RENAISSANCE GIFTS OF FATHERLY LOVE

Simona Catrinel Avarvarei
"Ion Ionescu de la Brad" University of Iași

Abstract: Under the scrutinizing, scholarly exploring tools of researchers, texts reveal their inner architecture, an enthralling and intricate juxtaposition of symbols, meanings and textures. It is texture, with its organic connotation of fabric and tissue this study explores, while mirroring two Renaissance treatises on education, King James I's ***The Basilikon Doron*** *and Neagoe Basarab's* ***Învăţăturile către fiul său Theodosie*** */* ***The Teachings to His Son Theodosie****. The search of domestic metaphor, the warm and genuine style, the unconditional love of a father towards his son support the research approach, whose main aim is not to place the two works in contrast, but to highlight their common legacy of values, tone and humanism.*

Keywords: stately power, legacy, fatherhood, education.

Etiamsi omnes

On the evening of June 4th, 2012 HRH Prince of Wales paid a heartfelt tribute to his mother, The Queen, at the Diamond Jubilee concert at Buckingham Palace, mesmerizing the huge audience gathered to witness the once-in-a-lifetime event when he addressed her with the words "Your Majesty, mummy… " The strictness of the royal etiquette was unexpectedly diluted and a warm touch of genuineness and commonness set the tone for the speech that was to follow. All it took was a single word, understood in almost any language spoken on the planet –*mummy* - for the hundreds of thousands of people attending the ceremony to empathize deeply with the excitement of the moment. People need and yearn for affection, complete and unconditional; royal households have seldom been recorded in history for their stories of parental love, unfortunately enough parading rather 'generously' through pages of chronicles with stories of cold and rather tense relationships between parents and offsprings.

This study looks into the serene naturalness, sheer humanity and sound wisdom that two fathers poured over their beloved sons in words which, beyond their intellectual refinement, tell the eternal story of the loving and thoughtful parent, irrespective of rank, space or epoch. Most fathers have signed their private correspondence, addressed to their children, with King James's words 'Your loving Father' although class and century separate them. Concern, a high sense of duty, responsibility for one's young and unexperienced shape the most intimate fibers of the soul, as heart beats equally strong in the chest of a king as in that of a simple mortal. What nobler and evermore impressive through its humanity a mission than that of guiding one's son beyond the fragility of a mortal's life, warning him of the perfidious, yet alluring *fortuna labilis*.

Both *Basilikon Doron*, as well as *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosie* gloss, with fatherly love, that in the face of time all is nothing but a game of vanity of vanities.

King James VI and I (1567-1625) and Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521) shared the same epoch of Renaissance with all its imbuing humanism. The Wallachian ruler did not master the art of wars, nor did he excel in weapon handling, as history presents him rather as a diplomat, a

BDD-A23219 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:01:48 UTC)

man of great culture and artistic refinement. He tailored his foreign policy as an unprecedented, at that time, exercise of diplomatic cleverness, maintaining peace with the Ottoman Empire and, on the other hand, building diplomatic relations with the Christian world. A genuine Renaissance prince, Neagoe Basarab founded the Monastery Curtea de Argeş, a masterpiece in the Byzantine style, and he was the one who also financed the printing of the Evangheliar / the Gospel Book by the monk Macarie at Târgovişte in 1512. Rather than otherwise, it was the art of writing that enthralled him[1] and thus, towards the end of his reign and life (1518-1521), he authored what is to be considered the first major Romanian literary work written in Old Slavic, *Învăţăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie / The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosie*.

Infused by the spirit of its time, the treatise is an encyclopaedic[2] approach towards Christian principles and Orthodox spirituality, a work on diplomacy and international relations, on military tactics and strategy, but most of all on political and moral education. Under the princely quill pen, words flood the manuscript in a most graceful and sensible manner, sagely offering advice to a naïve and innocent prince, still ignorant of the ways of the world. Thus, the textbook may be regarded as a testament on the art and science of ruling, left by a father to his heir. An interesting detail comes with the etymology of the Wallachian sovereign's cognomen, in a sort of predestination of the scholarly act and destiny. Although a delicate and still much debated subject between historians and linguists, the origin of the Basarab name points in the direction of the cumin tradition, where it meant 'father and ruler', from *basar*, to rule and *aba*, father. Neagoe Basarab seems to have lived his life within the generous, yet constraining semantics of his name that predestined him to be a fatherly presence not only within the bosom of his blood-related family, but also in the extended family of his people.

