

From the Twenty-First Century to the Middle Ages:  
The Mythical (De)construction  
of Stephen the Great of Moldavia

# **MEDIUM AEVUM QUOTIDIANUM**

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**SONDERBAND XXXII**

**FROM THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY  
TO THE MIDDLE AGES:  
THE MYTHICAL (DE)CONSTRUCTION OF  
STEPHEN THE GREAT OF MOLDAVIA**

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Krems 2016

GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER ABTEILUNG  
KULTUR UND WISSENSCHAFT DES AMTES  
DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

**niederösterreich kultur**

Cover illustration: Caricature of Stephen the Great  
counting his battles against the Ottomans (2010).

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– ISBN 978-3-901094-34-7

Herausgeber: Medium Aevum Quotidianum,  
Gesellschaft zur Erforschung der materiellen Kultur des Mittelalters, Kömermarkt 13,  
A-3500 Krems, Österreich. Für den Inhalt verantwortlich zeichnen die Autoren, ohne  
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Druck: KOPITU Ges. m. b. H., Wiedner Hauptstraße 8-10, A-1050 Wien.

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## **I Journey into the past: Flashbacks and nostalgia for Stephen the Great (1433 – July 2, 1504)**

Prince Stephen III of Moldavia is one of the most acclaimed Romanian historical characters, known as “Stephen the Great.” He ruled during the second half of the fifteenth century in the Principality of Moldavia, one of the three historical principalities which today form Romania. Stephen’s reign, policy, personality, artistic and military endeavours, were unique when compared to the reigns of his predecessors – a fact which elevated the prince on a pedestal already during his lifetime. As time progressed, Stephen’s place on his “pedestal” was strengthened by the fact that his direct and indirect successors were eager to mirror his actions, his character, and his reign altogether. This outcome gave birth to a distinction between Stephen as a historical prince and Stephen as a mythical prince. This study will discuss the transformation of the man into his myth, exploring the genesis, the reasons, and the mutations of this myth, including a survey of the twentieth- and twenty-first century image of the prince.

### ***July 2015***

Up to 10,000 people gathered on July 5, 2015 in the small settlement of Ștefan cel Mare (named after the great ruler Stephen) to celebrate the life, reign, and legacy of the prince. It became a tradition for the Ștefan cel Mare Town Hall to organise each year, at the beginning of July, a vast celebration with various activities such as art exhibits, book launches, concerts, all dedicated to the prince. “Just like every time, the prince himself will be among us, embodied by an actor,”<sup>1</sup> declared Mayor Mihai Moraru at the occasion of the 2015 festivities. The participants enjoyed the folkloric festivities, the “presence” of Stephen, but they also enjoyed the 20,000 stuffed

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<sup>1</sup> Sorin Saizu, “Praznicul lui Ștefan cel Mare” [The Feast of Stephen the Great] *Obiectiv Vaslui*, online <http://obiectivvaslui.ro/praznicul-lui-stefan-cel-mare/> (accessed January 25, 2016).

cabbage rolls prepared by the Town Hall, a delicacy Stephen himself would have also appreciated!

During the same time and in the same territory imbibed with the presence of the prince (the Vaslui county, a region where Stephen gained his most well-known military success), a different gathering was celebrating Stephen's life. The settlement of Muntenii de Jos organised their commemoration under the title "Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt – Cavaler al Creștinătății" (Saint Stephen the Great – The Champion of Christ), which also included a mass for the remembrance of national heroes by the feet of the equestrian statue of Stephen the Great.<sup>2</sup>

Each year in July, similar commemorations are organised especially throughout the historical province of Moldavia, the most important of which takes place at Putna Monastery, Stephen's main commission and burial place. Although the monks of Putna organise grand yearly festivities, the one of 2014 stood out as it was the 510<sup>th</sup> commemoration of Stephen's death.

### *July 2014*

The year 2014 coincided with the celebration of 510 years since the passing of the great prince, which resulted in various types of commemorations, some filled with piety, others replete with jubilation. Two events stand out, representing the different, sometimes opposite understandings that Stephen's image has received up until the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In 1871, the poet Mihai Eminescu encouraged Romanians to "transform Putna [Monastery] into the Jerusalem of the Romanian people and the tomb of Stephen into an altar of national consciousness."<sup>3</sup> Putna has become a site for pilgrimages and impressive celebrations, a fact proven by the over 2,000 people<sup>4</sup> who gathered at the monastery on July 2, 2014. An array of people arrived at the site of Stephen's tomb, ranging from clergy (the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, archbishops and bishops, accompanied by a large number of priests and deacons), administrative officials, representatives of the police and local administration, to ordinary people coming not only from Romania but also from the Republic of Moldova, many of them dressed in traditional costumes. An uncommon arrival was staged by the

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<sup>2</sup> Mihaela Zamescu, "Petrecere la umbra statuii lui Ștefan cel Mare" [Celebration under the statue of Stephen the Great] *Monitorul de Vaslui* online at <http://www.monitoruldevaslui.ro/2015/07/petrecere-la-umbra-statuii-lui-stefan-cel-mare-de-la-bacaoani.html> (accessed: January 25, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> This advice was part of Mihai Eminescu's speech at the first student congress in the honour of Stephen the Great which was organised at Putna, between the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> of August 1871. See also: *Înainte, împreună. Programul România Jună 2030* [Forward, together. The *România Jună* Programme 2030] (Bucharest: Visarta, 2012), 15-18 and 30-31.

<sup>4</sup> Neculai Roșca, "Peste 2000 de credincioși, ieri, la Putna, de ziua pomenirii voievodului Ștefan cel Mare" [Over 2,000 Christians were present yesterday at Putna at Stephen the Great's commemoration] *Obiectiv de Suceava* (local online newspaper), <http://www.obiectivdesuceava.ro/local/peste-2-000-de-credinciosi-ieri-la-putna-de-ziua-pomenirii-voievodului-stefan-cel-mare-galerie-foto/> (accessed January 25, 2016).



members of the Romanian Christian-Orthodox Student Association who, also dressed in national costumes, travelled by foot from the city of Suceava to the Putna Monastery.

Within the liturgy headed by His Holiness Teofan, the Metropolitan of Moldavia and Bucovina, and aided by the Patriarchal Choir, the sermon performed by His Holiness Teodosie, the Archbishop of Tomis, summed up the image of Stephen today:

Prince Stephen the Great is truly a man chosen by God, he is the good ruler, the brave, the one full of love and divine gifts, and in his 47 years of reign he believed, prayed, fasted, and defeated ... he respected his people and was careful not to have traitors sell his country. He loved his country, loved his people, loved faith, because he knew that without faith, neither his country nor his people would resist.<sup>5</sup>

The liturgy ended with military honours and a parade. After the military orchestra of Suceava had performed several military and heroic hymns, flower garlands were laid by Stephen's tomb, guarded by an always-lit candle. The entire day then ended with the members of the Romanian Christian-Orthodox Student Association who, late in the night, lit the so-called "torches of gratitude," surrounded the monastery, and then bowed by the tomb of the prince.<sup>6</sup>

The feeling of devotion for the saintly and heroic prince was present all throughout the celebrations of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July. One could easily notice the pedestal on which Stephen was metaphorically erected as a national hero and saint. However, a very different type of glorification was seen one month later, when a carnival was staged by the shore of the Black Sea in which Stephen the Great had the main role. Radu Mazăre, the then-mayor of the harbour city of Constanța is known to be a flamboyant character who used to engage in the organisation of costumed carnivals (similar to those in Rio de Janeiro) where he placed himself as the main character. He had already headed the carnival impersonating historical characters such as Suleyman the Magnificent, Emperor Caesar, or Louis XIV, but on August 2 he interpreted Stephen the Great of Moldavia. The carnival started with a procession of chariots throughout the city of Constanța, headed by the mayor's chariot which, on this occasion, was embellished with medieval Moldavian motifs: it bore on its front side the Moldavian symbol of the ox, while a fake horse was placed on its centre which the mayor mounted. Mazăre wore a red cloak, a golden garnished blouse with a large cross on it, a moustache and a wig with long hair, as well as an imposing crown. He

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<sup>5</sup> See the extract from the sermon in: Daniela Micuțariu, "Sfântul Voievod Ștefan cel Mare, sărbătorit ieri, la Putna, de mii de credincioși" [Saint Stephen the Great, celebrated yesterday at Putna by thousands of Christians] *Monitorul de Suceava* (local online newspaper), <http://www.monitorulsv.ro/Local/2014-07-03/Sfantul-Voievod-Stefan-cel-Mare-sarbatorit-ieri-la-Putna-de-mii-de-credinciosi>, (accessed January 25, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> For a full presentation of the events, see: Ibidem.

was accompanied by two acclaimed folk singers<sup>7</sup> impersonating Prince Stephen's mother and Vrâncioaia, the legendary old lady who was said to have helped Stephen win a battle.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the procession, the "actors" went up on a stage prepared for the reproduction of several episodes of the prince's life: the ultimatum given by Stephen's mother to return to the battle field and defeat the Ottomans; Stephen's meeting with Vrâncioaia, but also with Hermit Daniil; a scene from the Ottoman camp; a clash between the Ottomans and the Moldavians. The entire enactment ended with the mayor's words: "This was Stephen the Great."<sup>9</sup>

While the commemoration at Putna revealed the perception of Stephen from the point of view of religion and national identity, the so-called Carnival of Mamaia revealed his perception from a lay and a political point of view. Firstly, with the carnival, Stephen was deprived of his saintly aura and introduced in the realm of entertainment. Stephen ceased to be the receiver of prayers and gained a human side, among sparkly carnival chariots and club dancers. Moreover, he became the almost explicit model for the mayor of Constanța. Radu Mazăre stressed his high esteem for the ruler: "What happened on stage was more than pious ... I did not stay at the carnival dressed as Stephen the Great because he is a saint and I did not mean to associate him with what the rest of the carnival is about."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it was for the first time that the mayor did not remain on stage to watch the rest of the carnival. Moreover, the mayor's description of his interpretation betrays an affinity to the image of the great prince: "It was an uplifting situation for me, as leader ... It [the role] fits me, I must admit. If I had played a simple spahi, it would have probably been more difficult, but I was able to play a Romanian leader very well."<sup>11</sup> Additionally, describing his costume, he clarified that the crown did not bother him at all and that when he took it off, it "felt as if something was missing."<sup>12</sup> Needless to say, the mayor's words suggest that he identified himself with the image of the imposing ruler. As implied by the mayor's extravagant attitude and statements,

<sup>7</sup> Irina Loghin and Maria Cârnci. See: Cosmin Vaideanu, "Primarul Radu Mazăre l-a interpretat pe domnitorul Ștefan cel Mare la carnavalul din Mamaia" [Mayor Radu Mazăre interpreted Prince Stephen the Great at the Carnival of Mamaia], *Mediafax* news agency, <http://www.mediafax.ro/-social/primarul-radu-mazare-l-a-interpretat-pe-domnitorul-stefan-cel-mare-la-carnavalul-din-mamaia-foto-13026134> (accessed January 25, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> The legend which features Stephen the Great and Vrâncioaia is set on the background of a battle between the Moldavians and the Hungarians within the plains of Vrancea. Stephen was losing the battle and took shelter at Vrâncioaia's house who not only offered him food and a place to rest, but who also offered her seven sons to aid Stephen in winning the battle. In the end, Stephen did win the battle with the help of the Seven Brothers. See the versions of the legend in: *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în legendă* [Saint Stephen the Great. Portrait in legends] (Suceava: Mușatinii, 2003), 185-197 (Bătălia din munții Vrancei [The battle of the mountains of Vrancea]) and 231-234 (Povestea Vrancei [The story of Vrancea]).

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in: Vaideanu, "Primarul Radu Mazăre l-a interpretat pe domnitorul Ștefan cel Mare."

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem.

Stephen's crown could have been his own, just like Stephen's role as leader could have been his. Although Mazăre's entire staging was ostentatious and heavily criticised, the association of Mazăre with Stephen was a masked demonstration of power, done through the image of Stephen the Great – just like Stephen had used the image of iconic characters such as Constantine the Great or Alexander the Great, the leaders of today seem to use the iconic image of Stephen himself in order to enhance their own reputation.

