

The Reign of Teodosie and the 1521 Fights for the Wallachian Throne Short Considerations

Radu Cârciumaru*

*Valahia University Târgoviște, Faculty of Humanities, Str. Locotenent Stancu Ion, nr. 34-36, Târgoviște, 130018, Dâmbovița County, e-mail: radu.carciumaru@gmail.com

Abstract: *The Reign of Teodosie and the 1521 Fights for the Wallachian Throne. Short Considerations.* The period which covers the death of voivode Neagoe Basarab and the accession to the throne of Radu of Afumați, limited at historical scale, proved a moment of maximum tension in the sinuous development of the Wallachian state during the first decades of the 14th century. It was the beginning of a strained time in the evolution of the Wallachian state which was concluded by the instauration of a direct regime of domination of the Ottoman Empire. Naturally, when events reach us through chronicles or other subjective sources, the interval groups unclear aspects that cannot be supported by precious documentary evidence. Although historiography does not lack for interests in Teodosie's rule, a number of uncertainties regarding the age of the royal offspring, his relationship with the influential boyar family of the Craiovești and particularly his connections with the Ottoman power, represented by the Pasha of Nikopol, still linger on. Thus, the present study aims to highlight and complete earlier or more recent theories and assumptions formulated in the specialty literature and, therefore, to make a contribution to comprehending a controversial time of the Romanian Middle Ages.

Key-words: *voivode, succession, trusteeship, boyars, Ottoman Empire*

“Din mila lui Dumnezeu, Io Radul voievod și domn a toată țara Ungrovlahiei, fiul marelui și bunului Radul voievod” (meaning “*By God's mercy, I, voivode Radu, prince of all country of Ungro-Wallachia, son of the good and great Radu voivode*”)*. This is how the new Prince of Wallachia, Radu, illegitimate son of Prince Radu the Great, generally remembered as Radu of Afumați, a village located in the Ilfov area where his properties were, would call himself in the document issued on 3 February 1522 at the Princely Court of Târgoviște.

It was an official document that came out seven months after the last document issued by the chancellery of the great Voivode Neagoe Basarab (I. Bidian, 1978). The period, which is short at historical scale, marked a moment of fierce political and military conflict that would have an impact on the development of the Wallachian state during the first part of the 14th century.

Naturally, when events reach us through chronicles only, the interval generates controversies caused by the lack of absolutely necessary documentary evidence. An episode which best illustrates the turmoil of events shows us the ephemeral reign of Teodosie and the attempts to recover the throne that hastened his untimely end.

The death of Prince Neagoe Basarab on 15 September 1521 meant, according to the hereditary principle, that the power would pass to his son, Teodosie, who, being very young, was under the protection of the powerful Craiovescu family and his mother, Princess Despina Milița.

Dangers would threaten at every step the royal seat and, as the Ottoman Empire reached its acme, the status of Wallachia became more fragile. Boyars from Buzău, that had been banished to Moldavia by the late prince, had found support at the court of Bogdan III and were expecting to assume the power by bringing to the

throne the illegitimate son of the former voivode, Vlad cel Tânăr ("the Young"), who had ruled the country from 1510 to 1512.

The first unclear aspect, which is worth mentioning and analysing, is the age of the royal offspring who was entitled to reign, in autumn 1521. The writing of the Ragusan Michael Bocignoli, dated 29 June, 1524, mentioned that Neagoe Basarab left an heir who had not yet come of age: "...Basarab, domnul Țării Românești (pe care l-am cunoscut înainte de a fi domn, pe când mă aflam la români), moare lăsând după el un fiu de 7 ani" ("...Basarab, the Prince of Wallachia, whom I had met before he became voivode, while being among the Romanians, dies leaving behind a 7-year-old son")**. This information was questioned by the Romanian historiography (Constantin Rezachevici, 2001) which brought up the document of 30 October 1521 by which the Venetian ambassadors from Buda announced the appointment of 16-year-old Teodosie to the throne of Wallachia ("...Io Illustrissimo Vayvoda di Transalpina et li Valachi haveano electo il fiol suo chiamato Theodosio de anni 16...")***.

The writing of the Ragusan Bocignoli, which contains a comprehensive description of Wallachia, should be considered within the context of his rich diplomatic activity dedicated to stopping the expansion of the empire of the crescent moon. He completely disregards the two extra-Carpathian Romanian states that were under the Ottoman domination and enhances Transylvania's role appealing to the great Christian powers to support the fight against the Turks.

