THE MOLDAVIAN CHRONICLES FROM THE 15th CENTURY AND THE MODEL OF ŞTEFAN CEL MARE

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Abstract: *The Moldavian Chronicles from the 15th century were used as a diplomatic tool in order to make known the Moldovian royal court to the foreign courts. This aspect indicates an official nature of the chronicles. Moreover, a number of details present in the chronicle regarding trivial facts from the court or military events, show that the writer witnessed the events at court and war, with numerous examples from the weekday time mentioning, to the number and size of the cannons to be found on the battlefield. History was for the writer a different dimension of the life driven by the true faith and an attempt to better understand the divine will and to follow closely His ways. In this regard, many stereotype formulae are telling that all events are foreordained only by "the will of God."*

Keywords: *chronicle; model; translations.*

1. The Byzantine Lesson

Intermediaries played an important part in spreading the Byzantine civilization in Eastern Europe. Their role became obvious in every cultural sphere, but their greatest contribution was in the literary field. The Greek influence which was in continual movement found its way towards the people in Eastern Europe under the cover represented by the Old Church Slavonic. The starting point of this tradition can be found in the translations made by Constantine-Cyril and his collaborators. "Its role as a cultural intermediary was assured by its peculiar relationship with medieval Greek on the one hand, and with the spoken language of the Slav peoples, on the other. It also owed much of its success to the skill of the early translators who developed it into a refined and supple instrument." (Obolensky, D. 2002: 322)

The advantage of having so many books translated from the Byzantine literature into Old Church Slavonic was that the language became richer and more complex. One instance is that of the neologisms that were introduced from Greek in order to express new notions for the Slavs. The translated writings had mostly an ecclesiastic character. Beside this aspect, if one adds the fact that the spread of Old Church Slavonic (through translations, which resulted in a decrease in the number of people willing to learn Greek) challenged the hegemony of Greek, then the result is a restriction of the access to the classical helenic literature. "This was undoubtedly a loss, and it must be recognized that Old Church Slavonic was responsible for restricting the range of Greek culture accessible to the Slavs. On the other hand, by providing them with a literary medium which was close to their spoken vernacular, it greatly increased the number of educated persons in Eastern Europe, capable of acquiring this culture albeit partially or indirectly. (Obolensky, D. 2002: 324)

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In the context of the political and cultural relations between the Romanian Principates and Byzatium and the neigbouring countries, the old Romanian culture was developed in close association with the Byzatine and the Slavic, in particular with the South Slavic culture, and later with the Eastern and Northern one, in Poland. A fundamental aspect of these relations is constituted by the appearance and the development of the old Romanian historiography following the contact with the Byzantine and Slavic historical writing. The Byzantine chronicles in Slavonic translation were widely spread in Romanian circles, together with almost every one of the original writings belonging to the Bulgarians and the Serbs (hagiographies, genealogies, chronicles). The beginnings are represented by *The Chronicle Since Moldavia Began*, *The Serbian-Moldavian Chronicle*, continuing with *The Short Chronicle of Moldavia*, *The Putna Chronicle I and II*, *The Moldavian-Polish Chronicle* and *The Moldavian-Russian Chronicle* and ending with the chronicles of bishops Macarie and Eftimie and that of the monk Azarie.

An extremely important aspect refers to the image associated with the Old Church Slavonic. It was considered a sacred idiom, a bridge between God and the human being and the only adequate means of expression for elite literature, inaccesible to the masses.

The Old Church Slavonic was used in Moravia, Bohemia, Croatia, Bulgaria and Russia, and the translation of writings from Greek to Slavonic represented an important part in the process of the dissemination of the Byzantine culture. The translation work, achieved by Cyril and Methodius for their mission in Moravia (subsequently continued by their disciples in Bulgaria) gave the Slavic Churches the whole corpus of Greek liturgical texts. In addition to the Bible, the liturgical books and patristic texts, The Lives of the Saints were quick to be assimilated. “These Vitae, which either circulated singly or were collected in menologia by months of the ecclesiastical year, extolled the virtues of Christian heroism, and often satisfied the craving of the medieval man for the wonderful and the miraculous.” (Obolensky, D. 2002: 28). Thus Byzantine hagiography became a common source of inspiration for the peoples in Eastern Europe.