Thus Stephen the Great is a model, not only for leaders, but for ordinary people living in the Romanian territory. Stephen became omnipotent, omnipresent, and received as many guises as one could imagine. His image was personified for as many reasons as:

- Advertising campaigns: such as that of the *ROM* Chocolate, which, coupled with the traditional *Pegas* bicycle brand, created the “Marea Unire Digitala” (The Great Digital Union) campaign which used the image of Stephen as promoter for a digital “union” between Romania and the Republic of Moldova (Fig. 1);
- Environmental causes: such as the placards used in the manifestations against the construction of the gold mine at Roșia Montană which hinted to Stephen the Great and his legacy (Fig. 2);
- Art: in 2010, a virtual museum (unavailable online anymore) was created with representations of Romanian cultural figures as caricatures made by over 1500 artists.<sup>13</sup> A representation of Stephen the Great was also exhibited which showed the prince counting his victories against the Ottomans (Fig. 3);
- Nationalistic causes: the rather extreme online publication *Ziarul Ștefan cel Mare* [Stephen the Great Newspaper] whose slogan is “Unity, justice, brotherhood”<sup>14</sup> states its purpose from the opening webpage: “A national, political, and independent publication which militates for the independence, suzerainty, integrity, and reunification of Romania.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See the presentation of the exhibition: “Mari români, cum nu i-ați mai văzut” [Great Romanians, as you have never seen them before], *Evenimentul Zilei* online, <http://www.evz.ro/mari-romani-cum-nu-i-ati-mai-vazut-897342.html#ixzz2w1uSzU9z> (accessed: January 26, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ziarulstefancelmare.ro/> (accessed: January 26, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*.



Fig. 1: One of the advertisements used for the “Marea unire digitala” campaign where one of Stephen’s most iconic images is used with the (marketing) purpose of uniting online the people of Romania and Moldova. The campaign was initiated by the *ROM* Chocolate brand and was aided by the *Pegas* bicycle – both of them imbued with national identity as they had both been produced for nearly half a century. Image source: <http://www.romautentic.ro/mareaunire/> (accessed: January 26, 2016).



Fig. 2: Placard used at a manifestation against the Roșia Montană Gold Corporation project. The text says: "Roșia Montană is not yours. It belongs to the followers of your followers." It hints to the fictional speech of Stephen the Great written by the playwright Barbu Ștefănescu-Delavrancea: "Moldavia did not belong to my forefathers, does not belong to me or to you, but belongs to your followers and to the followers of your followers." (Barbu Ștefănescu-Delavrancea, *Teatru* [Theatre] (Bucharest: Minerva, 1983), 53). Image source: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) (accessed: January 26, 2016)



Fig. 3: Caricature of Stephen the Great counting his battles against the Ottomans (2010).

Image source and ©: Flemming Aabech

<http://www.aabech.dk/index-s-ny.htm>: "Karikaturer af rumænske personligheder" 1 (accessed: January 26, 2016)

Stephen's modern impersonations are however much more meaningful in the Republic of Moldova, where both (pro-Romanian and pro-Moldovan) fractions created after its declaration of independence have used Stephen the Great as proof for their causes: as the conflicts between Stephen and the Wallachians were largely speculated and interpreted, the prince became the great Moldovan and the means of legitimisation for the newly-established state.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For a very concise presentation of the Moldovan version of Stephen's myth, see: Virgil Păslariuc, "Ștefan cel Mare în bătălia politică din Republica Moldova" [Stephen the Great within the political battle in the Republic of Moldova], *Historia* online version of the magazine [http://www.historia.ro/exclusiv\\_web/general/articol/stefan-cel-mare-batalia-politica-republica-moldova](http://www.historia.ro/exclusiv_web/general/articol/stefan-cel-mare-batalia-politica-republica-moldova), last time accessed: January 26, 2016.

Furthermore, probably the most accurate perceptions of Stephen the Great today are revealed by direct testimonies of everyday ordinary people. The twentieth-century guest books of Putna Monastery are filled with zealous remarks and comments,<sup>17</sup> as the twenty-first century comments continue in the same spirit of piety and national identity, also revealing the mythical dimension of Stephen the Great.<sup>18</sup> Most comments are prayers to Stephen ("Saint Hermit Daniil, Saint Stephen, ask the Lord to forgive us, Amen!" – Fig. 4), while others are thanking the prince for his legacy ("Thank you, Stephen the Great, for what you have given the Romanian nation" – Fig. 5).

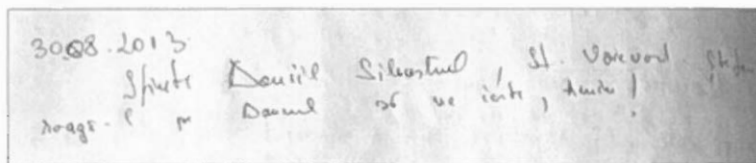


Fig. 4: "Saint Hermit Daniil, Saint Stephen, ask the Lord to forgive us, Amen!"  
Guest book of Putna (August 2013). Image source: Teodora Artimon

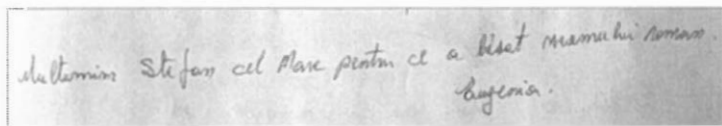


Fig. 5: "Thank you, Stephen the Great, for what you have given the Romanian nation."  
Guest book of Putna (September 2013). Image source: Teodora Artimon

Some of them are written in lengthier expressions of devotion, others in short but telling assertions. A man who signed himself as simply "Cristi" made a just as simple (but conclusive) affirmation: "Without Stephen, we would have been a vile weak nation." (Fig. 6) The visitor changed his mind and decided to lessen the dramatic comment by replacing the word "vile" with the word "weak."

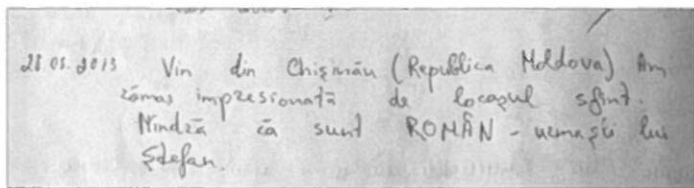


Fig. 6: "Without Stephen, we would have been a ~~vile~~ weak nation."  
Guest book of Putna (August 2013). Image source: Teodora Artimon

<sup>17</sup> See: Monah Alexie Cojocaru, "The guest books of the Putna Monastery. Between history and eternity," *Analele Putnei* 1 (2007), 181-212.

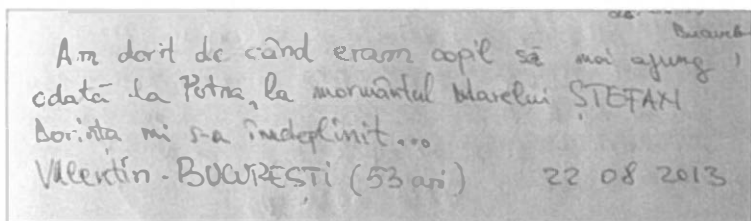
<sup>18</sup> All extracts which will be presented are dated August and September 2013 and were collected by the author of this study.

Many comments recall the pride of being the followers of Stephen (“... proud to be Romanian – a follower of Stephen” – Fig. 7), while others attest a lifelong desire to visit the burial place of the prince: “I wished, ever since I was a child, to return once more to Putna and to the tomb of the Great Stephen. My wish has finally come true...” (signed by Valentin, 53 years old [Fig. 8]).



21.08.2013 Vin din Chisinau (Republica Moldova) Am  
rămas impresionată de locul sfânt.  
Minda că sunt ROMÂN - urmașii lui  
Ștefan.

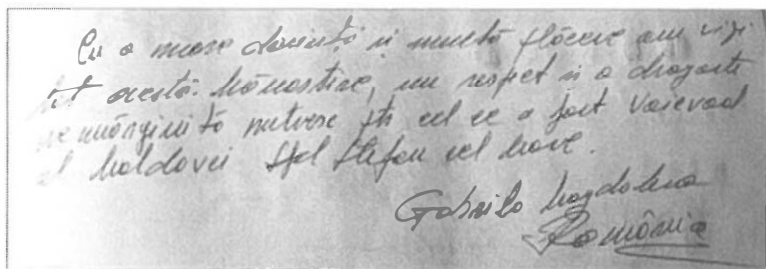
Fig. 7: “... proud to be Romanian – a follower of Stephen.” Guest book of Putna (August 2013)  
Image source: Teodora Artimon



Am dorit de când eram copil să mai ajung  
odată la Putna, la mormântul blavelui ȘTEFAN  
Dorința mi s-a îndeplinit...  
Valentin - BUCUREȘTI (53 ani) 22.08.2013

Fig. 8: “I wished, ever since I was a child, to return once more to Putna and to the tomb of the Great Stephen. My wish has finally come true...” Guest book of Putna (August 2013).  
Image source: Teodora Artimon

A type of sublime admiration is also attested in many comments: “I nourish a great respect and boundless love for the one who was the prince of Moldavia, Saint Stephen the Great” (Fig. 9).



Cu o mare dragoste și multă floare am vizitat  
acești domnitori, am respect și o dragoste  
neamănunțită pentru cel ce a fost Vasilevsul  
al Moldovei Ștefan cel mare.  
Gabriel Iordache  
România

Fig. 9: “... I nourish great respect and boundless love for the one who was the prince of Moldavia, Saint Stephen the Great.”  
Guest book of Putna (August 2013). Image source: Teodora Artimon



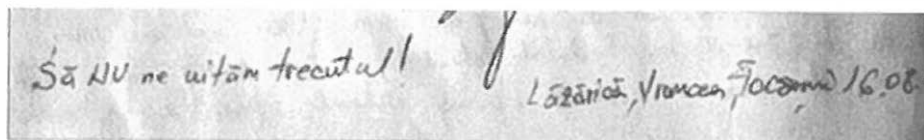


Fig. 10: "Let us NOT forget the past!" Guest book of Putna (August 2013).  
Image source: Teodora Artimon

Nevertheless, the most important aspect perceivable in the comments is the encouragement that the past should live on through Stephen's legacy ("Let us NOT forget the past!" (Fig. 10), as well as the explicit confirmation through the visitors' eyes that Stephen is still recognised as a genuine mythical hero.

There are two indicators of Stephen's mythical perception in the extracts of Putna. The first one is perceived through the verses of Adrian Păunescu's poem *Jurământ la Putna* [A Vow at Putna] which is often encountered in the comments ("Rise up, Stephen, and behold your sons/Because the times are hard/Forever faith to our Fatherland/We vow, Your Highness" – Fig. 11).

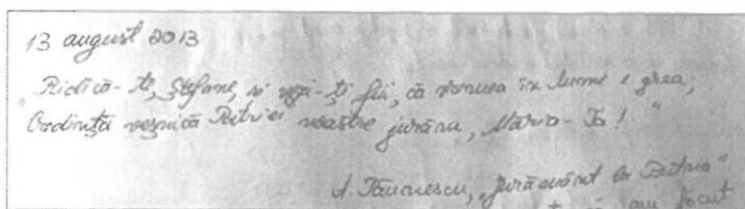


Fig. 11: "Rise up, Stephen, and behold your sons/Because the times are hard/Forever faith to our Fatherland/We vow, Your Highness."  
Guest book of Putna (August 2013). Image source: Teodora Artimon

The second one is observed through free-written comments which embody the entire sphere of Stephen's celebrated characteristics as hero-saint:

- Putna will always represent for me a true legend on the path of the prince we would like to follow." (Fig. 12)

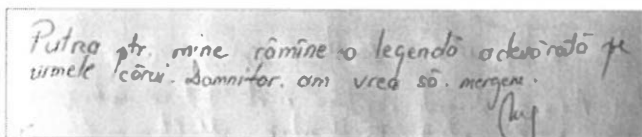


Fig. 12: "Putna will always represent for me a true legend on the path of whose prince we would like to follow." Guest book of Putna (August 2013). Image source: Teodora Artimon

- "Wonderful! We miss Prince Stephen the Great to unite our nation and guide it towards truth, faith, and prosperity. Thank you, Stephen!" (Fig. 13)

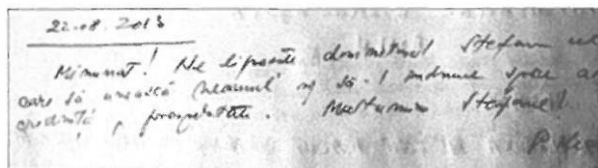


Fig. 13: "Wonderful! We miss Prince Stephen the Great to unite our nation and guide it towards the truth, faith, and prosperity. Thank you, Stephen!" Guest book of Putna (August 2013).