From this perspective, it is likely that the manuscript should have been ordered by the influential voivode of Transylvania, John Zapolya, in order to use it as an instrument of propaganda, possibly to raise a Christian coalition that would include the Romanian countries as well.

The negotiations carried out by Neagoe Basarab and the Pasha of Nikopol, Mehmed, during the first months of 1521, established the dispatch of Wallachian military support. Due to the voivode's poor health, it was probably placed under Teodosie's command****.

Youth and inexperience of the royal offspring in military actions finally led to the suspension of the Wallachian operations. At the same time it should be noted that Neagoe Basarab's doctor, Ieronim Matievich, a Ragusan as well, was in Wallachia during the last year of life of the

voivode and could have represented an efficient source of information for Michael Bocignoli.

In conclusion, all these negotiations could easily become known to the author of the epistle (especially since his writing is almost contemporary with the events) who thus considered the change of the rule in a negative way.

The information regarding Teodosie's age may also contain a mere error of interpretation. Bocignoli said he had met Neagoe Basarab before the latter's ascension to the throne and the references to Teodosie's age might allude to that particular time. If we start from the theory that Teodosie's age is correctly mentioned by the Venetian ambassadors, then he might have been, in early 1512, before Neagoe Basarab's assumption of power, 7 years old. Therefore, the data contained in Michael Bocignoli's epistle would refer to Teodosie's age during his stay in Wallachia, especially since the exact moment and circumstances of the sojourn remain unknown.

The lack of official internal documents makes it impossible to precisely date the reign of young Teodosie. It can be partially reconstituted based on several letters sent to Braşov and Sibiu and on reports commissioned by the Hungarian Kingdom which record some of the political turmoil across the Carpathians.

First, we shall focus on the controversial tutelage exerted by his uncle, the great boyar Preda Craiovescu. The *Letopiseşul Cantacuzinesc* accurately describes the course of events: "*Iar după moartea lui Băsărab voda s-au înălţat domn Preda, fratele lui Băsărab voevod, ca să ție domniia lui Theodosie, nepotă-său*" ("after Basarab voda's death, prince Preda, brother of Basarab voivode, assumed the trusteeship of the reign of his nephew Teodosie")*****. The oldest version of the chronicle of Wallachia provides an even clearer picture: "*În anul 7029 al lumii, după moartea lui, domnul Preda, fratele lui, s-a ridicat ca să facă pe Theodosie, fiul fratelui sau Basarab, viovod în locul tatălui sau.*" or in translation "In the year of the world 7029, following his death, his brother prince Preda raised to make Theodosie, the son of his brother Basarab, voivode in his father's place" (V. Căndea, 1970).

Radu Popescu's chronicle brings a different view on this moment, questioning the beginnings of Teodosie's reign: "*Iar, când au fost leat 7029, s-au pristăvit și Neagoe-vodă, domnul rumânilor. Și în urma lui au fost multă gâlceavă pentru domnie, că feciorii lui Neagoe-vodă, Theodosie și*

altul, au fost mici, rămași cu muma lor Dospina. Ci o seamă de boiari au rădicat domnu pă Preda, ce zic să fie fost frate lui Neagoe-vodă” (“and when it was the year 7029, Neagoe-vodă, the prince of the Romanians, passed away. Much quarrel for the throne did he leave behind for Neagoe-vodă’s sons, Theodosie and another one, were young and remained with their mother Dospina. Some boyars put Preda, Neagoe-vodă’s brother, on the throne”)*****.

In fact, the dissatisfactions arisen during Neagoe’s reign could be reiterated in that Teodosie, like his father, was not royalty. Not many years had passed since Vlad cel Tânăr had accused Neagoe of wanting his crown though he was not a princely offspring, which had finally been accepted by the Craiovescu boyars (“*Deci domnul...trimise să aducă dentru acel neam drept pre iubitul Neagoe la dânsul. Iar alți boieri deacă înțeleșeră, ziseră domnului: Doamne, părăsește-te de aceasta...că Neagoe iaste cu adevărat fecior al nostru și nu are întru sine hicleșug...Iar domnul zise: Deacă iaste așa, voi îl aduceți și jurați pentru dânsul.*”) (“So the prince sent for Neagoe. And other boyars told the prince: Our Lord, Neagoe is truly one of us and there is nothing cunning about him. And the lord said: If that is so, you bring him and swear for him”)***** (p. 21).

