

The Beginnings of the First Medieval Romanian State and the International Relations during the First Half of the 14th century

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Key-words: voivode, treaty, alliance, expansion, military campaign

Abstract: During the 14th century, in point of their external relations, Hungary and Poland, the main powers of the central-European area, will endeavor to limit the Mongolian power instated in the eastern zone of the continent after 1241. The political coordinates drawn by the two great kingdoms finally allowed the recently founded state of Walachia to obtain the acknowledgement of its political independence. The battle from Posada (1330), the Polish-Hungarian military actions in Minor Russia and the new politics inaugurated by the second Angevin king of Hungary, Lewis I, will contribute to the acceptance in the international relations of the first Romanian medieval state, situated south of the Carpathians.

Mots-clé : voivode, traité, alliance, expansion, campagne militaire.

Résumé : Au XIV-ème siècle, la Hongrie et la Pologne, les pouvoirs principaux de la zone central-européenne poursuivront, à l'extérieur, la limitation du pouvoir mongole instauré dans à l'est du continent après 1241. Les coordonnées politiques tracées par les deux grands royaumes ont permis, finalement, au jeune Etat de la Valachie d'obtenir la reconnaissance de son indépendance politique. La bataille de Posada (1330), les actions militaires polono-hongroises dans la Petite Russie et la nouvelle politique inaugurée par le deuxième roi angevin de la Hongrie, Louis I, contribueront à l'acceptation du premier Etat médiéval roumain, situé au sud des Carpates, dans les relations internationales.

During the first half of the 14th century, the actions of the Hungarian and Polish kings, determined by the mutations occurred in Eastern Europe, find deep roots in the events that take place on the territory of the future Romanian medieval states. Aiming to create a demarcation line in front of the Mongolian incursions, Hungary and Poland's plan will not exclude the extra-Carpathian area.

So, the dominant note in the complex situation of the Central and East-European Area during the first half of the 14th century was represented, from our viewpoint, by the idea of restraining the Tartar area of dominance. The presence of the Mongolian forces in the large Russian area and in the extra-Carpathian territories, as well as their raids towards central Europe had direct implications on the great Catholic kingdoms of the area. In front of the devastating actions of the Mongolian groups, the coalition between Hungary and Poland was absolutely necessary, even beginning with the first decennia of the 14th century, but the internal crises and the weakening of their central authority actually made it impossible to have any large military intervention. By the end of the 13th century, the Tartars had imposed their suzerainty on certain important states and zones of Eastern Europe. More or less dependent on

it, Lithuania, the principality of Halici, the local Moldavian formations, Walachia, Bulgaria and even part of Serbia fully felt the Mongolian dominance (Ş. Papacostea, 1981).

Consequently, from our viewpoint, the dynastic crisis attested at the beginning of the new century, both in Hungary and in Poland, postponed for an interval of several decennia, both in Hungary and in Poland, the idea of restraining the area of the Mongolian dominance. In the kingdom of Saint Stephan, the period of collapse, which appeared soon after the defeat suffered at Mohi (1242), will attain its culminating point even from the first years of the 14th century, when, with the death of King Andrew III, the Arpadian dynasty that had ruled Hungary for three centuries became extinct. Remained without any direct heirs to the throne, the Hungarian kingdom becomes an object of dispute for foreign dynasties. On the background of the fights for power between the two claimants, Otto of Bavaria and Charles-Robert of Anjou, internally, Hungary will go through a process of consolidation of its local centers of power, which will seriously affect the royal authority during the following decennia. One of the most significant examples is represented by Transylvania, where the voivode Ladislaus Kan will free himself from the tutorship exerted by Hungary, actively involving himself in the fights for the throne and managing even to imprison one of the claimants to the throne, the noble Otto of Bavaria (G. Popa-Lisseanu, C. Cihodaru, 1960). Pretending to accept the matrimonial alliance between his daughter and the feudal lord of German origin, Transylvania's voivode took the royal crown "for keeping" it. All was plotted, nevertheless, for Ladislaus Kan to obtain Hungary, as, soon after that, he will imprison Otto of Bavaria and marry his daughter to the heir of Serbian throne, prince Ştefan Uroş (I. Moga, 1948).