Image source: Teodora Artimon

- "A dead epoch? A controversial ruler? Not at all! He was a providential personality of the past, present, and future Romanian nation, joined in perfection. Saint Stephen is watching over us and is asking God to have the necessary patience and wisdom to be able to move the rock of faithlessness, oblivion, and indolence." (Fig. 14)

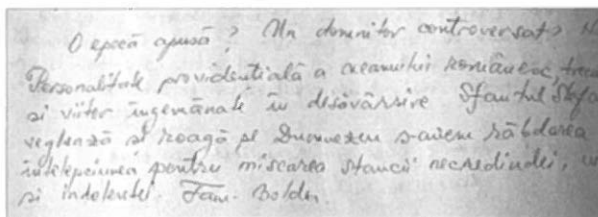


Fig. 14: "A dead epoch? A controversial ruler? Not at all! He was a providential personality of the past, present, and future Romanian nation, joined in perfection. Saint Stephen is watching over us and is asking God to have the necessary patience and wisdom to be able to move the rock of faithlessness, oblivion, and indolence." Guest book of Putna (August 2013). Image source: Teodora Artimon

- "... we cherish history for the immortality of our true heroes." (Fig. 15)

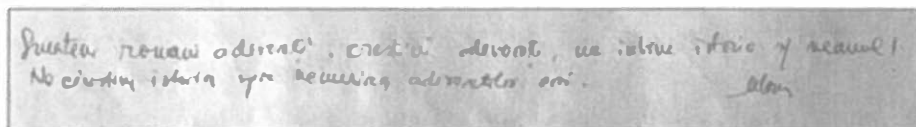


Fig. 15: "We are real Romanians, true Christians, we love our history and people. We cherish history for the immortality of our true heroes." Guest book of Putna (August 2013).

Image source: Teodora Artimon

- "Glory to the heroes of our nation! Saint Stephen the Great!" (Fig. 16)

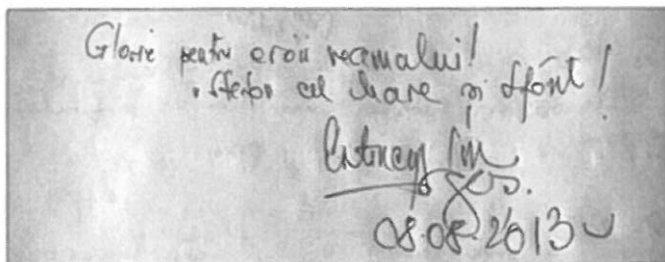


Fig. 16: "Glory to the heroes of our nation! Saint Stephen the Great!" Guest book of Putna (August 2013). Image source: Teodora Artimon

- "History is always calling us, in those holy places, in order to see who we were and how capable our forefathers were. God bless all those who laid a brick on the foundation of this country. Sleep in peace, Saint Stephen the Great!" (Fig. 17)

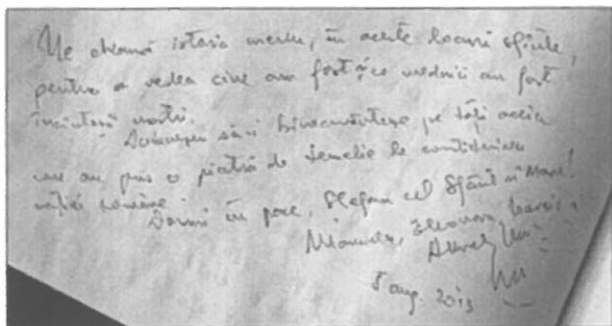


Fig. 17: "History is always calling us, in those holy places, in order to see who we were and how capable our forefathers were. God bless all those who laid a brick on the foundation of this country. Sleep in peace, Saint Stephen the Great!" Guest book of Putna (August 2013). Image source: Teodora Artimon

- "We came here looking for God and we enjoyed all the memories and heroic acts of Stephen the Great. We leave in hope that his [Stephen's] spirit still dwells in us and [we hope] that his memory will forever exist in my [our] minds and souls" (Fig. 18)

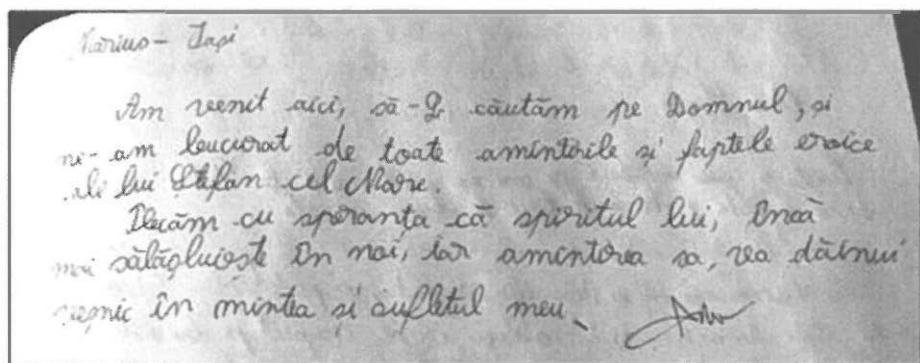


Fig. 18: "We came here looking for God and we enjoyed all the memories and heroic acts of Stephen the Great. We leave in hope that his [Stephen's] spirit still dwells in us and [we hope] that his memory will forever exist in my [our] minds and souls." Guest book of Putna (August 2013). Image source: Teodora Artimon

Stephen's spirit still dwells in the existence of today's Romanians. Whether he is the impersonation of the liberating saint, of the perfect hero, or of the genuine Romanian, one fact is certain: his myth has been blooming for over 500 years, not ceasing to gain new and outstanding attributes. The beginning of this mythical process will be explored in the following, focusing on Prince Stephen's and his immediate successors' methods to enhance his image. How can the mythical genesis for the character known today as "Stephen the Great of Moldavia" be characterised?

## II The man and his reign

Before being a myth, Stephen was a man. He was born sometime between 1437 and 1439<sup>19</sup> when, as Constantin C. Giurescu observed, Moldavia entered “the most beautiful period in its entire history.”<sup>20</sup> Although little is known about the ruler’s early years, it is certain that he was the son of Bogdan II and probably the grandson of Alexander the Good.<sup>21</sup> In 1450, his name appeared for the first time in an official document next to the title of *voivode/prince*: on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, Bogdan II associated his son to the throne in a document which vowed loyalty to the Hungarian Kingdom’s governor, John Hunyadi.<sup>22</sup> One year later, Bogdan II was murdered forcing Stephen to flee – his whereabouts between this date to the time of his enthronement are unclear. The soon-to-be prince might have taken refuge in either

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<sup>19</sup> The exact date of the ruler’s birth can only be estimated. Various dates have been proposed, the most probable being the 1437-1439 interval. See: Leon Simanschi, “Formarea personalității lui Ștefan cel Mare” [The Formation of Stephen the Great’s Personality], in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt – Portret în Istorie* [Saint Stephen the Great – Historical Portrait], ed. Maria Magdalena Székely and Ștefan S. Gorovei (Putna: Mușatinii, 2003), 36 and Ștefan S. Gorovei and Maria Magdalena Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior. O istorie a lui Ștefan cel Mare* [Princeps Omni Laude Maior. A History of Stephen the Great] (Putna: Mușatinii, 2005), 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria românilor din cele mai vechi timpuri până la moartea regelui Ferdinand* [The History of the Romanians from the Oldest Times to the Death of King Ferdinand] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2000), 139.

<sup>21</sup> The ascendance of Bogdan II is uncertain: he may have been either the son of Alexander the Good himself or the son of Alexander’s brother, therefore Alexander’s nephew. See: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni laude Maior*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Documente moldovenesti inainte de Ștefan cel Mare* [Moldavian documents dated before the time of Stephen the Great] II, ed. Mihai Costăchescu (Iași: Viața Românească, 1932), document no. 220; 751.

John Hunyadi's Transylvania, in Vlad the Impaler's Wallachia,<sup>23</sup> or even on the territory of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>24</sup>

Stephen's first act recorded after 1451 materialised in 1457 when he entered Moldavia with about 6,000 people gathered from Lower Moldavia and Wallachia.<sup>25</sup> Peter III Aron, the man behind the execution of Bogdan II and the current ruler of Moldavia, was the target of Stephen's army. The battle was fought on April 12 at Doljești and resulted in the dethronement of Peter Aron, who escaped to Poland. It was thus assumed that the enthronement of the new ruler, Stephen III, was made somewhere close to the battlefield, in a place known in chronicles as *Direptate*:

And Prince Stephen gathered the great and small boyars and together with the Metropolitan Teoctist and many monks, at the place called *Direptatea*; and they were all asked: do you all agree that he be your ruler? They all called out in one voice: May you rule for many years.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, the supposition that the coronation took place on a field rather than in a princely church, as required by liturgical tradition, is improbable.<sup>27</sup> It is more likely that the enthronement ceremony headed by the Metropolitan Teoctist I took place in the former capital of Moldavia, close to the princely palace of Siret, in the Church of the Holy Trinity.<sup>28</sup> Thus on April 12, 1457, Stephen inherited (or gained) an unbalanced and weak Moldavia. Since the death of Prince Alexander the Good in

<sup>23</sup> Only hypotheses can be formulated about the whereabouts of Stephen during this period, the one regarding Stephen's stay at the court of Vlad the Impaler being the most plausible one (argued by historians from A.D. Xenopol to Maria Magdalena Székely). See, for instance: Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Mușatinii* [The Mushatin Dynasty] (Chișinău: Columna, 1991), 56.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen's anti-Ottoman policies and alignment with the anti-Ottoman crusades, should not exclude a possible flee of young Stephen to the Ottoman Empire!

<sup>25</sup> "Prince Stephen, a son of Prince Bogdan, then came with a small army, with Wallachians, with the lower lands, having about 6000 people." See: "Cronica Moldo-Polonă" [The Moldavian-Polish Chronicle], in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică* [Saint Stephen the Great. Portraits in chronicles] (Suceava: Mușatinii, 2004), 22. (henceforth: "The Moldavian-Polish Chronicle").

<sup>26</sup> Grigore Ureche, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* [The Chronicle of Moldavia], ed. Dan Horia Mazilu (Bucharest: Gramar, 2009), 35 (henceforth: Ureche, *The Chronicle of Moldavia*). The account of Ureche is a later, seventeenth-century description. Contemporary sources describe the events in less detail: "Afterwards, the entire country was gathered with the Metropolitan Teoctist and he anointed him for the throne, on the River Siret, in a place named until today *Dereptate*." See: "Letopisețul de la Putna I" [The Chronicle of Putna I], in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 30. (henceforth: "The Chronicle of Putna I").

<sup>27</sup> The error of this hypothesis led to the misinterpretation and mistranslations of the chronicles. See: Constantin Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică a domnilor din Țara Românească și Moldova* [A critical chronology of the rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia] (Bucharest: Enciclopedica, 2001), 537-538.

<sup>28</sup> Dan Ioan Mureșan, "Teoctist I și ungerea domnească a lui Ștefan cel Mare" [Teoctist I and the princely anointment of Stephen the Great], in *România în Europa Medievală: între orientul bizantin și occidentul latin* [Romanians in Medieval Europe: Between the Byzantine East and the Latin West] (Brăila: Istros, 2008), esp. 341-343.

1432, the principality had gone through a hectic period which weakened authority. The new ruler managed to guide the principality into a thriving period, leaving behind the politically unstable times marked by a series of rapidly-changing reigns approved only by noble parties.<sup>29</sup> Seeking to disperse boyar power, Stephen employed a series of methods (including large executions) meant to suppress their control – as the Polish Jan Długosz described, “through his harshness and righteousness, leaving no crime unpunished, he made them [the boyars] obey all his orders.”<sup>30</sup>

A simple division of Stephen’s reign was made by the historians Maria Magdalena Székely and Ștefan S. Gorovei.<sup>31</sup> It outlines three time slots: the 1457-1473 period, corresponding to the beginning and the stabilisation of the reign; the *Great Policy* (1473-1486), referring to the period of highest economical and military growth; and the *Great Prayer* (1486-1504), relating to the time of the numerous church and monastic commissions.

## Beginnings

Three events should be highlighted when discussing the first period: the conquest of the Chilia fortress, the conflict with the Hungarians at Baia, and the beginning of the conflict with the Wallachian prince.