Thus, any pretender would consider himself entitled to assume the ruling of the country even if the association to the reign and the conveyance of the throne had been done in compliance with all the canons. Legitimation of power is very likely to have sparked the cavalcade of royal battles and prompted Preda Craiovescu to assume the task of ruling the country. The situation recorded as such by the internal chronicles emphasises the kinship relation between Teodosie and his uncle Preda, although Neagoe Basarab had promoted throughout his reign his filiation from Basarab Tepelus (L. M. Ilie, 2008).

In contrast, his main rival, Vlad Dragomir Călugărul, had a certain lineage, acknowledged as such by Hungary and Poland, which emphasised, in a correspondence that analysed the Turkish danger, his descent from the royal family (“*ex vojevodarum genere*”)*****.

From the very beginning, Teodosie tried, through his mother, princess Despina, to consolidate the relationships with the Christian powers. It is possible that when Teodosie was appointed as head of the state, Lady Despina should have been in Sibiu. She crossed in Wallachia before the fights from Targoviște won

by the pretender Vlad Călugărul (S. Dragomir, 1925-1926). The messenger sent to the court of the king of Hungary was stopped in Brașov on the grounds that it was not recognized: “*...ați oprit Grațiositatea voastră acolo în Brașov pe sluga noastră Andriiaș fiindcă n-ați crezut că este trimis de la domnia noastră. Drept aceea, Grațiositatea voastră, să știți și să credeți, că l-am trimis noi către înălțimea craiul cu vorbele noastre de trebuință, încă pe când mi-a fost Theodosie voevod în țară*” (“... Your Grace stopped our servant Andriiaș in Brașov because you did not believe he was sent by us. Therefore, Your Grace, you should know and believe that we sent him to his lordship the king with the right and necessary words when Theodosie was the voivode of the country”). The lack of dating of the letter sent by Princess Despina Milița prevents an exact placement in time of the moment. We may assume that references to Teodosie’s ruling of the country point even to the last days of the late Neagoe Basarab, when his son was imposed as prince*****.

The last document which confirms Teodosie’s reign (dated 7 January 1522) arranges the sequence of events that groups the attack of the pretender Vlad Dragomir Călugărul with his victory at Târgoviște and Teodosie’s appeal to the Ottoman power translated into the intervention of the bey of Nikopol by which his rights were reinstated. Certain passages are suggestive and can be judged in relation with the letter sent to Brașov by Lady Despina***** (p. 266).

Teodosie tried, amid evident collaboration with the Ottoman forces, to rekindle the relations with Transylvania and Hungary that had followed an upward trend during the last part of his parent’s reign. The distrust of Transylvanian towns, particularly of Brașov, in the political line pursued by the Wallachian state is clearly shown by the episode of the capturing of the Wallachian envoy which roused Lady Despina’s extremely eloquent reaction. To this we may add the envoy from Sibiu sent before Neagoe Basarab’s death in order to investigate precisely Voivode Teodosie’s political options*****.

Of particular interest, in the given context, is the possible alliance between the boyars that were in exile in Moldavia and those around the Buzău area who sought to put an illegitimate son of the prince, Vlad cel Tânăr, on the throne. Taking advantage of Prince Neagoe Basarab’s death, the boyars banished in the Moldavian country quickly took action and provided military

support to the pretender Vlad Dragomir Călugărul. Even though the Buzău boyars remain unidentified, it is known, however, and documents show it, that they allied with several boyars from Oltenia, such as Vlaicu stolnicul ("the seneschal"), Diicul comisul ("the equerry"), Dragomir logofătul ("the chancellor"), who were still faithful to the late voivode Mircea III. (D. Pleșia, 1970).

Historiographical controversies on the existence of two pretenders, Radu Călugărul and Vlad Dragomir Călugărul, have not yet been permanently settled. (N. Iorga, 1898) The name Radu seems to have been wrongly attributed by the 17th-century chronicles because in all contemporary documents he appears with the name of Vlad after that taken by his father at the enthronement. His being called "*călugărul*" ("*the monk*") suggests he put on the monastic robe, at an unspecified date, during Neagoe Basarab's reign, with the clear purpose of avoiding the intrigues that could endanger his life.