The lay writings were selected as well for their literary value. Examples abound, we can name a few: *History of the Jewish War* by Flavius Josephus (describing the revolt of the Jews against the Roman empire in 66-74 B.C as a personal experience), the *Romance of Alexander* by pseudo-Callisthenes (which is about Alexander the Great), *The Physiologus* (a book of Christian animal symbols, initially published in Alexandria, Egypt in the 2nd century A.D. and which throughout the Middle Ages was known as the *Bestiary*), the *Christian Topography* by Cosmas Indicopleustes (the manuscript of this book contains a diagram which explains the way sunrays fall on the ground) or *The Digenes Akrites*, an epic poem from the 10th century which described the battles of the Byzantines against the Arabs.

Among the lay works that exerted an important influence were the Byzantine chronicles, which can be divided in two groups: on the one hand those works that related events and attempted to imitate the style of the classical Greek historians (Herodotus or Thucidides), characterized by objectivity and causal explanations of events, and on the other hand chronicles and popular works which related more to Christianity than history. The latter were usually written by monks or priests, in a simpler and more accesible language for the less educated, and they were not interesed in causal exlanations, but in their succession, a testimony to the fact that the Byzantines, the people of the New Covenant, were those that had preserved the Orthodox faith.

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"Their preference for the chronicles could be attributed more satisfactorily to the religious interpretation of history contained therein: to the belief, in particular, that human affairs are controlled by supernatural forces which manifest themselves in earthquakes, comets and eclipses; that the destiny of individuals and of nations is a stake in the never-ending struggle between God and Satan; and that the unfolding of the divine plan in history is furthered by the conversion of nations to the Christian faith. These ideas, which are expressed more forcibly and vividly in the chronicles than in the histories, could be put to practical use both by the Byzantine missionaries, and by those recently baptized Slavs who sought to understand the significance of what had happened to themselves and their countries. This conception of history had the added advantage of being incomplete: the Kingdom of Heaven and its earthly counterpart, the Christian Commonwealth, were ever capable of expansion; and the story left unfinished in the Byzantine chronicles could now be taken up and carried on by the Slavs, which, as we shall see, they were not slow to do." (Obolensky, D. 2002: 330)

The literature translated from Greek into the Old Church Slavonic underwent, according to the country that had adopted it, some changes determined by the association with its new cultural medium but also by the influence exerted by its original place (as the original birth place of the writings went through a process of renewal). "In the earlier period with which we are at present concerned, the translated works, by a process of adaptation, were apt to acquire fresh features and to develop local variants. This suggests an analogy between literary 'translation' and the botanical process of 'transplantation', in the light of which it may be said that the writings so 'transplanted' from Byzantium to Eastern Europe brought forth creative offshoots which continued to live and grow in their new soil. Transplantation was thus accompanied by changes in the borrowed product, and this process was indeed possible only because the society and the culture of the 'receiving' country were at that time in a state of rapid change. In this process the translated works not only acquired new traits, but also stimulated, by a kind of cultural osmosis, the growth of 'original' literature in different parts of the Slavonic world." (Obolensky, D. 2002: 331)

The history library which was traslated from Greek by the Southern Slavs, in particular the Bulgarians, comprises the great works of Byzantine historiography. The works of Menander (who imposed the new comedy based on the investigation of private life), Theophylactus Simocatta (who produced a history of the reign of Emporor Mauricius in 8 volumes), Leon the Deacon (he wrote a 10-volume history, where he presents the events from 959 to 976 which he had witnessed), Mihail Psellos (the author of a philosophical synthesis, defining phisosophy as "the search for truth"), Anna Comnena (the author of *Alexiades*) did not raise any interest. Of particular interest were the universal chronicles, those writings which narrated history from its beginnings (Genesis) until the moment of writing. The Bulgarians showed interest in these texts not because of their language and hermeneutical issues, but because of the "special character", often quite specialized, of the elevated history books and the excess of details they offered (among the 37 books of the *Roman History* belonging to Nicephoros Grogoras, the events from 1204 to 1320 occupy only seventeen books, while the rest is made up from what happened in the period 1321-1359, the time of the great polihistor), which did not interest anybody who would contemplate the Byzantine past "from the outside". (Mazilu, D.H. 2000: 5-6)

The Southern Slavic scholars turned their attention to the works that narrated the life of the world, the Byzantine influence being dominant in the area of writing. The patrimony taken over by the Southern Slavic scholars (whom Dan Horia Mazilu calls

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"our intermediaries") from the Byzantine heritage reveals the existence of a certain category of texts. The Bulgarian scholars oriented themselves towards the patristic age, a much older period, ignoring the works of the contemporary Byzantine writers.