Stephen the Great launched his reign with a series of military interventions in Hungarian territory. Following his defeat, Peter Aron fled to Poland and then to the Hungarian Kingdom, where Stephen entered to capture him, as he still represented a threat to his throne.<sup>32</sup> Although Peter Aron could not be captured, Stephen did not cease his attacks on the Hungarians. The boldest offensive took place in 1462 when the prince tried to conquer the fortress of Chilia, which was at the time under

<sup>29</sup> For more on the political situation surrounding the coronation of Stephen the Great, see: Leon Șimanschi and Dumitru Agache, “Înscăunarea lui Ștefan cel Mare: preliminarii și consecințe (1450-1460)” [The Enthronement of Stephen the Great: Preliminaries and Consequences (1450-1460)], in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în istorie* [Saint Stephen the Great. Historical Portrait] (Suceava: Mușatinii, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> *Culegere de documente privind istoria românilor. Secolele XIV-XVI* [Collection of Documents regarding the History of the Romanians. Fourteenth-Sixteenth Centuries], ed. Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu and Liliana Trofin (Bucharest: Editura Universității București, 2006), 180. (henceforth: *Culegere de documente privind istoria românilor*).

<sup>31</sup> The two historians outlined this periodisation in their most recent monograph of Stephen the Great. See: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Aron sought help at the court of the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus, where he was campaigning for the king’s aid to support him regain the Moldavian throne. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 1461 however, Stephen tried a failed attack on Peter in Transylvania. See: “Letopisețul de la Putna II” [The Chronicle of Putna II], in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 33. (henceforth: “The Chronicle of Putna II”).

Hungarian and Wallachian control.<sup>33</sup> The attack was unsuccessful and the ruler's ankle was badly wounded<sup>34</sup> – a wound which would affect his health throughout his entire life.<sup>35</sup> The successful conquest of the Chilia fortress was possible only three years later, an event which angered the Hungarian king, Matthias Corvinus, who “could not stand to be failed and disregarded by Stephen.”<sup>36</sup> As a consequence, Matthias entered Moldavia aiming to dethrone Stephen and give the reign back to Peter Aron. In December 1467, the two armies clashed by the town of Baia. While both sides were severely damaged, Stephen seems to have won the battle,<sup>37</sup> while King Matthias was injured in the back by an arrow and forced to withdraw.<sup>38</sup> While the Battle of Baia ended most of the Moldavian-Hungarian dissensions, Stephen did not abandon the idea of capturing Peter Aron. He seems to have created a setup<sup>39</sup> for Peter in order to attract him back to Moldavia. Once he returned to Moldavia, he was “welcomed” by Stephen's army and Bogdan II's death was avenged with his decapitation.

The conflict with the Wallachian prince started during the first part of Stephen reign, in 1469, and lasted for over ten years. Radu the Fair, the ruler of Wallachia, was an ally of the Ottoman Empire – in a fact which Stephen disliked. Stephen wanted to replace Radu with a ruler with whom he would collaborate in his anti-Ottoman endeavours, and to eventually transform Wallachia into a “Moldavian bastion.”<sup>40</sup> The competition for the seat of Wallachia was full of twists as Radu the Fair was dethroned several times and replaced with Basarab Laiotă, the ruler appointed by Stephen. As a matter of fact, the intervention of Stephen in Wallachia was so intense that the Wallachian chronicle, *Letopisețul Cantacuzinesc*, recorded

<sup>33</sup> “In the month of July, the 22<sup>nd</sup> day, Prince Stephen came in front of Chilia and could not conquer it.” See: “Cronica Moldo-Polonă” [The Moldavian-Polish Chronicle], in Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. *Portret în cronică* [Saint Stephen the Great. Portraits in chronicles] (Suceava: Mușatinii, 2004), 22. (henceforth: “The Moldavian-German Chronicle”).

<sup>34</sup> “...he was shot on his left ankle and then he left Chilia.” See: Ibidem.

<sup>35</sup> Ironically, in a cyclic symbolism, one might argue that the wound gained in the first important battle led by Stephen the Great was also the wound which eventually led to his death.

<sup>36</sup> Jan Długosz about the battle of Baia in *Culegere de documente privind istoria românilor*, 181.

<sup>37</sup> Many debates have been raised concerning the outcome of the battle of Baia with some historians arguing that the Moldavians won the battle and others arguing that the Hungarians did. See the history of the debates in: Alexandru Simon, “Valahii la Baia. Regatul Ungariei, Domnia Moldovei și Imperiul Otoman în 1467 (The Wallachs in Baia. The Kingdom of Hungary, the Rule of Moldavia and the Ottoman Empire in 1467),” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie “A.D. Xenopol”* 46 (2009): 127-150.

<sup>38</sup> “Then King Matthias was shot by two arrows which he took with him out of the country.” See: “The Moldavian-German Chronicle,” 23.

<sup>39</sup> Although the theory is still under debate, it seems that some of Stephen's boyars, pretending that they were not satisfied with the new ruler, wrote a fake letter to Peter Aron, asking him to return and to retake his righteous place as the prince of Moldavia. See: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 74.

<sup>40</sup> See: Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român* [An Honest History of the Romanians] (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic Gold, 2010), 110.



that “the old Stephen of the Moldavian country ... stood here in the country [Wallachia] and ruled for sixteen years.”<sup>41</sup>

### *Conflicts*

During the period described as the *Great Policy*, the conflict with Radu the Fair and Wallachia continued. Stephen the Great entered Wallachia accompanied by Basarab Laiotă and provoked the military reply of Radu in 1473. The Wallachian was defeated and lost his throne, as well as his wife and daughter<sup>42</sup> who were taken into Moldavian captivity, but he returned one month later and removed Basarab Laiotă from his seat. Nevertheless, Stephen defeated Radu once more, although the latter was aided by an Ottoman army comprised of about 19,000 soldiers.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, this ever-lasting enthronement-dethronement game with Radu the Fair<sup>44</sup> fades away when compared to the events most eloquently identified with the *Great Policy* period: Moldavia's relationship with the Ottoman Empire.

In 1474, Basarab Laiotă, once more the prince of Wallachia, allied with the Ottomans and broke his fidelity to Stephen. Laiotă, like most Wallachian rulers,<sup>45</sup> understood that in order to keep the seat of the principality he had to concede to the sultan, as such a small piece of land as Wallachia could not rival the Ottoman Empire. Seemingly, Stephen was the only one who believed that Wallachia could withstand the Ottoman power and this resulted in one of the main reasons for the beginning of the Ottoman-Moldavian conflict. There were several crucial causes which animated Sultan Mehmed II's anger towards the Moldavia: Stephen the Great's endless interference in Wallachia; his refusal to pay Moldavia's tribute to the Ottoman Empire; and the conquest of the Chilia fortress, the port by the Danube, which the Ottomans wanted attached to their empire.<sup>46</sup> The tension between the

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<sup>41</sup> *Cronicarii munteni* [Wallachian Chroniclers] I, ed. Mihail Gregorian (Bucharest: Minerva, 1984), 55.

<sup>42</sup> Radu's daughter, Maria Voichita, was thus a prisoner at the Court of Suceava, only to later on become Stephen's third wife, the mother of the heir to the throne, Bogdan III.

<sup>43</sup> The Moldavian-German Chronicle recalls that Radu's army was formed of 13,000 Ottomans and 6,000 Wallachians. See: “The Moldavian-German Chronicle,” 24.

<sup>44</sup> All contemporary chronicles present the conflict between Stephen the Great and Radu the Fair. The most detailed however is “The Moldavian-German Chronicle.” See the entire entry on this conflict in: Ibidem, 24-25.

<sup>45</sup> Basarab Laiotă was not the only one whom Stephen appointed prince of Wallachia but who politically betrayed him by allying with the Ottoman Empire. See: Ileana Cazan and Eugen Denize, *Marile puteri și spațiul românesc în secolele XV-XVI* [The Great Powers and the Romanian Space in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries] (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2001), 73-74.

<sup>46</sup> These reasons were the engine for the beginning of the war between Moldavia and the Ottoman Empire. After the defeat of the Wallachian Prince Radu the Fair, the Sultan, already tired of Stephen's “misbehaviour,” reacted quickly and violently. For a thorough explanation of the factors involved in the Ottoman-Moldavian conflict, see: Ileana Cazan and Eugen Denize, *Marile*

Empire and Moldavia grew, but before an attack on Stephen's principality, the sultan gave him an ultimatum to pay his tribute. Aşık Paşazade recalled how

the sultan, with the help of Allah almighty, after he subdued the vilayets of all the unfaithful beys, he called the ruler of Moldavia to the Porte and told him: "This time you will bring yourself the tribute, just like the tribute from the Wallachian vilayet is brought, and you will be with us just like the bey of Wallachia is, so that we know in which way you live with us." With these words the unfaithful was summoned, but he did not come and did not even take account of them [the sultan's words].<sup>47</sup>

Unsurprisingly, as Stephen neglected the sultan's ultimatum, the attack on Moldavia was inevitable. It came in January 1475. The Ottoman army, formed of about 120,000 people as Maciej Strykowski estimated, plus a Wallachian army, headed by Paşa Suleyman, was sent towards Moldavia in the winter of 1474. Based on the same estimation of Strykowski, Stephen had an army of around 40,000 people, to which an uncertain number of Polish soldiers were added together with 5,000 Szeklers and 1,800 Hungarians sent by King Matthias.<sup>48</sup> The numbers of the participants to the battle must have been highly exaggerated on both sides but it is nonetheless certain that there was a significant discrepancy between the two military forces. Being outnumbered, Stephen burnt the southern part of Moldavia thus destroying all sources of subsistence.<sup>49</sup> It was under these circumstances that the Ottoman army, tired and hungry,<sup>50</sup> entered Stephen's principality in February 1475. The prince made sure that

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*puteri și spațiul românesc în secolele XV-XVI [The Great Powers and the Romanian Space in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries]* (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 200), 70-74.

<sup>47</sup> Aşık Paşa Zade in Eugen Denize, *Românii între Leu și Semilună. Relațiile turco-venețiene și influența lor asupra spațiului românesc. Secolele XV-XVI* [The Romanians between the Lion and the Crescent Moon. The Ottoman-Venetian Relations and their Influence on the Romanian Space. Fifteenth-Sixteenth Centuries] (Târgoviște: Căratea de Scaun, 2009), 134.

<sup>48</sup> The numbers of the soldiers were estimated by Maciej Strykowski. See: Maciej Strykowski, "Kronika Polska," in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 194.

<sup>49</sup> In the context of the conflict between the Ottoman Empire and the Danubian Principalities, Florin Constantiniu describes what he calls a medieval "asymmetric conflict," which refers to the clash between two numerically unequal armies. Constantiniu discusses the strategy used by the principalities in this type of conflict – always a defensive strategy, focused on a tactic meant to discourage the Ottoman conquest. This tactic implied avoiding an open-field battle and preventing the enemy from using its numerical and technical superiority. A demographical and economical void would be created by evacuating the population and destroying/burning the crops and houses located on the path of the enemies. The military groups that would detach from the main army in search for food, would be hit by surprise by the Vlach. This harassment of the enemy therefore not simply meant its weakening by not giving them access to food and shelter, but also meant the demoralisation of the people who would feel insecure. See more: Florin Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român* [An Honest History of the Romanians] (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic Gold, 2010), 87-93.

<sup>50</sup> "The Islamic army was weak because it had gone through the expedition against Alexandria." See: Mehmed Neşri, in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 264. See also: Székely and Gorovei, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 113.

the battle would not take place in an open field, but in a territory that would advantage him. The valley of the Bârlad River, close to the fortress of Vaslui, was a narrow space where the Ottoman army could not unfold. The benefits of the site were enhanced by the bad weather conditions which had a visible impact on the Ottoman army.<sup>51</sup> The armies collided there, Stephen himself entering the battle<sup>52</sup> as the Ottomans were flanked within the valley. They seem to have been chased from the valley, as sources attest that a significant number of Ottoman soldiers died while many others were taken prisoners:

... but there were those [of the Ottoman army] who were not used to fighting and got tired... They were looking for the chance to run away, and when they had the opportunity, they scattered away and they were what caused the defeat. Leaving the battle and the slaughter, they ran and they did not look back. There was no way to do that [to look back]. They stepped on each other as if they were a herd of sheep and the brave ones could not fight anymore. Suleyman Paşa could not gather in one place the soldiers who were spreading away...<sup>53</sup>

The battle, known as the Battle of Vaslui, was a resonating success often reflected in the voices of the time, as well as in Stephen the Great's memorable letter to the Western leaders which described the confrontation and asked for help in the imminent reply of the Ottomans – a help which never came.