Returning to the actual events, Radu Popescu's chronicle records the following development: "*Iar pribegii ce au fost în domnia lui Neagoe-vodă, pribegiți în Moldova, auzind poftită de dânșii, de moartea lui Neagoe-vodă, au venit în țară, și, împreună cu buzăienii, au rădicat pe alt domnu, pă un Radul-vodă Călugărul și au mers de s-au bătut cu Preda, ce era cu ceilaltă ceată de boiari...*" ("And the outcasts banished to Moldavia during Neagoe-vodă's reign, learning about Neagoe-vodă's death they had so long desired, returned to the country and, together with the Buzău noblemen, enthroned another voivode, someone called Radu-vodă Călugărul and went to fight Preda, who was with the other band of boyars")***** (p. 272). The fragment suggests that the alliance between the exiled boyars and those in the country was not well established, but rather temporary, aiming to instate Vlad Dragomir Călugărul.

His ascension to the throne or rather his assumption of power by force of arms is recorded by the city of Brașov on 11-12 October 1521 when he appears as bearing the title "*novus wayvoda Transalpinensis Wlad*" *****. As a matter of fact, all notes recording the new power appeared in October, which confirms that Vlad's installation occurred sometime during the last days of September 1521. We have in mind the letter sent by King Louis II to the Transylvanian Saxons in which he asked them to assist Teodosie who had been dethroned by

"*Calager...Dragamir*"***** (p. 375) and that sent to the people of Sibiu on 24 October 1521 *****.

The main battle was to take place at Târgoviște and the exact dating cannot be done. Placing it after 23 September is mandatory for that was the time when knez Demetrie was sent by the voivode of Transylvania to transalpine areas in order to investigate the dissensions between voivodes ("*...disturbiorum in partibus transalpinis inter Wayvodas.*")*****. The defeat of the army led by Preda Craiovescu appears to be explained by the numerical inferiority suggested veiledly both in *Letopiseșul Cantacuzinesc* and Radu Popescu's chronicle. The appeal to Mehmet Bey's Ottoman forces across the Danube, made before the battle of Târgoviște, confirms the insufficient army that Neagoe Basarab's son had.

Vlad's ascension to the throne is also recorded on 14 October in the information given by a Wallachian priest who announced the representatives from Sibiu about Teodosie's replacement with Vlad: "*Cuidam pope transalpinensi qui attulit quod Theodosius rursus in sedem Wayvodatus est locatus et Wladt emulus esset interemptus...*"***** (p. 846).

Therefore, sometime in early October, at Târgoviște, a new prince, who promised to overthrow the balance of powers in the country held by the influential family of the Craiovescu boyars, was installed. He had the opportunity to avenge the death of his father, Vlad cel Tânăr, who had been killed after a campaign led by the Pasha of Nikopol in collaboration with the forces commanded by the Craiovescu boyars.

An identical action was inevitable. The Craiovești had informed their protector of the turmoil in the country and were expecting an intervention of the latter meant to reinstate Neagoe Basarab's son.

Turkish troops led by Mehmet Bey reached Târgoviște towards the middle of October. The development of hostilities was not detailed in any sources; however, it is known that Vlad Dragomir and his main allies were captured.

The document which recounts this event is a report from the castellan of Făgăraș addressed to the vicevoivode of Transylvania on 25 October 1521. Its analysis brings up several other interesting data.

Thus, it is mentioned that, beyond the Turks' categorical victory, Mehmed became the real leader of the state. Still, his mission was to reinstate Teodosie and, consequently, he would

The Reign of Teodosie and the 1521 Fights for the Wallachian Throne

Short Considerations

not want to exceed his duties. Without the Empire's support, his action might have encountered a fierce riposte from the inside and probably that is why the Ottoman ruler chose to cross the Danube at Nikopol to start negotiations with the Sultan regarding his reinstallation as voivode of Wallachia.

The same description of events can also be found in later sources, which means that the Bey of Nikopol tried to take over the power in October 1521 (J. Filstich, 1979).

Mehmed left the Wallachian state with the former voivode, who was captive, and a character with great influence in the country, the equerry Radu Bădica, Neagoe Basarab's cousin, who was on the party opposing the Craiovești. His close relationships with the Pasha of Nikopol are proved by Radu Bădica's killing Vlad Dragomir Călugăru at his order: "*Acolo fiind și Bădica comisu...au cerșut voie de la Mehmet-bei, de au taiat capul Radului-vodă.*" ("As the equerry Bădica was there... he asked for Mehmet-bey's permission and beheaded Radu-vodă")***** (p. 272). As son of Radu the Great, the equerry Radu Bădica was already trying to show his loyalty to the Turkish power that, in two years' time, would grant him the power in Wallachia.