On the other hand, the preference for texts from John Chrysostom, Gregory Nyssis or Basil the Great, leading representatives of old Byzantine literature meant a considerable effort, as their texts were neither easy to comprehend, nor easy to translate. In addition to these texts translated into Slavic, the scholars attempted to enlarge their fields of interest, dwelling also on lay texts, on apocriphal literature. We should also mention historiographic contributions such as the chronographs of Zonaras, Malalas or Manasses. The chronicles of Ioannes Malalas (6th century), Gheorghios Synkellos (8-10th centuries) were translated, these being unknown in the Romanian book archives, as well as the *Universal Chronicle* of Symeon the Magister and the Logothete also called Metaphrastes, written in the second half of the 10th century.

The chronicle of Malalas goes from Genesis to the last years of Justinian's reign, providing the Slavs with the opportunity to acquaint themselves with ancient history as well as the Greek mythology. The Chronicles of Gheorghe the Monk (also known as Hamartolos, the sinner) from the 9th century used to be very popular, being translated twice, first in the 11th century and the second time in the 14th century in Bulgaria. In the 12th century the *Epitomê historiôn* (*the History Summary*) of the historiographer Joannes Zonaras and the *Universal Chronicle* of Constantine Manasses were translated. The latter, Born at the beginning of the 12th century, living for a long time around the Imperial court, became a bishop of Naupaktos in the last years of his life. His versified chronicle was translated into Latin by J. Leunklavius in 1573, being called *Chronike Synopsis* in Middle Bulgarian during the Reign of Tzar Ivan Alexandr, the son in law of Basarab I, the prince of the Romanian Principate. A copy of this translation was also made in Moldavia, probably in the 16th century and included in a codex that comprised the *The Chronicle since Moldavia Began, with God's Will*, the chronicle of Stephen the Great and Bogdan the 3rd. This is the first Moldavian chronicle. This literature translated south of Danube was spread north in our lands, becoming an important source of information.

"Byzatium after Byzantium"- this is the defintion given by Nicolae Iorga in a concise syntagm, which attempts to give a lapidary assessment of the old Romanian culture (or, at least, a significant part of it). (Mazilu, D.H. 1994: 33)

In addition to the Byzantine heritage, by means of Slavonic influence, the Romanian scholars were able to benefit from the Slavonic historiographic writing, in particular the Serbian ones, which had been produced under the Byzantine impetus. Such examples are the *Lives of Serbian Kings and Archbishops*, written by Archbishop Danilo the 2nd (1279-1337), the *Serbian Chronicles* which narrate the Serbian history from 1355 to 1490 and a Chronicle that narrates historical events up to 1512 which purpots to be „the first attempt at rallying the Romanian and the Balcanic history." (Mazilu, D.H. 2000: 9)

The Tetraevangelium written on parchment at the end of the 14th century is the oldest manuscript to be preserved in the Neamț monastery. Other manuscripts copied and illuminated here are kept at the Romanian Academy Library or in other libraries and museums here and abroad. For example the Romanian Art Museum has the *Epitaph*, written in 1493 by Abbot Silvan.

Besides Neamț, illuminating schools existed in Moldavia since Stephen the Great, at Putna and Dragomirna, where three Tetraevangelia, three Liturgy books and a Psalm book are preserved, all illuminated. The school founded at Dragomirna by its

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great founder left an impressive number of works, over 25 known manuscripts from the period of Anastasie Crimca and which are mostly illuminated. The Romanian Academy Library keeps two copies of the *Apostle*; an *Apostle* is kept at the State Library in Vienna, written on parchment and illuminated by the Metropolitan himself in 1610; at the State Museum in Moscow there are five items, among which an illuminated *Psalm book*, at the Saltikov-Scedrin Library in St. Petersburg there is a *Psalm book*, a *Typikon* and the *Universal Chronicle* of Symeon the Magister and Logothete, while at Liov there are three items: an illuminated *Tetraevagelium*, the *Lives of the Saints* and Nicon's *Pandect*. Among the martyrs, only the mentioning of a few is impressive: deacon Dumitraşcu Belinschi, monk Teofil from Voroneţ, the painter Stephen from Suceava, the deacon Petru, the deacon Vasile, the monk Pahomie, father Manoil from Suceava.