Although the Moldavians were successful at Vaslui and “took the sword in their hands and, with the help of God, went over them, stepped on them [the Ottomans] and took them through their spears,”<sup>54</sup> the Ottoman reply came promptly. This time, the sultan himself, Mehmed II, was leading the armies. The Ottomans had conquered earlier in the year the Khanate of Crimea, so at the time of the attack on Moldavia, in July 1476, the sultan had additional help from the Tartars, who attacked Moldavia from the North, while he was charging from the South.<sup>55</sup> While Mehmed advanced with his numerous army<sup>56</sup> – among whom, also the men of Laiotă Basarab<sup>57</sup>

<sup>51</sup> “... it was a very difficult winter. Because of the cold, the army could not resist and suffered a defeat.” See: Mehmed Neşri, in *Ştefan cel Mare şi Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 264.

<sup>52</sup> “... all the formations ... were defeated by the Turks and a great danger was threatening them, until Stephen jumped himself in the middle of the Turks.” See: Jan Długosz, “Historia Polonica,” in *Ştefan cel Mare şi Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 164.

<sup>53</sup> The Ottoman chronicler Tevârih-i Ali-i Osman on the Battle of Vaslui in *Culegere de documente privind istoria românilor*, ed. Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu and Liliana Trofin, 183.

<sup>54</sup> From the Letter of Stephen to the Christian rulers after the Vaslui victory (25 January 1475) in *Istoria României în texte* [The Romanian History in Texts], ed. Bogdan Murgescu (Bucharest: Corint, 2001), 136.

<sup>55</sup> “But Stephen was not frightened by these two powerful enemies, meaning the Tartars and the Turks, who, with remarkable armies, raided over Moldavia almost at the same time.” See: Jan Długosz, “Historia Polonica,” 169-170.

<sup>56</sup> The Moldavian-German Chronicle estimated that about 200,000 men comprised the Sultan's army, although the number may be exaggerated. “The Moldavian-German Chronicle,” 26.

<sup>57</sup> “... the Turkish tsar himself, named Mehmed-beg, came with all his power together with Prince Basarab.” See: “Letopiseţul anonim al Moldovei” [The Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia], in

– Stephen faced the discontent of his own men who were eager to go back North to their lands and defend their households against the Tartar attack. Consequently, Stephen allowed his men to return to their homes for two weeks. This led to the unfortunate outcome that at the time of the clash with the Ottoman army, the prince stood without the largest part of his army.<sup>58</sup> The battle was fought at a site called Valea Albă (Războieni), and Stephen with his few men was defeated. Stephen retreated and the sultan headed towards the seat of Moldavia, Suceava, but could not conquer it and eventually returned to Istanbul.<sup>59</sup> Altogether, the Battle of Valea Albă was a military failure for Moldavia, but at the same time it was a political success, because the prince remained on his seat and the principality was not transformed into a *paşalîc*.<sup>60</sup>

The last significant event which took place during the so-called *Great Policy* period was the conquest of Stephen's two most-cherished fortresses: Chilia and Cetatea Albă (Akkerman). The two fortresses, essential trading points in the Black Sea region, were what may be called the "gates and the keys"<sup>61</sup> of Western trading into the East. Furthermore, they were the only missing pieces for the Ottoman Empire to close the Black Sea and have full control over it. Sultan Bayezid II eventually made the decisive move and seized the fortresses.<sup>62</sup> Chilia was conquered after a ten-day siege in July 1484 and Cetatea Albă was conquered shortly afterwards, in August.<sup>63</sup>

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*Ştefan cel Mare şi Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 17. (henceforth: "Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia").

<sup>58</sup> Stephen allowed his men to go back and defend their homes for 15 days after which they were to return to the battlefield. Therefore, at the time of the battle, he was only accompanied by his boyar army, formed of about 10.000 to 12.000 men. See: Gorovei and Székely, *Principes Omni laude Maior*, 154.

<sup>59</sup> "Then the Turks killed all the army of Prince Stephen ... so that he escaped with a few men. And they burnt almost the entire country but they could not conquer any fortress." See: "The Moldavian-German Chronicle," 26.

<sup>60</sup> Florin Constantiniu shows the Battle of Valea Albă as a perfect example for the asymmetric military conflict. A conflict involving an expedition of the Sultan with a numerous army in which the Ottomans were victorious, but could not take advantage of its undoubted superiority to gain a political success: the dethronement of Stephen the Great. See: Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, 88-89 and 112.

<sup>61</sup> Gorovei and Székely, *Principes Omni Laude Maior*, 222.

<sup>62</sup> One of the most thorough descriptions of the campaign, which also incorporates the Ottoman preparations, was written by Mevlâna Mehmed Neşri. See in: *Ştefan cel Mare şi Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 258-260. Nevertheless, the account written by Ibn Kemal in his *Tevârih-Âl-i Osman. VIII. Defter* is even more detailed than that of Mehmed Neşri. See its presentation in: Nagy Pienaru, Ovidiu Cristea, "Campania otomană din 1484. Mărturia lui Ibn Kemal – The Ottoman Campaign in Moldavia (1484). Ibn Kemal's Testimony," *Analele Putnei I* (2012): 43-58.

<sup>63</sup> Moreover, during this one-month period, Stephen seemed to have lost not only Chilia and Akkerman, but up to six ports by the Black Sea (Chilia, Licostomo, Cetatea Albă, Cetatea Neagră, Sevastopole and Ilice), which made the economical, military and, quite importantly, the psychological impact on the prince even greater. See details on the conquest and its

The conquest had a strong impact on Stephen's transition from the *Great Policy* period to the *Great Prayer* period, as the two fortresses had a unique emotional relevance for him. The results of the Ottoman campaign were disastrous: Chilia and Akkerman were conquered along with the entire Moldavian coast, allowing half of the urban Moldavian population to fall under Ottoman occupation.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, returning to Suceava after the unfortunate events, the court did not resume its duties until two years later at the end of the summer of 1486,<sup>65</sup> leading to speculation that the prince had lost his throne.<sup>66</sup> The prince however remained on his throne and made efforts to regain stability and even re-conquer the lost fortresses.<sup>67</sup> When he eventually realised that his efforts were ineffective, he lost his long-lasting "obsession"<sup>68</sup> for them and redirected his energy towards internal issues and grand church and dynastic-building programmes. This was the positive aspect of losing the fortresses: it opened the path towards new initiatives, leading to the rupture between the *Great Policy* and *Great Prayer* period.<sup>69</sup>

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consequences in: Alexandru Simon, "Naples, Milan and the Moldavian Question in the Summer of 1484: New Documents," *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 24 (2008): 177-196.

<sup>64</sup> Alexandru Simon, "Chilia și Cetatea Albă în vara anului 1484. Noi documente din arhivele italiene" (Naples, Milan and the Moldavian Question in the Summer of 1484: New Italian Documents), *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 26 (2008): 178.

<sup>65</sup> Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 221.

<sup>66</sup> Simon, "Naples, Milan and the Moldavian Question in the Summer of 1484: new Documents," 179 and 191.

<sup>67</sup> There are at least two documents which stand as proof for this. Firstly, Giovanni Dario documented that after the conflict, Stephen had returned to Suceava and caused numerous disorders (see: *22 Dispacci da Constantinopoli al doge Giovanni Mocenigo*, ed. Giuseppe Calo and Alvise Zorzi (Venice: Corbo e Fiore, 1992), 174), suggesting that the prince was trying to re-conquer lost territories. Secondly, a Venetian report from the Ottoman Empire reproduced in May 1485 a dialogue between a Moldavian ambassador to the Porte and a Pasha, which took place in Istanbul after the taking of Chilia and Akkerman. Stephen transmitted through his ambassador the information that he would refuse to pay the tribute to the Empire until he was returned the two fortresses which were rightfully his. The Ottoman refused, arguing that "quelle duy terre stavano meglio in mano del Gran Turcho" ("...the two cities were better in the hands of the Great Turk.") See: Nagy Pienaru, "Moldova și Imperiul Otoman. Solia lui Ștefan cel Mare din 1485" [Moldavia and the Ottoman Empire. The messenger of Stephen the Great from 1485], in *Putna. Ctitori ei și lumea lor* [Putna. Its ktetors and their world] (Bucharest: Oscar Print, 2011), 85 (see the entire text: 85-86).

<sup>68</sup> Ștefan Andreescu actually used the word "obsession" when describing Stephen's affection for the fortresses. Ștefan Andreescu, "Cronica lui Ștefan cel Mare: înțelesurile unei întreruperi" [The Chronicle of Stephen the Great: the meanings of an interruption], in *Istoria românilor: cronicari, misionari, ctitori (sec. XV-XVII)* [The history of the Romanians: chroniclers, missionaries, ktetors (fifteenth-seventeenth centuries)] (Bucharest: Universităţii, 1997), 126. For more on this "obsession" and its consequences, see also: Ovidiu Pecican, *Sânge și trandafiri. Cultură ero(t)ică în epoca ștefaniană* [Blood and Roses. (H)ero(t)ic Culture in the Era of Stephen the Great] (Chișinău: Cartier Istoric, 2005), 101-102.

<sup>69</sup> A second theory concerning the rupture between the two periods highlights Stephen's fall of his horse in 1486. See: Ștefan S. Gorovei, "Gesta Dei per Stephanum Voievodam," in *Ștefan cel*

## Art and spirituality

The period of the *Great Prayer*, as its name indicates, is marked by spiritual-related activity rather than by military enterprises. Of course, the military aspect of the reign was present in events such as the Battle of Codrîi Cozminului: the successor of Casimir IV, John Albert, was planning Stephen's dethronement and his replacement with his younger brother, Sigismund. Accordingly, after a period filled with pressure, John Albert attacked Moldavia in 1497. The battle ended with Stephen's victory and a peace treaty was signed with Poland two years later.<sup>70</sup>

Whereas the first thirty years of Stephen's reign were characterised on an artistic level by mostly building fortresses and fortifications, and by reconstructing some of the princely courts, the last twenty years of the reign were substantially linked to a programme focused on building churches and monasteries, by refining a unique architectural style and a Byzantine-based iconography. The most important edifice for Stephen was however built before the *Great Prayer* period: the Putna Monastery. The monastery was erected between 1466 and 1469<sup>71</sup> and although it was destroyed in a fire and reconstructed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it still holds the most relevant items of Stephen's dynastic image construction: the tomb of Stephen plus eleven other tombs belonging to members of his family, which all survived the fire. Putna was built as a necropolis for the princely family. Based on the richness of the edifice and the symbols of power which adorned the tombs and their surroundings, it has been suggested that this site was meant to be a recreation of historical memory, a *lieu de memoire*.<sup>72</sup>

Although it is questionable if, as legends say, Stephen built a church after each military victory, it is known that between 1487 and 1504 almost 30 churches and monasteries were built at the prince's order, plus several others commissioned by his boyars.<sup>73</sup> During this period, monastic art was enlivened. Architecturally, the so-called *Moldavian style* was established, which was a mixture of Byzantine and Gothic models, where the Byzantine influence was reflected in the spatiality of the edifices, while the Gothic was visible in the construction techniques and decorative elements.

Iconographically, the style was a junction between the Paleologian and South-Danubian artistic influences and, as Vasile Drăguț explained, it is characterised by an

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*Mare și Sfânt. Atlet al credinței creștine* [Saint Stephen the Great. Champion of the Christian Faith] (Suceava: Mușatinii, 2004), 410-412.

<sup>70</sup> See a detailed description of the Battle of Codrîi Cozminului in: Gorovei and Székely, *Principeș Omni Laude Maior*, 319-340.

<sup>71</sup> Vasile Drăguț, *Dicționar enciclopedic de artă medievală românească* [Encyclopedic Dictionary of Romanian Medieval Art] (Bucharest: Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1976), 250.

<sup>72</sup> Maria Magdalena Székely elaborates on the idea of Putna as a *lieu de memoire* in her article "Le Monastère de Poutna – lieu de mémoire," in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Atlet al credinței creștine* [Saint Stephen the Great. Champion of the Christian Faith] (Suceava: Mușatinii, 2004), 37-71.