The Turkish troops' leaving the Wallachian state meant the beginning of Teodosie's second reign. It began towards the end of October 1521 for on 1 November Teodosie would send a letter to the people of Brașov informing them of the new dangers that threatened his reign: "*Iar după aceea, încă nu-mi fu cu atâta destul, ci iarăși mi s-au ridicat alți vrășmași și cu hoți, cu făcători de rele, și au prădat țara și au ars-o pe dânsa.*" ("And after that, as it was not enough, other enemies raised and, hand in hand with thieves, with evildoers, plundered and burned the country")***** (p. 267). It is hard to prove who had inflicted the latest damages upon the country. Although Teodosie said his rule had come from the Turks, the only who had set fire and taken slaves were the Ottoman troops instructed to loot the Buzău area: "*Și Mehmet-bei...încă până a nu trece la Nicopia, au trimis turci de au robii pã buzăieni și au prădat tot județul acela, pentru rădicare Radului-vodă Călugăru*" ("And Mehmet-bey, before going to Nicopia, sent Turks to enslave the people of Buzău and plunder all the county, for raising Radu-vodă Călugăru")***** (p. 272). However, we find similar information in Macarie's chronicle which emphasises that Teodosie's reign was troubled by no fewer than 6

outcasts who all perished in less than a year (P. P. Panaitescu, 1959)

Therefore, it is possible that the decision to send Teodosie to Nikopol, in the last days of 1521, should have been prompted by the contingent struggles for power that had broken out and on which documents have not preserved any information. Still, it was Mehmed who was behind this action as he wanted to have Wallachia and thus acted accordingly.

Returning to documentary evidence, sometime in mid December of 1521, Teodosie was taken across the Danube under Mehmed-bey's protection and at the Sultan's orders. It was only the first stage of the plan that was to end with bringing a Turkish ruler to Wallachia. According to a letter dated 1521, Louis II of Hungary informed Sigismund I of Poland of the attack launched by Mehmed in the southern parts of Transylvania***** (p. 373).

However, it is difficult to speak about an interruption of reign since on 7 January 1522 hegumen Joseph of Curtea de Argeș went to Sibiu with a message from Teodosie. Entrusting such a deputation across the Danube does not seem, however, impossible, especially in terms of the message contained which insists on trust in the words and information of the carrier ("*...trimis-am pe al nostru părinte, pe egumenul Iosif de la Arghiș...cu ale noastre adevărate și de trebuință cuvinte...apoi Grațiozitatea voastră...cu luare aminte să credeți lui, căci sunt vorbele domniei mele pe adevărat*") ("we have sent our father, hegumen Joseph of Argeș with our true and necessary words... then Your Grace carefully should believe him for they are my words indeed")***** (p. 265).

The voivode's crossing the Danube may thus have two causes. Either Teodosie had to be put under protection against the numerous attacks that were endangering his reign, or he left for the Ottoman Empire precisely to get stronger support from the Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent.

His passing away, as shrouded in mystery as his short reign, urges us to assume that some disagreement, regarding even the ruling of Wallachia, had intervened between Teodosie and his protector, the Pasha of Nikopol. His replacement was extremely rapid for on 22 January the authorities of Sibiu would send an envoy to Târgoviște that was supposed to rekindle the relationships with the new prince of Wallachia, Radu of Afumați. The swift sequence of events allows us to believe that Teodosie fell victim to an assassination plotted by Mehmed

bey or by the nobility dreaming to instate the Turkish rule.

Without knowing the place and date of death, history recorded the voivode's passing out of existence based on an icon ordered by his mother Despina, dated approximately 1522, bearing the inscription: "...primește sufletul robului tău, Ion Teodosie și adu-l la judecata ta" ("receive the soul of Thy servant, Ion Teodosie, and bring him to Your judgment")*****.

His removal marked only the beginning of the political and military tensions that, nearly a century later, would again take the shape of the anti-Ottoman fight. An empire that now, under the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent, reached its utmost force, would bring an unprecedented alternation on the royal throne and create premises for installing a regime of Turkish domination over Wallachia.

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