The situation of crisis of the kingdom was meant to worry as well the papacy, and its plans to fight against the pagans that continued to represent a threat at the borders of the Hungarian and Polish state being almost totally compromised. In order to mediate the conflict for the Hungarian throne and to hurry the re-launch of the anti-Mongolian actions, Cardinal Gentile was going to be sent to the kingdom of Prince Stephan. Soon after, the high prelate managed to obtain the acknowledgement of Charles-Robert as king of Hungary by the Legislative Assembly (Ş. Pascu, 1971), especially as the main counter-candidate, Otto of Bavaria, had lost, in our opinion, much of his internal support, after the moment of his imprisonment. Even so, Charles-Robert of Anjou was to be enthroned in royal Alba two years after these events, when, after an agreement with Ladislaus Kan, the marks of royalty, which had been held until then by the Transylvanian voivode, were sent to the Hungarian capital (S. Iosipescu, 1980). Lacking for the moment, the important support of the papacy (beginning with 1309 it saw its power isolated in Avignon, France), Charles-Robert of Anjou had to face the first extremely difficult moment of his reign, Hungary being divided into small enclaves of noblemen disputing their right to rule over different territories, to the expense of the central authority. The situation of the margin zones, namely Serbia, or that of the area beyond the Carpathians (Transylvania), controlled by the Hungarian royalty, before 1241, was also not encouraging for the Angevin crown.

In the Polish kingdom, the process of territorial recovery is attested a bit earlier, even from the first years of reign of Vladislav Lokietek (1305-1333), but it will bring about a series of complications in the relations with the Central-European states, which will delay Poland's beginning of the offensive on the eastern areas, dominated by the Mongolians.

The first conflict was to be opened by Poland against the Bohemian kingdom, which controlled most of Silesia, followed soon after that by the conflict against the Teutonic Order, which had consolidated its domination on Eastern Pomerania, and finally the one against the Brandenburg frontier comitat, which claimed western Pomerania (Ş. Papacostea, 1980).

The start of the territorial recovery process in Hungary focused on Transylvania, especially as the restoration of the dominance over the intra-Carpathian voivodate opened as

well the perspective of recovering the territories south of the Carpathians, where the voivode Basarab I had managed to unify the already existing formations into a single political organism: Walachia. The offensive of the central power will be launched in 1311 against the most fervent contestant of the royal power, the noble Matei Csak, who, though not caught, will have to take refuge in Transylvania. In our opinion, this is how the Transylvanian voivodate became, at the beginning of the 13th century, the last bastion of the discontent accumulated against the Angevin crown, a stumbling stone for the new dynasty that was leading Hungary.

The first important success of king Charles-Robert of Anjou was going to be recorded only in 1315, when he managed to remove voivode Ladislaus Kan from Transylvania, after a period during which there had been successive attempts to limit all the prerogatives he had held in the intra-Carpathian voivodate (Ş. Pascu, 1971).

The opening of the military hostilities sharpened the conflict with the nobles who had lost most of their privileges after the setting up of the Angevin dynasty. In the new political context, Transylvania became “the perfect ground” for the noblemen to launch a counter-offensive tacitly supported by some external powers. Most likely during the spring of 1316, the former high dignitary of Hungary, Iacob Kopasz and Matei Csak, together with the sons of the former voivode Kan and benefiting of a possible military support from Serbia and Walachia, started the noblemen’s revolt meant to remove Charles-Robert of Anjou from the throne of Hungary.

The royal armies, under the command of the comitat leader Dousa, crushed this coalition with their categorical victory obtained at Debreţin, which put an end to the noblemen’s revolt once and for all. As a reward, the comitat leader Dousa will be given, in 1318, the title of voivode of Transylvania, adding to it during his leadership the counties of Bihor, Crasna, Solnoc and Satu-Mare, which had formerly been the property of the Borşas (S. Iosipescu, 1980).

The process of territorial recovery will be extended, after this moment, over Banat, where Charles-Robert of Anjou will instate his control over the fortified town of Mehadia (an important area at the Walachian frontier) and over the fortified town of Deva, annexed, using military force, during the year 1322.

As ruler of Mehadia, the Hungarian king will appoint one of his trusted men, the castle administrator Dionisie Szechy, as the man who was to tactfully control the already tense relations between Hungary and the Walachian state. The hostile attitude manifested by the kingdom of Saint Stephan towards the political union accomplished by Basarab I, south of the Carpathians, triggered from the start military conflicts on the border, on the line of the mountains Cerna and Mehedinţi, sporadically mentioned as well by some Hungarian documents.