<sup>73</sup> Vasile Drăguț, *Pictura murală din Moldova. Secolele XV-XVI* [Mural Painting in Moldavia. Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries] (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1982), 11.

austere and grave sense of face expressions, by simple and clear compositions, and by warm, soft, and non-exuberant chromatics.<sup>74</sup> Moldavian painting reached its maturity with the age of Stephen the Great, not only from a stylistic point of view, but also from a communicational point of view. Certain aspects of the iconographical programme were designed to transmit not only religious messages, but also particular political messages, highlighting the princely authority and sometimes the animosity with the enemies of the principality. This is the case of the Mounted Procession of the Holy Cross, the mural scene commissioned at the Pătrăuți Monastery. The Mounted Procession presents an army of military saints led by the Archangel Michael and Constantine the Great after the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. The unique painting represents the establishment of both the Byzantine Empire and Christianity. The commission of this image symbolically suggests both the political and dynastic aspirations of the Moldavian ruler as a visual link between the desired “empire” of Stephen and the Empire of Constantine I.<sup>75</sup>

Including a variety of local elements, the disposition and conception of the iconography was based on the Greek *Ermeneia*.<sup>76</sup> Thus the superior part of the church carried representations of the Divine Church with Christ Pantocrator placed in the central dome, while the lower part was dedicated to Biblical stories and military saints – interestingly, the votive image of the ruler and his family was represented within the space reserved to military saints. All edifices commissioned by Stephen were decorated with this type of iconography, leading Moldavian medieval painting to its peak. Some of the most important churches and monasteries are the Pătrăuți Monastery, Milișăuți Monastery, St. George Church of Hârlău, Voroneț Monastery, St. Elijah Church in Suceava, St. Michael Church at Războieni, or Bălinești Monastery.

### “Love”

Stephen the Great married three times and each marriage was replete with political and ideological aspirations. His first wife was Evdokia of Kiev, whom he married in 1463.<sup>77</sup> Her father was the cousin of Casimir IV, therefore she descended from the family of the great dukes of Lithuania. The marriage alliance revealed the political orientation of Stephen at the time, as well as his affiliation with Poland. The marriage with Evdokia only lasted four years, as the princess died in 1467.

<sup>74</sup> Vasile Drăguț, *Dicționar enciclopedic de artă medievală românească*, 232.

<sup>75</sup> Vasile Drăguț also suggested another interpretation of the mural. The Mounted Procession may also refer to the crusade-like battles fought by Stephen, thus suggesting his desire of political independence. See: Vasile Drăguț, *Pictura murală din Moldova*, 12-13.

<sup>76</sup> See: Paul Hetherington, *The "Painter's Manual" of Dionysius of Fournà* (London: Sagittarius Press, 1974).

<sup>77</sup> “In the year 6971 [1463], June 5th, he made Evdokia his wife, the sister of the tsar of Kiev.” See: “The Chronicle of Putna I,” 30.

Nevertheless, during this short period of time, she gifted her husband with a strategic alliance with Poland.<sup>78</sup>

The choice of Stephen's second wife suggests both the prince's political orientation and some of his dynastic aspirations. In 1472, he married Maria Assen Palaiologos of the Principality of Mangup in the Crimean Peninsula, the last extant Byzantine territory during Stephen's reign.<sup>79</sup> The name of the princess shows her connection to both the Byzantine and the Bulgarian Empires – she was a descendant of the Byzantine Palaiologian family and the Bulgarian Assenid dynasty.<sup>80</sup> Corina Teodor suggests three of Stephen's reasons for choosing Maria as wife. The first reason was political, in accordance with his anti-Ottoman policies: in a moment when new anti-Ottoman plans were being projected in Europe, having the Crimean peninsula on the Christian/Moldavian side was a great advantage. The second reason was commercial: the space which encompassed the Peninsula witnessed an ample international trade which Moldavian princes were well aware of ever since the end of the fourteenth century. The third reason was ideological: as the fall of Constantinople opened the door for a next emperor who would inherit the Byzantine Empire's legacy, both Ottomans and Christians were eager to gain this new role. Stephen was no exception and the marriage to a Byzantine-descending princess was a symbolic step towards accomplishing this.<sup>81</sup>

The prince's third wife, whom he married six months after Maria of Mangup had died, was Maria Voichița, the daughter of the Wallachian prince Radu the Fair. Unmistakably, Stephen married the second Maria because of his desire to bring Wallachia under Moldavian ideological regulation and to integrate it into Moldavia's

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<sup>78</sup> As Constantin Rezacheici points out, "the marriage with this princess of Kiev offered the young Moldavian prince the advantages of certain dynastic links in the Polish-Lithuanian-Moscow space, which lasted for a long period after the early death of Evdokia, and which, from an alliance point of view, were much more prestigious and practical than the links offered by the other two marriages of Stephen." See: George Marcu, *Între diplomație și "iubire." Soțiile lui Ștefan cel Mare* [Between Diplomacy and "Love." The Wives of Stephen the Great], on [http://reteactualiterara.ning.com/profiles/blogs/ntre-diploma-ie-i-iubire-so-iile-lui-tefan-cel-mare?xg\\_source=activity&id=1971741%3ABlogPost%3A1262523&page=4](http://reteactualiterara.ning.com/profiles/blogs/ntre-diploma-ie-i-iubire-so-iile-lui-tefan-cel-mare?xg_source=activity&id=1971741%3ABlogPost%3A1262523&page=4), last time accessed on January 25, 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Gorovei and Székely, *Princesps Omni Laude Maior*, 90.

<sup>80</sup> For more on the princess's origins, and especially on her Byzantine descentance, see: Maria Magdalena Székely and Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Maria Asanina Paleologhina. O prințesă bizantină pe tronul Moldovei* [Maria Assen Palaiologos. A Byzantine princess on the throne of Moldavia] (Suceava: Mușatinii, 2006), especially the chapter-articles "Rudenii byzantine ale Doamnei Maria" [Byzantine relatives of Doamna Maria], 112-143, and "Maria Asanina Paleologhina, Doamna Moldovlahiei" [Maria Assen Palaiologos, Doamna of Moldavia], 69-112.

<sup>81</sup> For more on the reasons for marrying Maria of Mangop, see: Corina Teodor, "State Reasons and Matrimonial Strategies in Moldavia During the Reign of Ștefan cel Mare," *The Yearbook of the "Gheorghe Șincai" Institute for Social Sciences and the Humanities of the Romanian Academy* 7 (2004): 15-16.



external (anti-Ottoman) policy.<sup>82</sup> The fact that their son was named Bogdan-Vlad (uniting the two most emblematic Moldavian and Wallachian historical names) is one of the most evident proofs for the political alliance made through this marriage.<sup>83</sup>

Stephen's three marriages reflect the prince's political inclinations, resulting in three distinct periods: the Polish period, the Byzantine period, and the Wallachian period. While Stephen's relations to all these three realms were constant during his entire reign, it may be stated that the prince's inclination towards one or the other became dominant at certain times, depending on his wife.

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<sup>82</sup> This desire was reflected in the actual names of the two principalities: while before Stephen's reign, Moldavia was known as *Valahia Minor* and Wallachia as *Valahia Major*, sometime during Stephen's reign, the names changed and Moldavia became *Valahia Major*, while Wallachia was transformed into *Valahia Minor*. Moreover, Stephen's intitulation in official documents points to a suzerain-vassal relationship between the two principalities as the Wallachian prince is named "the son of my [Stephen's] reign." See more: Șerban Papacostea, "The Foreign Policy of Stephen the Great: the Polish option (1459-1473)," *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 25 (2007): 24-25. More aspects of this suzerain-vassal relation and of Stephen's intitulation will be discussed further on in the article.

<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, a parallel hypothesis argues that political interests may have not been the only reasons which convinced Stephen to marry his third wife: may love have also been implied? Corina Teodor argues that certain representations of the royal couple seem to indicate that Stephen loved Maria. See: Corina Teodor, "State Reasons and Matrimonial Strategies in Moldavia during the Reign of Ștefan cel Mare," 18.

### III The creation of the self: Stephen and the origin of his myth

#### *The dynastic project*

Stephen imprinted on multiple levels of his reign: chroniclers were delicate with the words they used while scribing the ruler's name on parchment, as well as the artists who carefully designed his and his wife's faces on manuscripts or textiles;<sup>84</sup> his soldiers, inspired by his ever-presence in war, composed songs about his bravery;<sup>85</sup> his donations and plentiful commissions allowed the clergy to recall him in sainthood; Szeklers and Polish people were thankful for the land and tax privileges Stephen offered them in Moldavia;<sup>86</sup> Moldavian subjects had the opportunity to admire his countless votive portraits painted in churches and monasteries which allowed the association of his name with a face; and so on. It may thus be assumed that Stephen, from the debut of his reign, methodically built his image not only for his present subjects, but also for the unborn heirs of Moldavia – peasants, boyars or rulers – within something that may be called a “dynastic project.”<sup>87</sup> The dynastic

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<sup>84</sup> The most thorough examples, still extant today, are the portrait of Stephen the Great in the Gospels of Humor (1473), and the tomb cover of Stephen's second wife, Maria of Mangup.

<sup>85</sup> There are only later, sixteenth-century testimonies, about the chants presenting Stephen the Great, but it must be assumed that these chants originated in the time of Stephen and were propagated in the future. The chant recorded by the Polish Maciej Strykowski, reminded of Stephen in the following way: “Stephen, Prince Stephen, Stephen, Prince Stephen, you beat the Turks, beat the Tartars, beat the Hungarians, the Russians and the Polish.” See: *Călători străini în Țările Române I* [Foreign travelers in the Romanian Principalities I], ed. Maria Holban (Bucharest: Științifică, 1970), 454.

<sup>86</sup> However, Stephen did not offer his help because of kindness, but because he had true economical reasons for colonising Moldavia. For more information on Stephen's colonisation efforts, see: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*; see also: Maria Magdalena Székely, “Monarhul ideal în imaginarul evului mediu. Rene d'Anjou și Ștefan cel Mare – Le monarque idéal dans l'imaginaire médiéval. René d'Anjou et Étienne le Grand.” *Analele Putnei I* (2010): 292-293.

<sup>87</sup> For a description of the dynastic project, see also: Benoît Joudiou, “Le règne d'Étienne le Grand et la succession: une perspective idéologique,” in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Atlet al credinței*

project was a means of securing the throne for himself and his offspring by relying on the creation of a princely persona which legitimised Stephen and his family to the throne from the perspective of the past, present, and future. While he connected his image to his most illustrious predecessors<sup>88</sup> and he associated his sons to the throne,<sup>89</sup> the actions he made regarding *his present* are most relevant for the conception of his myth. The next sub-points will show how Stephen built his own notoriety and how the people surrounding him helped bring his myth to life for the very first time in history.

### *Was Stephen his little principality's emperor?*

Let us marry... an empress!

A significant number of studies have been written on the “imperial” dimension of Stephen’s reign,<sup>90</sup> but a few issues which are still worth discussing in order to understand the foundation of the myth, starting with the ruler’s marriages. Stephen married Evdochia of Kiev in 1463 and, five years after her death, in 1472, he married Maria of Mangup. The two ladies never met, yet there is a meaningful connection between them: they were both linked to imperial legacies and in the chronicles written under Stephen the Great, their names were closely connected to the title of *emperor*. The Chronicle of Putna I recalls that “in the year 6971 [1463] July 5, he took Evdochia as wife, the sister of Simeon, tsar of Kiev.”<sup>91</sup> The title changed, however, and became more explicit in the Romanian translation of the chronicle: “In the year 6[9]71 [1463], July 5, he took Evdochia of Kiev as wife, the sister of Emperor Simeon.”<sup>92</sup> Evdochia descended from the line of the great dukes of Lithuania as her father was Olelko of Kiev, first cousin of Casimir IV, King of

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*creștine* [Saint Stephen the Great. Champion of the Christian Faith] (Succava: Mușatinii, 2004), 415-429.

<sup>88</sup> See for instance the way he connected his image to the first ruler of Moldavia, Dragoș, in Ștefan S. Gorovei, “Umbra lui Dragoș. La Putna – The shadow of Dragoș. At Putna” *Analele Putnei I* (2008).

<sup>89</sup> More on this in: Joudiou, “Le règne d’Étienne le Grand et la succession: une perspective idéologique.”

<sup>90</sup> A wide variety of arguments have been elaborated in order to prove the reality or non-reality of Stephen as emperor. See, among others: Dumitru Năstase, “Ștefan cel Mare împărat” [Emperor Stephen the Great] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt: 1504 – 2004. Portret în Istorie*, 568-611; Valentin Al. Georgescu, “L’idée impériale byzantine et les réactions des réalités roumaines (XIVe-XVIIIe siècles). Idéologie politique, structuration de l’État et du droit” *Byzantina* 3 (1971): 311-339; Constantin Rezachevici, “Neamul doamnei Evdochia de Kiev, în legătura cu descoperirea pietrei sale de mormânt la Suceava” [The family of Evdochia of Kiev, regarding the discovery of her tombstone in Suceava] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Atlas al credinței creștine*, 120, 125.