The 15th century marks the emergence and the development of indigenous historiography for the history of Romanian culture. If the Southern Slavs translated chronicles rather than Byzantine histories, the translations that reached the Romanian space were multiplied and they represented the patrimony of a library.

In their writings the chroniclers aimed to write down the main events of the past and contemporaneity, underlying the political events which were related to the situation of the prince and the boyars, the relationships among them in their exercise of state power and the raports with the Church. The particular historical circumstances, the fight for independence and territorial integrity had to be mentioned, always in comparison with the political situation of the neighbouring states. In this context a new idea appears, that of ethnic and linguistic unity. The fight for independence was an extremely important objective, which could be achieved only on the basis of princely autocracy, that is of a form of government in which the whole power was concentrated in the hands of one person, who was outside the rule of law. Princely autocracy meant that the prince was the sole ruler of the centralized state and the boyars were subordinated to him, and also that the prince was the divine representative on earth.

The chroniclers of the 15th century and their followers in the ensuing centuries outline a definite role for Moldavia. A political orientation is strongly felt, the chroniclers having the task of sometimes over-evaluating the significance of this principality for the policy of neighbouring states. Relations with princes from Walachia and Transylvania and with Polish and Hungarian kings as well as Turkish Sultans or Tatar Khans are mentioned. One could not but appreciate this attempt to emphasize the role of Moldavia as well as that of the Romanian principalities in the general organization of Christianity and in preparing the resistance against the Ottoman Empire. This organization was supposed to contribute to enhancing the presence of the Romanian principalities on the political map of Europe, which, together with the great powers, offered to participate in any armed conflict which would have threatened Christianity. Achieving independence becomes a vital issue for the chroniclers, and their political thinking found expression in their engagement with history. The cult of history was turned into a special cultural value which conferred increased power to the writing in the service of the prince.

The historical literature in the medieval period takes the shape of chronicles, and authors remain loyal to the Byzantine medieval historiography. The chroniclers present important personalities and their illustrious achievements, which they sketch against a well justified and argued background. In this case, the chronicler is not content with just enumerating or emphasizing the features of such a personality, but he also highlights the events that justified the emergence of such a ruler, who in other circumstances would not have given the full measure of his worth. And then a whole

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series of problems of the time appears, ranging from internal to external ones, from minor to life threatening. The battles against the invaders, the (often complicated) relations between the prince and the boyars, plots, personal interests which affect linear government or intrigues at the princely court are enumerated.

The origin of the divine right of the prince is unanimously accepted by chroniclers who are thus the partisans of the concept of divine determinism but also share the belief in the common origin of the Romanian people, each of these statements being decisively sustained with historical or linguistic arguments.

The historiographical works that describe the events associated with the activity of the prince have a common denominator, that of the divine right of the prince, who bases his whole activity on the will of God and through the protection and support of the Creator, these chronicles having an official courtly character: The Putna Chronicle (a short history of the rulers of Moldavia); The Bistriţa Chronicle (The Chronicle since Moldavia began, with God's will). Subsequently the title was changed to the Anonymous Chronicle (the change was made by P.P. Panaitescu in the edition of the Slavonic-Romanian Chronicles in the 15th-16th centuries, published by I. Bogdan in 1959 and included in the treaty The History of Romanian Literature in 1964). Others have taken the name after P.P. Panaitescu. Although the Putna Chronicle is anonymous as well, it kept the name given by Ioan Bogdan; The Moldavian-German Chronicle (The short chronicle of Stephen, with God's help the prince of Moldavia and Wallachia), written in German.

2. The Dinasty in the Period of Stephen the Great and the Extollment of Merits in the Chronicles

"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves."

(Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans, 13:1-2)

The dinastic ideea, as a family whose members succeed to the throne (as princes, kings or emperors) was closely associated with faith during Stephen the Great's period. Royal blood was the male descendancy (even illegitimate offspring). In older times this had nothing to do with faith. The 15th century is a century in which dinasty becomes a reality- in the following century the situation changes as the boyars begin to aim for higher positions and attempting to place their representatives on the throne. The best way to preserve the image of a dinasty was through Stephen's particular interest for the restoration of his ancestors' graves. A wooden church from Volovăţ, where the grave of Dragoş the first prince of Moldavia was situated, was translated to Putna. By bringing Dragoş's grave close to his future resting place and building an inscription, Stephen emphasizes the idea of the blood ties of a family which is mindful of traditions and eternally reigning.