The conquest of Walachia became a strategically crucial objective for Hungary, having to be judged from a completely different perspective than the one encountered in many specialized studies. In our opinion, the main purpose of this action is neither determined by the conflict concerning the rule over Banatul de Severin, nor by the problem of the Hungarian suzerainty over certain territories on the right side of the river Olt. It should rather be judged strictly in the context of the plan to launch an offensive against the areas ruled by the Tartars, all the other reasons mentioned or not in the documents of the time coming next as importance. Looking at the events from this perspective, we consider that the instauration of a firm Angevin control over Transylvania and over the area south of the Carpathians ensured a more efficient defense on the eastern border of the kingdom and allowed, at the right moment, to start an action (in collaboration with Poland) in the territories dominated by the Mongolian force.

At the same time, for Walachia the danger became an imminent one, as Hungary was

approaching its borders, the only solution for the voivode Basarab I, externally, remaining the area south of the Danube, seeing that the area east of the Carpathians was not organized as a state and Serbia had received a significant blow in 1319 from the Angevin military expedition, which had led to the appearance of a Hungarian enclave: Banatul de Macva (M. Holban, 1980). The voivode Basarab I managed to give a strong retort to the Angevin expansionist tendencies soon after that, with an uncommon diplomatic ability, concluding a solid external alliance, in the area of Lower Danube, with the Bulgarian czardom. The death of the czar Gheorghe Terter II led to the coming to the throne of Bulgaria of the dynasty of the Şişmans. Speculating at his best these political changes, the Walachian voivode set up a treaty with the czar Mihail III Şişman, in 1323, this treaty having a marked military character. Though its provisions have not been found in any document, the later course of the events allowed the identification of a significant part of the conditions of this deal. So, while Walachia was to obtain support in case of an exterior attack, the Bulgarian czardom was to receive military aid for the recovery of the territories from Tracia that had come once more under Byzantine and Serbian domination.

Mihail III acted very rapidly in order to fulfill his goals, starting a raid against Tracia at the beginning of 1323, among its military forces under his command being mentioned both Walachian and Tartar groups.

The politics initiated by Basarab I, who prevented the Hungarian kingdom from starting an action south of the Carpathians, was completed as well by an initiative that may have come from Walachia as well, sporadically mentioned by some chronicles. According to these sources, the boundary regions of the kingdom, namely the zone of Mehadia, are invaded in 1326 by Tartar groups which, logically, in order to attack the respective territories, had to transit Walachia (M. Holban, 1980). The Tartar invasion, openly supported or not by the Romanian voivode, will lead Hungary towards the adoption of an attitude of conciliatorism in the relations with the state situated south of the Carpathians. In our opinion, it should be integrated in the border conflicts that preceded the installation of the castle administrator Dionisie in Mehadia and, for this reason, we cannot exclude the possibility that the attack may have had for a main purpose only the intimidation of the adversary, especially as the existence of a Bulgarian-Walachian alliance, in which the Tartar force had the possibility to get involved at the right time, was not something that the Hungarian kingdom could neglect.

The diplomatic initiatives of the Walachian state, regardless of the means they use, manage to stop the Hungarian action of territorial expansion, at a time when the Angevin crown had obtained important successes in the external politics. The only possibility for the Hungarian kingdom remained that of waiting for a favorable moment to attack Walachia, in order to totally annex this new political formation.

The plan of the campaign against the Wallachian state will probably be prepared starting with 1327, when the Hungarian court found out about the imminent expedition of czar Şişman in Macedonia, where an important Walachian participation was expected as well. The choice of Basarab I as part of the possible alliance concluded among the Byzantine emperor, Andronic III, and the Bulgarian czar, Şişman, in order to recuperate the Macedonian territories that had become the property of the Serbian king, Ştefan Uroş III, must be regarded most reticently, as neither the Serbian, nor the Bulgarian chronicles mention any Walachian participation in the campaign started in the summer of the year 1330.

The diplomatic qualities for which the Walachian voivode had been remarked make us consider that he preferred to adopt a prudent attitude in this conflict, especially as Hungary's plans to launch an offensive in Walachia could not have been completely unknown to him. Under these circumstances, sending important military forces in the faraway Macedonia would have obviously endangered the very existence of the freshly created state.