<sup>91</sup> The Chronicle of Putna I, 30.

<sup>92</sup> “Traducerea Românească a Letopiseșului de la Putna” [The Romanian translation of the Chronicle of Putna] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 38.

Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania. In reality, Simeon, Evdochia's brother, was prince of Kiev and not emperor, but they were considered to be the descendants of the Rurik dynasty whose members were sometimes given the title of "emperor."<sup>93</sup> Although at the time of the marriage, Stephen had already signed a Polish-Moldavian peace treaty with Casimir IV,<sup>94</sup> the importance of the marriage remains: the marital contract aimed the reinforcement of the Polish-Moldavian relations, but Stephen was also interested in the legacy given by a woman with a good family history.

The same happened when he married Maria of Mangup: "In the year 6980 [1472], September 14, Prince Stephen took a wife, Maria from Mangup; there was a Christian empire..."<sup>95</sup> The Crimean principality, known as Mangup or Theodoro, being the last standing strip of Byzantine land, represented an opportunity for Stephen to attach his name to Byzantine legacy. Who was Maria of Mangup and how could her name have helped Stephen? There is no concluding genealogical information on Maria. Based on indirect material and written sources, it may only be implied that she was descending from the Palaeologan family.<sup>96</sup> Thus, she was a Byzantine princess coming from the Crimean peninsula, which meant that she represented a double advantage for Stephen: on one side, through a marital alliance with Crimea, Stephen could develop his influence on the seaside territory which would result in economic advantages; and on the other side, Stephen could legitimately enter the realm of the Byzantine world. The importance of Maria's ideological heritage can be seen in a particular tomb cover: that of Maria herself (Fig. 19). Recent studies have shown that the princess' tomb cover is "the only piece known today which brings together all the signs of power of the last Byzantine emperors,"<sup>97</sup> including two two-headed eagles and the monogram of the Palaeologan family.

Stephen wanted to inherit the Byzantine legacy and, in a period when the Ottoman Empire was pushing into Christian territories, Stephen was among those rulers who wanted to keep the Byzantine heritage intact. The Principality of Mangup was threatened by Ottoman occupation and, in a fifteenth-century world where Orthodox rulers were attracted by the idea of becoming the continuators of the

<sup>93</sup> For more details on this descendance: Gorovei and Székely, *Princesps Omni Laude Maior*, 49-50.

<sup>94</sup> The peace treaty with Poland was a strategic move which assured Stephen that an attack from the Ottoman Empire would not take place. See more: Eugen Denize, *Stephen the Great and His Reign* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Institute Publishing House, 2004), 45-49.

<sup>95</sup> The Moldavian-Polish Chronicle, 43.

<sup>96</sup> For some of the most significant and recent studies on the Byzantine wife of Stephen the Great, see: Ștefan S. Gorovei, "Maria Asanina Paleologhina, Doamna Moldovlahiei I" [Maria Asanina Paleologhina, Princess Of Moldavia I] *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 22 (2004): 9-50; Idem, "Maria Asanina Paleologhina, Doamna Moldovlahiei II" [Maria Asanina Paleologhina, Princess Of Moldavia II] *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 24 (2006): 55-80; Székely and Gorovei, *Maria Asanina Paleologhina: o prințesă bizantină pe tronul Moldovei*.

<sup>97</sup> Ștefan S. Gorovei and Maria Magdalena Székely, "Însemnele imperiale ale doamnei Maria Asanina Paleologhina" [The imperial signs of Princess Maria Asanina Paleologhina] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Atlet al credinței creștine*, 105.

emperors of Constantinople, it is easy to argue that Stephen might have imagined that, being married to a Byzantine princess and being able to defeat the Ottomans, he would inherit if (for sure) not Constantinople, then at least the small principality of Mangup.<sup>98</sup> It has been assumed, in fact, that after the Principality of Mangup was conquered by the Ottomans (leaving Stephen with no further possible interest in the Principality and his Byzantine princess), the prince stepped back from his wife's life, and shifted his interested towards his third wife, Maria Voichița.<sup>99</sup>



Fig. 19: Tomb cover of Maria of Mangup, Putna Monastery. Image source: <http://www.stefancelmare.ro/Acoperamantul-de-mormant-al-Mariei-de-Mangop-s6-ss22-c9.htm>

<sup>98</sup> Stephen the Great was not the only ruler who aspired to be the new Byzantine ruler/emperor. Ivan III of Moscow married Sophia Palaeologus, granddaughter of Emperor Constantine XI, in the same year that Stephen married Maria: 1472. It becomes clear that by this strategic move, Ivan III aspired to transform Moscow into the "Third Rome," just as, maybe, also Stephen had on his mind. See more: Alexander Gertsen and Nadezhda Gertsen, "Moldova și principatul Theodoro la 1475" [Moldavia and the Principality of Theodoro in 1475] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Atlet al credinței creștine*, 142-143.

<sup>99</sup> Ibidem, 145.

“Long live the Tsar!”

An indirect argument for Stephen as a ruler who wished to hold imperial power could be indicated by the date of his marriage to Maria of Mangup. They married on September 14, 1472, which coincided with the date of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. The Church did not allow weddings during feast days, which means that the ruler must have received an exemption from the Church for the marriage. This shows that it was particularly important for him to marry his Byzantine wife on that precise day which commemorated the cross, the symbol of Christianity and the Byzantine world. While this marriage allowed Stephen to aspire to the role as a new emperor of a new Byzantine world, it also allowed him to hope that Suceava might become a new Constantinople.<sup>100</sup> It is intriguing how shortly after the prince's wedding to Maria of Mangup, his title changed. In very few, rather controversial sources, he now became *tsar* – emperor.

The Moldavian ruler had a more or less standardised title, which was used in most documents of the time. Stephen was usually named with the following formula:

[1] with the will of God + [2] *Io* + [3] Stephen + [4] voivode/prince +  
+ [5] ruler [*domn*] + [6] (of the) Moldavian Principality<sup>101</sup>

Most documents issued by Stephen's court respected this formula and resulted in syntagms such as “Nos Stephanus woiewoda, Dei gratia dominus terrarum Moldaviae.”<sup>102</sup> However, this formula changed occasionally and designations such as *haeres*, the one “crowned by God,” the “lover of God,” “palatinus” or even “emperor/tsar” can be encountered in various documents.<sup>103</sup> This imprecision in titling led to various interpretations of Stephen's imperial title.<sup>104</sup>

There are five known sources which recall Stephen as “tsar.” The first instance, dated 1473, is found in the Gospel of Humor, commissioned by Stephen, where the epilogue of the manuscript, on the verso of folio 265, presents the ruler with the

<sup>100</sup> See: Maria Magdalena Székely and Ștefan S. Gorovei, “<Semne și minuni> pentru Ștefan Voievod. Note de mentalitate medievală” [“Signs and miracles” for Prince Stephen. Notes on medieval mentality] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt – Portret în Istorie*, 72.

<sup>101</sup> The basic version of this formula ([1] Stephen + [2] voivode + [3] ruler [*domn*] + [4] (of the) Moldavian + [5] Principality) plus the attributes which complement it (*with the will of God + Io*) have been presented and explained point by point by Gorovei in his article “Titlurile lui Ștefan cel Mare. Tradiție diplomatică și vocabular politic”: 41-78.

<sup>102</sup> Ioan Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan cel Mare II (1493-1503; 1457-1503)* [The Documents of Stephen the Great] (Bucharest: 1913), 266.

<sup>103</sup> All the examples cited at this point can be found, together with their explanation and contextualisation, in Gorovei's article “Titlurile lui Ștefan cel Mare. Tradiție diplomatică și vocabular politic,” 41-78.

<sup>104</sup> Benoît Joudiou made this point very clear: “L'imprécision du titre souverain roumain ouvrait la porte aux interprétations les plus larges quant à la nature même de la *domnia*.” See the article “Remarques sur la signification du titre “souverain” dans les Principautés Roumaines” *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 19 (2001): 77.

following titles: "The honourable and lover of Christ tsar, Io Stephen voivode, ruler of Moldovlahia."<sup>105</sup>

The following three instances can all be found in a single source: the Anonymous Chronicle, written at the court of Stephen. Firstly, the chronicle notes the following: "In the same year, August 29, there was a big earthquake all over the world, while the tsar was sitting at his table."<sup>106</sup> Historians reached the unanimous conclusion that the "divine sign" of the earthquake must have aimed Stephen, who was probably seen by the scribe of the chronicle as the ruler of the world, thus the appellative *tsar*.<sup>107</sup> Another event guided by the divine was also portrayed while mentioning "tsar" Stephen:

And Prince Stephen with all his soldiers returned as a bearer of victory in his fortress Suceava and the Metropolitans and priests all came before him, holding the Gospels in their hands, praying and praising the Lord for all that has been given as a gift from the Almighty and blessing the tsar: "Long live the tsar!"<sup>108</sup>

One can notice that the "tsar" is mentioned twice within this sentence. Moreover, not only is Stephen identified with imperial designation, but he is also enacting something which seems to be a triumphal entry into Suceava. It is easily understandable why this procession is associated to the word "tsar." The event takes place when Stephen returns from his campaign against the Ottoman army which entered Moldavia in 1475 and which was eventually defeated.<sup>109</sup>

There is finally a fifth instance where Stephen is identified with the imperial title. A Bulgarian Book of Eight Tones, an *oktoihos* found in Kiev, describes the conquests of the fortresses of Chilia and Akkerman and, while telling the story, it names Stephen the "tsar of Moldavia."<sup>110</sup>

Therefore, one can notice that Stephen is *царь*, an equivalent of *emperor*. The question is now whether Stephen actually used the title of *emperor* or whether this

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<sup>105</sup> Mihai Berza, *Repertoriul monumentelor și obiectelor de artă din timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare* [The collection of monuments and artifacts dating from the reign of Stephen the Great] (Bucharest: Academiei, 1958), 388.

<sup>106</sup> "Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia," 15.

<sup>107</sup> Dumitru Năstase explains that the chronicler highlighted the earthquake as a world-wide event by describing it as "a big earthquake there all over the world." Because this world-wide event is correlated to the name of Stephen, the conclusion of the historian is that Stephen must have been seen as the ruler of this very world. See: Năstase, "Ștefan cel Mare împărat", 568-569. See also: Gorovei, "Titlurile lui Ștefan cel Mare. Tradiție diplomatică și vocabular politic," 73-74.

<sup>108</sup> "Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia," 16.

<sup>109</sup> For a description of the events of 1475, surrounding the clash between the Moldavians and the Ottomans, see: Eugen Denize, *Românii între Leu și Semilună. Relațiile turco-venețiene și influența lor asupra spațiului românesc, secolele XV-XVI* [The Romanians between the Lion and the Half-Moon. Turkish-Venetian relations and their influence on the Romanian space, fifteenth-sixteenth centuries] (Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun, 2009), 132-139.

<sup>110</sup> The Book of Eight Tones was found in Kiev by the philologist Ioan Bogdan who hypothesised that the document must be contemporary to Stephen the Great. See: Ibidem, 74.

title was only used in connection to him. While there are not enough arguments to support the theory that Stephen actually used the title of *emperor*, it is likely that he wanted to have his name connected to an imperial dignity. The *oktoihos* is a further argument for this theory and its importance rises as it is a source not created in Stephen's principality: the fact that Stephen is named *tsar* within this document must be a reflection of Stephen's imperial aspirations outside the borders of Moldavia.

## Suceava and imperial manifestation

The fortress of Suceava was Stephen's capital. It is particularly important to see not only how it was reflected in sources (and, consequently, in the Moldavian imaginary),<sup>111</sup> but also how Stephen used this space in order to enhance his strength over the principality. A critical delimitation should be made at this point: the space used by Stephen for what will be named in the following as "imperial manifestation" was that of the fortress itself and not that of the surrounding city.<sup>112</sup>

The ruler's "imperial manifestation," if it existed in Moldavia, should be visible in court ceremonials and rituals, such as coronations, weddings, feasts, processions, etc. However, extant sources indicate no imperial-like ceremonials for any of these events.<sup>113</sup> The only ceremonies which may be resembled to anything imperial are Stephen's returns from battles to Suceava. These returns, which resembled triumphal entries,<sup>114</sup> seem to have been based on a recipe which was enacted after a military victory. There are four instances when sources discuss these

<sup>111</sup> For a study of the city landscape and its reflection in medieval imaginary, see: Alexandru Pinzar, "Suceava în imaginarul medieval - Suceava in medieval imaginary," *Analele Putnei* 2 (2008): 25-50.