Divided into two parts, *The Teachings* narrate the story of the divine origin of a ruler's power, rooted not in the fragile realm of the world, but in the celestial kingdom of God Almighty, a thesis that also appears in the *Basilikon Doron* as main rationale for a future king's education and for his understanding of the world and of the others. The two parts of Basarab's political testament are meant to warn the young prince of two main types of errors, hence their different structure and corpus of the work; whereas the first part is a moral compendium that criticises the mistakes or praises the glorious deeds of illustrious men, the second one indents to be a guide for the king's doings.

Using various sources, mostly the *Bible* and the *Old Testament*, *The Panegyric of St. Emperors Konstantine and His Mother Helen*, the novel *Barlaam and Josaphat*, Simeon the Monk's *Humiliation*, Sf. Ephrem's *Homily to the Transfiguration* and *The Teaching for Good Deeds and for God's Tolerance and Await*, *The Apocryphal about the Cross Wood*, Neagoe Basarab conceived the first part of his manuscript as a compilation of texts that would help the young heir comprehend the importance of refined education in shaping an exquisite moral and human profile, a must for all those called to shepherd the flock. The very association between a ruler and the Divine Shepherd does nothing but to emphasise the sovereign's God anointed status and the overwhelming weight of his office, in the spirit of the hesychastic tradition that

[1] "Neagoe Basarab, this Marcus Aurelius of Wallachia, artist and philosopher ruler, who makes us watch in amazement, as to an exceptional epoch of peace and culture, in the midst of many centuries' dark storm, the short while between the years 1512-1521." (B. P. Haşdeu)

[2] Hosted by the Cluj branch of the Romanian Academy manuscript 109 of the *Teachings*, coming from the private library of Ştefan Cantacuzino, contains 273 pages.

BDD-A23219 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:01:48 UTC)

permeates the lines of the manuscript. In *A Paterne for a King's Inauguration*[3], James VI and I advises his son to be "a great watchman and shepherd…and his eye must never slumber nor sleepe for the care of his floke, ever remembering that his office, being duly executed, will prove as much *onus* as *honos* onto him."[4] The *Basilikon Doron* repeats the concept of the divine right of kings, equally voiced in another of King James's works, *The True Law of Free Monarchies*.

A pacifist himself, the king refutes such ruling strategies as fear, coercion, and pressure, much in the Machiavellian spirit of the means that justifies the end which most sovereigns unrightfully and exceedingly resorted to. A prince must dominate through his real, true and unspoilt *self*, and, most importantly, through his wits and wisdom:

He who shall become king must have a great mind and be able to know and understand the minds of the servants, whose minds ought neither to know, nor to understand, the mind of the king. (*The Teachings*)[5]

Furthermore, wisdom also refers to the power and capacity of listening to other people's advice, an idea that not only Neagoe Basarab passes on to his son, but also King James to Prince Henry:

[…] follow the advice of the mighty, the not so powerful and the most humble ones, for this is the right way. Join them in secrecy and ask for advice, and make room for the best ones in your hearts. (*The Teachings*)

Flatter not your selfe in your labours, but before they bee set foorth, let them first bee privily censured by some of the best skilled men in that craft, that in these workes yee meddle with. And because your writes will remaine as true pictures of your minde, to all posterities; let them bee free of all uncomelinesse and unhonestie: and according to Horace his counsell .- Nonumquam premantur in annum. *(The Basilikon Doron)*

The second part of *The Teachings* consists of twelve chapters that may be read in the key of a moral, ethical, social code and it is in this section where the reader comes to discover the author's personal ideas and style. Thus, the author speaks about the way in which a ruler has to equally honour noblemen and his faithful and trustworthy servants, how he should judge and settle disputes and rivalries between his subjects:

Should thou spend thine days with the chosen ones, their good advice and teachings will be with thee every day and every hour; be with the fools and the rebellious, and a fool and a rebel thou shall become. (*The Teachings*)

At the same time, the father draws his son's attention on how important a thing is for a future ruler to show mercy and generosity while being just and unbiased in his judgement - "and unto each, as the law says, thus thou shall do…" (*The Teachings*)

If diligent enough, thou shall lead your flock well, and not let some feast and become fat, while others starve to death. Be just onto all, giving every man his due, for as one's deed is, so shall one's honour and mercy be. (*The Teachings*)

A good, pure and courageous heart is the heart of a prince- "all shall help the good man, and all shall hate the coward" and thus, trying to dwell in the mind of his son long after his

[3] *A Paterne for a King's Inauguration*, authored by King James I of England, was for Charles, his second son and future king himself known as Charles I of England, what the *Basilikon Doron* was for Henry Frederick.
[4] *A Paterne for a King's Inauguration*, King James VI and I, apud. Parris B. ""The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body": Sovereign sleep in Hamlet and Macbeth" in Shakespeare Studies, vol XL, Susan Zimmerman and Garrett Sullivan (eds.), Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012, p. 101.
[5] All quotations from *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosie* are my translation.

BDD-A23219 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:01:48 UTC)

journey through the realms of this world would have come to an end, Neagoe Basarab authors, despite its humble and reserved tone, a genuine treatise on the art of lawful ruling.

Should thou not be willing to know your flock and be just onto all, what king and shepherd should thou be? (*The Teachings*)

All in the name of the unwritten moral and ethical code of the land and of its people, that has to be obeyed, of that warm humanity that urges the ruler never to hurt his subjects' soul and always to consider them God's creations, redeemed for eternity on the sacred wood of the Holy Cross. The complete man of the Renaissance ideals lives not only through his state affairs but also through his heart and personal reference to human values. A unique blend of oriental and occidental philosophy, mixing Byzantine Orthodoxy spirituality with the encyclopaedic character of the Renaissance singles Neagoe Basarab's *Teachings* out, offering it uniqueness and adding it on the frontispiece of universal values.

A father's concern for the education and wellbeing of his son makes us consider parts of the manuscript a judicious code of good manners and etiquette, where one learns how gentlemen should sit at a table, how they should eat and drink, details that equally concerned King James and are hence to be found in his letter addressed to his eldest son, Henry:

Use also the like forme in your gesture; neither looking sillily, like a stupide pedant; nor unsetledly, with an uncouth morgue, like a new-comeouer Cavalier: but let your behaviour be naturall, grave, and according to the fashion of the country. […]And remember (I say over againe) to be plaine and sensible in your language (*Basilikon Doron*)

There is a sad story behind the two manuscripts related to the early death of the addressees, Prince Theodosie and Henry Frederick, Prince of Wales and Duke of Rothesay. The former ascended the throne at a very fresh age, but died of tuberculosis, in Constantinople, at the age of 17; the latter lived one year more, and died of typhoid fever when his father was still ruling over England and Scotland. For the modern reader, the tragic destiny of the heirs seems to highlight even further the deep humanity of the text and its natural affectionateness.

Written and printed in Edinburgh in 1599, in seven copies only, as James's gift of knowledge and love[6] to his son and heir, the *Basilikon Doron* also speaks of regal power and responsibility. The 57-page document gathers precepts on the art of ruling, approaching in its three-part structure the sovereign's duty as a Christian towards God (Part I), the duty and responsibilities of his office (Part II), also outlining the code of etiquette and manners in its last fragment.

I have […] divided this treatise in three parts: the first teacheth you your duty towards God as a Christian; the next, your duty in your office as a king; and the third informeth you how to behave yourself in indifferent things, which of themselves are neither right nor among, but according as they are rightly or wrong used, and yet will serve according to your behavior therein, to augment or impair your fame and authority at the hands of your people. Receive and welcome this book then as a faithful preceptor and counselor unto you, which, because my affairs will not permit me ever to be present with you, I ordain to be a resident faithful admonisher of you. (*Basilikon Doron*)

If the two monarchs had exchanged documents, their heirs would have equally received the same sound advice and guidance. Both Neagoe Basarab and James VI and I urged their sons to be good Christians, to praise God and His infinite goodness, to rule over their subjects with wisdom and care, supressing any tyrannical thought and action; a clear mind and a pure heart

[6] In Greek, *Basilikon Doron* (Βασιλικὸν Δῶρον) means 'royal gift'.