The politics of Stephen overcome the country borders, as he was an European prince, with good knowledge of the world and a good understanding of foreign politics. The results of Stephen's diplomacy are outstanding: from 1462 to 1465 he fights the Wallachians and is at peace with the Turks, Hungarians and Poles; in 1467 he fights the Hungarians, while the Poles come to his help at Buda; from 1475 to 1476 he fights the Turks, while the Poles and the Hungarians send him help; from 1477 to 1480 he fights

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again the Wallachians, and the Hungarians, the Turks and the Russians stand on his side.

In addition to a real knowledge of the external political situation, Stephen possesses a remarkable ability to take advantage of the circumstances, of the rivalries or the envy of his neighbours, proving himself to be a political genius. Only this can explain how the ruler of such a small country could defeat the Wallachians, the Poles, the Hungarians, the Tatars or the Turks.

Stephen's literary talent is witnessed by the wealth of military detail which he employs in the description of the Vaslui battle, in the letter to the Christian princes, on the 25th of January 1475.

The struggle against "the enemies of Christendom", as it is mentioned at the end of the letter is a leitmotif which will occur again and again, in various syntagms in Stephen's correspondence and his envoys: "the foes of Christendom (...), the infidel Turks"; "these (the Turks) are getting stronger against Christendom"; "from every side the pagan Tatars and Turks are getting stronger against Christendom." In 1477, in front of the Senate of Venice Ioan Ţamblac uttered words written by the ruler of Moldavia, reconstituting the battle at Valea Alba with all its tragedy.

Analyzing the inscriptions on the tombstones at Rădăuţi and Putna as well as the oldest Moldavian chronicle, I.C. Chiţimia reached the conclusion that "Stephen the Great initiated a sober and concise historiography style." His style is unique, difficult to imitate, and the rotives in the church porches stand testimony to the fact that the prince considered his military feats exemplary and worthy to be known by his descendents. These are the impressive deeds of a prince who still believed in *Respublica Christiana*, although he had had the repeated unpleasant experience of waiting for the promised help that never came. Yet the purpose of this *Respublica Christiana* was the mutual help in the defense of Christianity.

The chronicles written at the court of Stephen represent a different type of writing, a particular and sober manner of extolling Stephen's merits.

3. Conclusions

Moldavia's cultural achievements during the reign of Stephen the Great, the church paintings with valuable local elements, the stone sculptures, the fine embroidery, the crafty metalwork, the church music, the beautiful books and illuminations written in the monasteries at his wish are the expression of the divine protection he felt on himself and his country. The attachment of Stephen the Great's towards the Church can be deduced from these chronicles of the age, especially from the supposed Bistrita chronicles, where it is shown that after each war, the prince ordered „his metropolitans and bishops and all the priests to thank God." We also have to bear in mind the fact that under Stephen's reign the written Moldavian culture becomes more extensive, not only by the increased reproduction of old manuscript prototypes, but also by the diversifying of the fields approached in their contents.

The chronicles write down important historical moments of the age: the consolidation of centralized power and the struggle of the Moldavian prince against the Turks, to liberate the country and defend the faith. The chronicle shows that Stephen the Prince is the elected by God, strong, brave and pious. For the anonymous chronicler all Christian countries form one unit: the Christianity. And what is of major interest is that this Slavonic chronicles, mirroring the opinion of the age calls Prince Stephen „a holy victor in the name of faith", as it was the formula for the great defenders of the faith.

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There is a certain ritual in every chronicle, some formulas which need to be inserted, from the actions undertaken by the main character to the discourses spoken in certain situations. And then, the literary discourse of the author had to become subordinated to this ritual, because that way the human role models needed by medieval texts were generated. "The will to subordinate literary discourse to etiquette, to the reconstruction based on cannonical principles, by endlessly remaking the cannon could also explain the translation- so frequent in old literature- of some sequences (descriptions, discourses, endings) from one text to the other. Of course that by practising this unevolved "intertextuality" (...) the medieval writer had no intention of mystifying the reader, of presenting what had been taken from another text as a real fact (a historical one, let's say). The "real" and the "necessary" are mixed and confused. And from this mélange, over which the writer presides, *exemplarity* is born (so valued by old writing), the *ideal character*, *the human role model* (Stephen the Great in this case), a "birth" in which etiquette plays an important part." (Mazilu, D.H. 1994: 82)

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