On July 18, 1330, about two weeks after the campaign started, near Velbujd, the

Bulgarian army is attacked; the offensive of the French mercenaries and of the Serbian troops proves to be decisive, and in the terrible clash is killed even the czar Mihail III himself.

The important battle opened extremely advantageous perspectives for Hungary, which now had the possibility to launch an attack on the Walachian state that had remained, after the defeat of the Bulgarians, without the external ally it would have needed in order to counteract the Hungarian expansion plan.

Even though the Romanian historiography accredited for a long time the idea that the Hungarian action was motivated by the fact that the Walachian voivode had joined the region of Banatul de Severin to Walachia, in our opinion, the attack on Walachia should be included among the actions that were part of the Hungarian and Polish kingdoms' plan to restrain the area of Tartar domination, especially as this goal is one of the main concerns of the external Hungarian politics during the first half of the 14th century.

When the Hungarian military campaign against Walachia began, the complications from Central Europe were playing a just as important role for Hungary. In 1327, the Polish king, Vladislav Lokietek, started the offensive against the Teutonic Order, his main target being to restore his domination over Pomerania. The conclusion of the alliance between the Teutonic Order and the Bohemian kingdom, in 1329, was a source of danger not just for Poland (which so became unable to face the new concentration of military force), but also the action of undermining the Tartar power in Eastern Europe in which the Angevin crown was interested.

Judging the facts from the perspective of these events, which have not yet been discussed by our historiography when trying to determine the reasons why the attack south of the Carpathians took place, we consider that the Hungarian kingdom needed to bring under submission the entire Walachian state. Getting closer to the mouths of the Danube, which were dominated by the Mongolians, would have created a considerable advantage for Hungary, while an instauration of the Hungarian power in Walachia, corroborated to a successful offensive of Poland in Galitia and Podolia would have endangered even the Tartar domination in the Moldavian area.

Based on the above considerations, the sacrifice made by king Charles-Robert in 1330, just before the campaign against Walachia, when he gave Poland a help of 8000 men to continue the fight against the Teutonic order appears more logical and justified (E.C.Lăzărescu, 1935). All this data explain much more clearly why the Angevin campaign continued after the occupation of Banatul de Severin, as the king's desire to submit the entire state situated south of the Carpathians can be understood, in our opinion, as an attempt to create, in all the extra-Carpathian area, a "buffer" zone in front of the Tartar incursions towards Hungary.

The failure of the military campaign from Walachia can have multiple reasons, but we think that these reasons should be looked for in the hasty preparation of this action (after the defeat of the Bulgarian czardom at Velbujd), in the fact that the territory was unknown and in the moment chosen in order to launch the campaign (the beginning of the cold season). Finally, all these mistakes led to the defeat suffered at Posada (November 9-12, 1330) whose proportions are those of a great disaster only from the perspective of the human losses suffered by Hungary and of the external prestige of Hungary, affected following the terrible clash. Otherwise, politically, this failure is just a relative one, as the Hungarian kingdom continues to hold an extra-Carpathian area, Banatul de Severin, from where the offensive could be started over again. Later on, this aspect will be speculated to the maximum by the new Angevin king, Lewis I, who will know how to take advantage on the situation of diplomatic isolation Romania found itself in after 1330.

From the viewpoint of the international relations, the defeat suffered by Hungary in

Wallachia determined the Hungarian crown to adopt a defensive politics, acting especially in order to consolidate the relations with Poland in order to launch an ample action against the Tartar power. However, in the third decennium of the 14th century, the Hungarian politics will not be able to give its external plans enough coherence to put into practice the stipulations of the treaties and agreements concluded with the Polish kingdom, whose aim was the expansion eastwards.

The victory obtained by the Polish kingdom in front of the Teutonic order at Plowce, in 1331, did not lead to a breaking of the force balance formed following the Bohemian-Teutonic alliance in 1329, especially as Vladislav Lokietek's main ally, Charles-Robert of Anjou, seemed more and more preoccupied to organize a new military campaign against the "unfaithful" voivode Basarab I.

The death of the Polish king led to a totally different optics for Poland in its external politics. Cazimir III, the son of the former king, got to the throne in 1333, his principal goal being the reconciliation with the Teutonic order, Bohemia and the border comitat of Brandenburg. Under the impulse of Hungary, the new member of the dynasty gave up recovering the territories of Central Europe, choosing the Eastern expansion instead (§ Papacostea, 1980).