BDD-A23219 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:01:48 UTC)

will lead a prince towards the best way of prudent government. Reigning over England during its most special age of the Renaissance, a great art lover himself and a highly educated mind of his time, King James began his letter in the tradition of the Elizabethan sonnet, thus prefacing his manuscript elegantly:

Reward the just, be steadfast, true, and plain,
Repress the proud, maintaining aye the right,
Walk always so, as ever in his sight,
Who guards the godly, plaguing the profane.
And so ye shall in princely virtues shine…(*Basilikon Doron*)

He continues by explaining the reasons that made him lay down in writing some thoughts for his son, continuing thus the spirit of a special type of écriture, which, despite its solid didactic character, was born out of the most natural, yet extraordinary in its genuineness, fatherly love. Nicollo Machiavelli in *The Prince*, Erasmus from Rotterdam in *The Education of a Christian Prince*, or Lorenzo de Medici in *The Paternal Advice to a Cardinal* narrate the same story.

Since I the author thereof, as your natural father, must be careful for your godly and virtuous education, as my eldest son, and the first fruits of God's blessing towards me in thy posterity; and as a king must timously provide for your training up in all the points of a king's office since ye are my natural and lawful successor therein, that being rightly informed hereby of the weight of your burthen, ye may in time begin to consider, that being born to be a king, ye are rather born to onus, than honos, not excelling all your people so far in rank and honor, as in daily care and hazardous painstaking, for the dutiful administration of that great office, that God hath laid upon your shoulders. (*Basilikon Doron*)

Basilikon Doron may also be interpreted in the key of indebted gratitude that raises prayers of praise and thanks to Lord Almighty, who, in His infinite love and mercy has blessed a father with his son; in the name of this gratitude and love, the father feels that he should build his 'cathedral' in his beloved and dearest child, and no effort or no pain is too little for accomplishing his mission:

[..] hoping, yea, even promising unto myself, that GOD, who in his great blessing sent you unto me, shall in the same blessing, as he hath given me a son, so make him a good and a godly son; not repenting him of his mercy showed unto me, I end, with my earnest prayer to GOD, to work effectually unto you, the fruits of that blessing, which here from my heart I bestow upon you. (*Basilikon Doron*)

King James teaches his heir that in order to be a good Christian one must not only love and fear God, one should also closely follow the word of the Scripture and be grateful for what God had so generously bestowed upon him.

Now, the onely way to bring you to this knowledge, is diligently to reade his word, and earnestly to pray for the right understanding thereof. Search the Scriptures, sayth Christ, for they beare testimonie of me and, the whole Scripture, saith Paul, is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable to teach, to convince, to correct, and to instruct in righteousnesse; that the man of God may be absolute, being made perfite unto all good workes. (*Basilikon Doron*)

The words of the Old Testament that James urged his son to read, speak of the king as the judge of his people. Nevertheless, Henry ought to become a merciful and a God-fearing king, distancing himself from the vindictive law of retaliation and governing with justice and equality. And when all these would have been accomplished, the king should defend the many and oppressed if justice is on their side and sympathize with them:

BDD-A23219 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:01:48 UTC)

[…] embrace the quarrell of the poore and distressed, as your owne particular, thinking it your greatest honour to represse the oppressours care for the pleasure of none, neither spare ye anie paines in your owne person, to see their wrongs redressed. (*Basilikon Doron*)

For there is no nobler a mission for a king than to lead his flock and look after it with care and affection. Thus, it is of the greatest importance to James that his son knew his duty, and knew it well.

