653, the new prince of Moldavia, Gheorghe Ștefan (1653-1658) certified that the French nobleman Jean Georges Aussel had been for two years (1651-1653) the captain of the German

dragon company (*căpitan de nemți*) from The Royal Court of Iași (A. Veress, 1938, p. 264-265).

According to an epigraphic testimony at the end of Matei Basarab's reign (1632-1654), the Prince of Wallachia, "căpitan de nemți" (German dragon captain) died and was buried in the church of St. Dumitru in Târgoviște (N. Iorga, 1908, p. 90-91). In 1656, Constantin Șerban (1654-1658), Prince of Wallachia sent a letter to the Transylvanian Prince György Rákóczi (1648-1660), asking for a company of at least 300 dragons, thus showing that he was also attended by a company (*steag*) made up of 110 German mercenaries (N. Iorga, 1902).

In the beginning, these mercenaries often called "nemți" (Germans) in the historical sources were recruited from the Transylvanian Saxons. At

the end of the 17th century and the beginning of the 18th century they were recruited from the Wallachians. For example, a Moldavian document (*zapis*) issued on July 5, 1667, reminded of Stoica "ce au fost iuzbași de drăgani" („who was the captain of dragons”) (Ghibănescu Gh., 1908, p. 198). On November 6, 1695, during Constantin Brâncoveanu's reign (1688-1714), there was mentioned a Wallachian called Grigorașcu among the dragons (*nemții*) of the Prince's Court (N. Stoicescu, 1968, p. 203). A certain Vasile "neamțul din Poartă" (the German at the Prince's Court) was also mentioned during the same period*.

In the first half of the 18th century, there were other Romanian names who were part of the dragons' company (*steagul drăganilor*): Stroe Stegarul (1st February 1728) (N. Stoicescu, 1968, p. 203) and Sandu Berechet "de la steagul drăganilor" (from the dragons' company) in Bucharest (7th November, 1751) (N. Iorga, 1909, p. 99) or Gligorașco Stegarul (2nd May 1734)** and Stoica the captain of the dragons in Iași (13th March 1740) (D. Z. Furnică, 1908, p. 12-13).

Since their appearance in the two Romanian Principalities the dragons had formed special companies named "steaguri" in the documents of the time. Their number was relatively small: from a few dozen to a maximum of 200 soldiers. As shown above, before 1653, Prince Vasile Lupu was attended by about 100 German mercenaries, led by a Polish captain whose name was not recorded in the epoch (M. Costin, 1958). His successor to the ruling of Moldavia, Gheorghe Ștefan (1653-1658) had 400 German mercenaries (dragons), led by the Polish colonel (*polcownik*) Lonczecki (M. Costin, 1958). He assured the guardianship of the Royal Courts in Iași and Suceava (M. Costin, 1958, p. 169). At about the same time, his neighbour, Constantin Șerban, the Prince of Wallachia, was attended by 110 dragon mercenaries (N. Iorga, 1902). The Swedish traveller Class Brorsson Ralamb*** would record the existence of several German infantry companies (1657), which had their garrison at the Royal Court in Bucharest.

It is quite possible, however, that Ralamb had mistaken the dragons (C.J. Karadja, 1920, p. 210), few in number, as stated before, for the much more numerous military category of the infantry mans (*dărăbanți, dorobanți*) (E. Lința, 1964, p. 198).

In 1702, the Prince of Wallachia, Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714), had "două steaguri de

nemți" (two German dragon companies) (Dinu C. Giurescu, 1962, p. 253). A local document in 1693 showed that the German dragons from Brâncoveanu's Court were under the command of Captain Ștefan****.

Dimitrie Cantemir (1710-1711), Prince of Moldavia had 100 dragons, organized in 4 companies, each company counting 25 soldiers. A few years later, as a refugee in Russia, after the Russian-Turkish war between 1710 and 1711, the Moldavian prince noted that there were 4 dragon captains in Moldavia before 1700, each of them commanding 1000 soldiers (D. Cantemir, 1973, p. 219). Arguably, Prince Cantemir overstated their number.

According to an official memorandum on September 1, 1739, (*Suma liudelor de toate steagurile de slujitori*), the Wallachian Phanariot Prince, Constantin Mavrocordat (1735-1741), had a company (*steag*) of 35 soldiers (*slujitori*) led by Captain Antonie, and two subordinates (*zapcii*) (Dinu C. Giurescu, 1962, p. 480-481). During this prince's reign, the dragons were guarding the gates of the Royal Court in Bucharest (N. Stoicescu, 1968, p. 203; C. Neagoe, 2009, p. 513). Later, under the rule of Prince Matei Ghica (1752-1753), the dragons from the Royal Court in Bucharest were led by the Greek Prince Polihron (G. Potra, 1982, p. 197-198). At that time, most of the dragons were Romanians, Greeks and Serbs, and very few were of German origin. Some of them owned homes in Bucharest (I. Ionașcu, 1959, p. 128). On February 3, 1775, the new Phanariot Prince of Wallachia, Alexandru Ipsilanti (1774-1782) and his retinue entered Bucharest being accompanied by 50 dragons (V. A. Urechia, 1892, p. 13). The last Phanariot Prince of Wallachia, Alexandru Suțu (1818-1821) had only 12 dragons used in particular to catch the robbers (*nemți de putere*)*****.

In 1748-1749, the dragons from Iasi were led by the Serb Captain Dumitru*****. During Grigore Callimachi's reign (1761-1764) in Iasi there was a company (*steag*) made up of 53 dragons*****. In 1776, under the rule of Prince Grigore Ghica III (1774-1777), the dragons from Iasi were led by the Serb captain Pavlu*****. As it is well known, the dragons in Moldavia took part in the prince's retinue organized during the great Christian feasts (D. Simonescu, 1939, p. 270, 275).

During Constantin Brâncoveanu's reign, the dragons of Wallachia received about 2 meters (3

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Dragons Called *Drăgani* or *Nemți***

coți) of shiny and smooth silk (*tafta*) as a gift on Easter and Christmas in order to make apparel (Dinu C. Giurescu, 1962, p. 441), as well as a money gift (*bacșiș*), consisting of 1.32 talers (*1tl. = 131 bani*) (D. Ciobotea, 2016, p. 62). On the day of St. Basil the Great and St. John the Baptist, the trumpeters and local criers from the dragon company received (*bacșiș*) 1-1.5 talers as a gift, while soldiers received only 0.5 talers (Dinu C. Giurescu, 1962, p. 462, no. 252-253, p. 463, no. 254, p. 464, no. 256, p. 465, no. 263).

Dragons from Moldavia were provided with certain exemptions and privileges especially in the 18th century. In 1753, for example, 53 dragons from Iași were exempt from the tax to the throne (*mucarer*), whereas in 1764 they were registered in the Treasury of Moldavia (*Sama Visteriei*) to pay 3 talers yearly for the colours tribute (*ploconul steagului*)*****.

Other testimonies of the time noted that the great commander of the Moldavian army (*marele hatman*) received a yearly money gift of 25 talers (*plocon*) from the captain of the dragons (N. Iorga, 1900, p. 30).

After overthrowing the Phanariot princes (1/13 July 1822), the military category of German dragons (*drăgani* or *nemți*) was doomed to disappear. The princes of the first half of the 19th century sought to reorganize the armies of the two Romanian Principalities, on a modern basis, now made up only of Romanian soldiers.

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