In our opinion, both for Poland and for Hungary, a change of direction in their external politics was absolutely necessary as the dynasty member Cazimir III did not have enough military force to destroy the Teutonic-Bohemian alliance that was blocking the kingdom in the area of the Baltic Sea, and, after the astounding defeat suffered in Walachia, the Hungarian state needed to demonstrate that it continued to remain the most significant power in Central and South-Eastern Europe, the main pillar in the battle against the Mongolian power.

The main important diplomatic measure was to be taken in 1335, at Wyzsegrad, when the first preliminary discussions concerning the Russian czardom Halici-Wolhynia took place. The crisis from Minor Russia directed the attention of Hungary and Poland, the most powerful states from Central and Eastern Europe, towards these territories. Yet, the status of Halici was extremely complex, as it was paying tribute to the Golden Horde; consequently, any action directed against it would have given birth to a significant conflict with the Mongolian forces. Moreover, under the leadership of khan Uzbek, the Tartars remained a terrible force, their invasions being devastating both for the Catholic powers of the area and for the Byzantine Empire. However, controlling South-Western Russia remained a major strategic objective for Poland, as the powerful kingdom was capable to stop in this way the numerous Tartar invasions aimed at it, many of them supported by the Russian princes incapable to oppose the Mongolian leadership (V. Spinei, 1982). This conglomerate of powers having interests in this area will be joined by Lithuania, pagan at the time, claiming in its turn the right to rule the Russian principedom.

The new encounter between Cazimir III and Charles-Robert of Anjou which took place in Wysegrad as well, in 1338, was going to hasten the unfolding of the events. The alliance between Hungary and Poland will be completed by the adhesion of the main political leader of the area, namely the prince Boleslav of Mazovia, to the new treaty signed by the two powers. His presence to these negotiations represented an extra guarantee for the fact that Halici was to be submitted in the future, especially as certain blood connections allowed Cazimir the Great to hope that he might occupy the throne of Halici. That treaty may have contained as well the first secret stipulations related to the succession to the Polish crown. So, the Polish king took upon himself, in case he had no male inheritors, to cede the rights over Poland to one of the sons of Charles-Robert of Anjou. This system of alliance relied, as we can see, on a huge political compromise, Hungary giving up any kind of rights over the

territories that were part of the principality Halici-Wolhynia, but obtaining certain promises concerning the occupation of the Polish throne.

In this context, the much-disputed correspondence between Charles-Robert of Anjou and the pope Benedict XII, in 1338, has a real basis which, in our opinion, should be reconsidered in specialized studies (Ş.S. Gorovei, 1997). Beyond the “pompous” declarations according to which Hungary has been waging an uninterrupted war against the pagans and the Orthodox schismatics *, we can demonstrate, based on this document, the much more offensive attitude of the Hungarian kingdom, prepared for starting an ample action concerning the areas controlled by the Tartars (who were pagans) and for subordinating the Halician feudality (whose faith was Orthodox).

The position of prince Boleslav and his possible conversion to Catholicism were going to give birth to deep internal discontent; as a consequence, the local boyars set up a plot following which the Russian leader was assassinated on April 7, 1340. The act itself gave Poland enough reasons to intervene for the occupation of Halici and Wolhynia. Just 9 days after the assassination of the Russian prince, Poland and Hungary launched a combined attack in southern Russia, which indicates the fact that the military action had been prepared, very minutely, long before, and it had been dictated only partially by the disappearance of Boleslav of Mazovia.

The inefficiency of the campaign started following this assassinate was given mainly by the lack of support from the part of the local elements, as the Russian boyars supported the Lithuanian prince Lubart to the throne (V. Spinei, 1982). The removal of the Polish-Hungarian army was only temporary, as king Cazimir III organized a new large military intervention at the beginning of the summer of 1340, by which he managed to occupy the Russian principality for the second time. Among these coordinates we find as well the deal of the Russian landed gentry with the Mongolian forces who, in their turn, had distinct interests in this region. The great khan Uzbek, though at the sunset of a glorious reign, could not be indifferent at the loss of Halici, a territory that had paid tribute, until then, to the Golden Horde, an important source of revenue for the Mongolians.