A good King, thinking his highest honour to consist in the due discharge of his calling, emploieth all his studie and paines, to procure and maintaine, by the making and execution of good Lawes, the well-fare and peace of his people; and as their naturall father and kindly Master, thinketh his greatest contentment standeth in their prosperitie, and his greatest suretie in having their hearts, subjecting his owne private affection…(*Basilikon Doron*)

Common to the two authors is the wish to author a manuscript that would offer guidance and counselling when the paternal figure would have paid Charon the toll to cross him the Styx. From the realm of the shadows, where lips are muted and words muffled, such testimonies of love and wisdom will continue to tell the story of a father who once taught his son to be a great man and a good ruler.

Charging you in the presence of GOD, and by the fatherly authority I have over you, that ye keep it ever with you, as carefully, as Alexander did the Iliad of Homer. …(*Basilikon Doron*)

Both the *Basilikon Doron* and *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosie* gloss on the special relationship that a ruler must build with his conscience, a relationship to be fostered and interviewed unceasingly, as God shines upon those who honour Him with their lives, thoughts and deeds:

[…] remember every once in the four and twenty hours, either in the night or when ye are at greatest quiet, to call yourself to account of all your last days actions, either wherein ye have committed things ye should not, or omitted the things ye should do, either in your Christian or kingly calling: in that account let not yourself be smoothed over …. but censure yourself as sharply as if ye were your own enemy. (*Basilikon Doron*)

Neither Teodosie, nor Henry developed the crude, merciless and severely distorted concept of conscience most medieval rulers displayed almost so ostentatiously, almost blurring it into total annihilation. They did not come to speak the language of Machiavelli and were advised to distance themselves as far as possible from such rationale as the one that triggered the mechanisms of power that served Richard III to ascend the throne of England:

Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls;
Conscience is but a word that cowards use
Devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe.
Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.
Richard III, V. iii 308-311

No metal withstands time better than a brave heart and a living consciousness and the princes know that. Their fathers taught them the lesson of humility and Christian love, instilling a profound sense of duty and total self-commitment. The young princes are summoned to constantly remember their onus towards the Almighty, to master patience and keep their hearts immaculate and open and their minds sharp and awake. While King James ends his testament in a rather flamboyant style (Cohen 2015: 91), summarizing in just a few lines the core philosophy of the manuscript, the Wallachian ruler offers a final lesson of Christian generosity, self-abandonment and devotion. And most importantly, the two documents engrave splendid stories of (fatherly) love, lent to us beyond time and territory.

BDD-A23219 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:01:48 UTC)

To conclude then, I charge you, as ever ye thinks to deserve my fatherly blessing, to follow and put in practice, as far as lyeth in you, the precepts hereafter following. And if ye follow the contrary course, I take the Great GOD to record that this book shall one day be a witness betwixt me and you. (*Basilikon Doron*)

Thus, if you bury your wealth in the belly of the poor, thieves will not steal it, and no moth shall eat it, and you will find yourself a true son of the heavenly kingdom, where joy is and eternal and unchanging happiness dwells, amen. (*The Teachings*)

Bibliography:

1. Basarab, Neagoe. *Învăţăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Teodosie*, Litera Internaţional Bucureşti, 2001.

2. Buşulenga, Zoe Dumitrescu. *Valori şi echivalenţe umaniste, excurs critic şi comparatist*, Eminescu, Bucureşti, 1973. Print

3. Cartojan, N. *Istoria literaturii române vechi*, Minerva, Bucureşti, 1980. Print

4. Cohen, David. *Educaţia regală: Cum şi-au crescut regii britanici copiii din 1066 până în prezent*, Translated by Adriana Ionescu, ALL, Bucureşti, 2015. Print

5. James I. *Basilikon Doron or His Majesties Instructions to His Dearest Sonne, Henry the Prince*. Edinburgh, 1599, (epub) [http://www.stoics.com/basilikon_doron.html]. Web. January 2016.

6. Parris, B. "The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body: Sovereign sleep in Hamlet and Macbeth" in *Shakespeare Studies*, vol XL, Susan Zimmerman and Garrett Sullivan (eds.), Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012. Print

7. Zamfirescu, Dan. Expresia genială a vechii civilizaţii româneşti, in *Istorie şi Cultură I*, Roza Vânturilor, Bucureşti 2003. Print

BDD-A23219 © 2016 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-15 02:01:48 UTC)