The concerted reaction of the Tartars and of the Russians chased the occupying troops and, above all these, Poland saw itself obliged to face an important Mongolian invasion in the south, where significant efforts will be made to push back the pagan hordes. The devastating action triggered the papacy’s reaction as well, which, through the voice of Benedict XII, asked for the organization of a great crusade against the pagans and the unbelievers, in this case the name pagans being used to designate the Lithuanians **.

Under the circumstances of these never ending confrontations, the idea of a compromise between the Polish king and the Russian boyars made its presence felt even more acutely, and so it was put into practice in 1344. The boyars of Halici understood that no other power will listen so carefully to their demands and for this reason, with the price of the loss of their nationality but with the guarantee of keeping their privileges, they accept the compromise with Poland (B.D. Grecov, 1950). The dynasty member Cazimir III was acknowledged through this act as suzerain over the principality of Halici-Wolhynia in exchange for the political and religious autonomy and for the acceptance of boyar Detco as representative of the king in the territory (Ş. Papacostea, 1980).

Certainly, Poland’s diplomatic successes were made simpler, to a significant extent, by the events of the year 1342, which brought important changes in the external relations from this part of Europe. The death of khan Uzbek and that of the Hungarian king Charles-Robert of Anjou opened unimagined perspectives, during a first stage, for the re-launch of the plan of restraint of the area dominated by the Tartars. However, their actions ran the risk of being seriously compromised or even totally stopped by the events that were taking place

inside the Golden Horde. Here, the inheriting prince Tinibek, according to certain opinions, showed himself willing to accept the Catholic religion. The adoption of Christianity by the highest Mongolian dignitary would have automatically led to changes in the directions promoted by the papacy, in close connection with the Catholic kingdoms of the area (Ş.S. Gorovei, 1973). The assassination of this inheriting prince by his own brother indicates, however, clearly, the opposition faced by such a measure in the Mongolian state.

The disappearance of khan Uzbek marked, in a general sense, the beginning of the process of decay of the Golden Horde. Preoccupied both with the European and the Asian problems, the great khan had managed to give consistence to his large dominion at the same time administratively, politically and economically (B.D. Grecov, A.I. Iacubovschi, 1953). The process of state decentralization, the clash between different noble groups, and especially the politics begun by the new khan Djonibek, aiming to consolidate Islamism and the extension of his dominion in the Middle East (by including Azerbaijan) led to a weakening of the positions held in the European area, a weakening of which Hungary and Poland tried to take advantage. So, while the Mongolian power adopted in the European area more and more defensive politics, the Hungarian kingdom, in full expansion by then, found the necessary force to recommence the offensive actions interrupted for several decennia.

In our opinion, the new Hungarian king, Lewis I of Anjou, understood, despite his young age, that in order to break the Mongolian block, it was necessary to attract on the diplomatic level the countries situated in front of the Tartar demarcation line, extending from the steppe situated north of the Black Sea to the Lower Danube. The most advantageous for Hungary seemed to be the regulation of its relations with Walachia, a state that was going through a period of crisis externally, after the battle from Posada. At the level of the internal leadership, the situation was extremely delicate for the young Walachian state, a part of the prerogatives related to power having been, probably, passed on by Basarab I to his son, the inheriting prince Nicolae Alexandru. Moreover, after 1340, the Golden Horde had taken control over the corridor of the steppe up to Vicina, 200 miles upstream from the mouths of the Danube, and consequently menaced Walachia more and more directly (S. Iosipescu, 1983).

In the year 1343 or 1344, a meeting between Lewis I of Anjou and the associate-voivode, Nicolae-Alexandru, took place, through which Walachia resumed its diplomatic relations with Hungary and assumed to maintain a neutral position in case of a future Hungarian-Tartar military conflict. The rapidity of the conclusion of this act by the dynasty member Lewis I proves how important it was for him; Lewis I shows his willingness to give up the strong tensions of the past only in exchange for the recognition of a formal vassality.

However, the act itself marks the end of a process for the young Romanian medieval state, a long process marked by the numerous distinct interests of the great surrounding powers, which finally led to the acceptance of Walachia as one of the states of Central and Eastern Europe.

Translated by Cerasela Enache

* DIR, C, 3/XIV, p. 499.

** Hurmuzaki, Doc., I, p. 658-660.

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