<sup>112</sup> Historians often mixed the space of Suceava's fortress with that of Suceava's city. This confusion was deepened by inaccurate translations of sources which mixed the terms "fortress" and "city." Ștefan Gorovei made the situation clearer by taking the original versions of some of these sources and explaining how they make a clear delimitation between what was city and what was fortress. For his study, see: Ștefan S. Gorovei, "Cetatea de scaun a Sucevei. O ipoteză - The Suceava fortress. A hypothesis," *Analele Putnei* 2 (2008): 15-24.

<sup>113</sup> Coronations and weddings are most often studied. Bogdan-Petru Maleon highlights that the hypothesis according to which a whole ceremonial following the Byzantine or Western model used to be performed since the foundation of the Moldavian state, should be excluded. See: Bogdan-Petru Maleon, "Observații privind dobândirea puterii princiare în Moldova epocii ștefanieni" (Some Remarks on Gaining the Princely Power in Moldavia during Stephen the Great Epoch) *Analele Putnei* 1 (2011): 7-20. For information on the wedding of Stephen to his "imperial" wife Maria of Mangup, see, for example: Maria-Venera Rădulescu, "Episoade din istoria Moldovei redată pe cahle descoperite la Curtea Domnească de la Vaslui: nunta lui Ștefan cel Mare cu Maria de Mangop" (The wedding of Stephen the Great and Maria of Mangup. Images on glaze stove tiles discovered at Vaslui (15<sup>th</sup> century), *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 14 (2006): 81-100.

<sup>114</sup> For a concise article concerning this subject, see: Maria Magdalena Székely, "Atributele imperiale ale cetății Suceava" (Imperial attributes of the Suceava fortress) *Analele Putnei* 2 (2008): 5-14.



“entries:” the entries of 1465, of 1473, of 1475, and of 1481. The four known “entries” appear in most of the chronicles written during Stephen’s reign and they present the prince as a triumphant leader of armies:

- The entry of 1465, after Stephen conquered the fortress of Chilia:

And then he [Stephen] returned with all his army in his seat of Suceava. And he ordered all the metropolitans and the bishops and all the priests to thank God for what was given to him by God Almighty...<sup>115</sup>

- The 1473 entry, which took place after Stephen victory over the Wallachian Prince Radu the Fair:

And he took the wife of Prince Radu and his daughter, his only-born, and all the treasures and the vestments and his flags... And then he returned to his seat of Suceava. And then, the metropolitan with all the clergy made him a wonderful and beautiful greeting, but they especially praised God for all the gifts He had given to his servant, Prince Stephen.<sup>116</sup>

- The entry of 1475 is probably the most famous one because it was preceded by the victory of Vaslui, where Stephen defeated the Ottoman army led by Suleyman Pasha. This entry is particularly important as it has an aura of imperialism:

And their flags and large maces were taken away, more than 40 maces. And Prince Stephen returned as a bearer of victory with all his soldiers in his fortress Suceava and the Metropolitans and priests all came before him, holding the Gospels in their hands, praying and praising the Lord for all that has been given as a gift from the Almighty and blessing the tsar: <Long live the tsar!><sup>117</sup>

- The entry of 1481 was preceded by another victorious battle with Wallachia, which took place at Râmnic:

And Prince Stephen returned from there as a bearer of victory with all his army and his boyars, in his seat of Suceava. And there, Prince Stephen made a great feast to the metropolitan, the bishops, his boyars and his entire army. And he named a lot of *viteji*<sup>118</sup> and he gave a lot of gifts and expensive vestments to his boyars and his *viteji* and his entire army. And he let all of them go home and he

<sup>115</sup> “Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia,” 14. This entry is also presented in the Chronicles of Putna numbers I and II, in the Romanian translation of the Chronicles of Putna, and also in the Moldavian-Polish Chronicles.

<sup>116</sup> “Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia,” 16. This entry is also presented in the Chronicle of Putna number II, in the Moldavian-German Chronicle, and in the Moldavian-Polish Chronicle.

<sup>117</sup> “Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia,” 16.

<sup>118</sup> The title of *viteaz* (pl. *viteji*) is a higher title in the Moldavian army. For a description of the Moldavian army composition, see: Ioan Cupşa, *Arta militară a moldovenilor în a doua jumătate a secolului al XV-lea (Ştefan cel Mare)* [The Moldavian military art in the second half of the fifteenth century (Stephen the Great)] (Bucharest: Editura Militară a Ministerului Forţelor Armate ale R.P.R., 1959), chapter II *Puterea militară a Moldovei* [The military power of Moldavia], especially 20-28.

taught them to praise and bless the Lord for all that has happened, because it all came from God.<sup>119</sup>

Reading these examples, one can notice that Stephen's entries in Suceava followed the recipe of a ritual: he entered the fortress with his army, was welcomed by the clergy, and a religious ceremony took place after the entrance. The entry in 1481 adds to this information: not only did a religious ceremony take place, but a feast was also organised where, probably, war plunder was distributed to the most significant soldiers, while others received higher titles as a result of their success in battle. But can one discuss a "triumphal entry?" Should one compare Roman or Byzantine triumphal entries to Stephen's entries based on extant sources, Moldavian entries seem rudimentary. Relevant elements of Stephen's entries remain unknown, the most important of which is the triumphal route. The Constantinopolitan triumphal route was dictated by the city landscape and further on detailed by custom,<sup>120</sup> therefore, although standardised, it was prone to change. However, when studying the Moldavian case, it is easy to notice that there exist no indicators of the route or its changes, or of the ruler's stops – apart from the obvious stop at the church where the religious ceremony took place. Also, apart from the "Long live the tsar!" acclamation of the 1475 entry, there are no other testimonies of acclamations, chants or intonations, all indispensable to triumphal entries. Similarly, while guilds would normally be involved in the decoration of the imperial route, in cleaning the streets and stewing them with flowers,<sup>121</sup> there are no visual sources in Moldavia to attest any type of preparation of the fortress for such a major, imperial-like event. Surely, considering the description of the entries in the Moldavian chronicles, it must be assumed that these were large-scale events, involving a large public.

Regardless of all these gaps, one cannot decisively argue that Stephen's entries were not moulded on the model of triumphal entries. Suceava did not have a triumphal route, but neither did Constantinople or Rome have a standardised one.<sup>122</sup> While one can argue that there was no standardised triumphal route in Suceava, one cannot argue that the route used by Stephen (whichever it was), was not meant to be triumphal. Moreover, the four above-presented sources indicate some aspects which can easily be linked to imperial behaviour: Stephen returns from his expeditions with a significant amount of goods, including royal hostages such as the Wallachian ruler's wife and daughter; he participates in religious processions involving the Metropolitan, bishops and a large body of clergy; he distributes war booty and grants higher dignities. Whether these aspects sum up the behaviour of an emperor is irrelevant. What is relevant, instead, is that they are signs of ostentatious showing of power.

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<sup>119</sup> "Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia," 18.

<sup>120</sup> Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 208.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibidem*, 205-208.

<sup>122</sup> For a comparison between the triumphal landscape of Constantinople and Suceava, see: Székely, "Atributele imperiale ale cetății Suceava," 7-8.

## Stephen, the Last Emperor?

Stephen seemed to have wanted to surpass the status of an ordinary Moldavian ruler and resemble the image of an emperor – be it in the form of a Byzantine emperor or in the form of the Last Emperor. The myth of the Last Emperor had a valuable significance in the history of Christianity and its importance rose on the eve of the Apocalypse, believed to begin at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>123</sup> The myth implied that a Roman emperor would have to live through a period of hardship and fight evil, in order to eventually defeat the enemy. Having defeated the enemy, he would surrender his imperial regalia to God and would thus put an end to the Roman Empire. The end of the world would follow, allowing the kingdom of God to be established.<sup>124</sup> A number of significant rulers were identified with the Last Emperor,<sup>125</sup> especially in times of distress and negative expectations, and Stephen the Great was seemingly one of them. Because the myth of the Last Emperor was known in fifteenth-century Moldavia,<sup>126</sup> one may deduct facts which, although scarce, point to Stephen as a ruler identified with the Last Emperor. In connection to this, the messianic aspect of the Mounted Procession of the Holy Cross (Fig. 20), a mural scene painted in the narthex of the Pătrăuți Monastery, should be pointed out.

As a scene rarely depicted in orthodox iconography<sup>127</sup> and much debated in historiography, this mural has been interpreted in several ways. Most historians conclude that it was intended to represent Stephen's crusade against his Islamic enemies, as well as a sign of the political and religious aspirations of the ruler.<sup>128</sup> The image illustrates a saintly mounted procession headed by a winged rider, identified in an inscription as the Archangel Michael, who leans towards the rider close behind

<sup>123</sup> Based on the calculations of Gennadius Scholarius from his 1472 Chronograph, the end of days were to arrive in 1492. See more: Maria Magdalena Székely, "Ștefan cel Mare și sfârșitul lumii – Stephen the Great and the End of the World," *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 21 (2003): 256.

<sup>124</sup> More on the myth of the Last Emperor in: Maria Ana Travassos Valdez, *Historical Interpretations of the "Fifth Empire."* *The Dynamics of Periodization from Daniel to Antonio Vieira, S.J.* (Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, series ed. Robert J. Bast) (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 208-223.

<sup>125</sup> Such as Charlemagne or Frederick II. See: Ibidem, 211.

<sup>126</sup> The Apocalypse by Pseudo-Methodius of Patara contains the most widely-spread description of the Last Emperor as an apocalyptic figure. Pseudo-Methodius' Apocalypse was also to be found in a manuscript from Neamț Monastery (now manuscript no. 135 at the Library of the Romanian Academy). See: Liviu Pilat, "Mesianism și escatologie în imaginarul epocii lui Ștefan cel Mare – Messianism and eschatology during the time of Stephen the Great," *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 22 (2004): 107.

<sup>127</sup> This scene cannot be found in any versions of the *Ermeneia*, the guide of Byzantine Orthodox iconographical programmemes.

<sup>128</sup> Both of these hypotheses were formulated in the first and groundbreaking study of the mural scene. André Grabar, "Les croisades de l'Europe orientale dans l'art," in *L'Art de la fin de l'antiquité et du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Collège de France, 1968), 169-175.

him, identified as Constantine the Great in another inscription. Following the Archangel and Constantine, there are the military saints George and Demetrius, followed themselves by a large group of other saints. In the upper right corner of the scene, in the sky, a bright white cross is visible, which gives meaning to the entire mural. The Mounted Procession of the Holy Cross illustrates the miraculous vision of the Holy Cross by Emperor Constantine: on the eve of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge against the Roman Emperor Maxentius, Constantine had a vision of the Cross, accompanied by the wording “in this sign, [you shall] conquer.” He subsequently won the battle, opening the path towards Christianisation throughout the Roman Empire. In drawing a parallel with Constantine’s victory over the pagans, a significant number of studies have linked the emperor’s victory with an eventual victory of Stephen the Great over his pagan enemies – namely, the Ottomans.<sup>129</sup>



Fig. 20: *The Mounted Procession of the Holy Cross*, Pătrăuți Monastery. Image source: <http://www.crestinortodox.ro> (accessed: February 4, 2016)

The scene painted in the Pătrăuți Monastery offers insight into the various ideologies pursued by the ruler,<sup>130</sup> including the eschatological idea of the Last Emperor. While the scene was primarily interpreted by historians as an anti-Ottoman plea, it may also be seen as a representation of the last days in which the Last Emperor defeats his enemies. A parallel can be made between the Mounted Procession and the Russian icon of *Ecclesia militans*, painted after the conquest of

<sup>129</sup> A large number of historians referred to this interpretation of the scene, starting with the already-mentioned study of André Grabar. See some of the studies referring to the anti-Ottoman significance of this scene in: Drăguț, *Pictura murală din Moldova*, 13-16; Virgil Vătășianu, *Istoria artei feudale în Țările Române* [The history of feudal art in the Romanian Principalities] I (Bucharest: Academiei, 1959), 806; Idem, *Studii de artă veche românească și universală* [Studies of old Romanian and universal art] (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1987), 51; Dan Zamfirescu, *Neagoe Basarab și învățăturile către fiul său Theodosie: problemele controversate* [Neagoe Basarab and his teachings to his son Theodosie: controversial problems] (Bucharest: Minerva, 1973), 85-86.

<sup>130</sup> At least three ideas may be noticed within the mural scene: the idea of an anti-Ottoman crusade; that of following the Constantinian model; as well as the eschatological idea.

Kazan by Ivan IV of Russia in 1552 (Fig. 21). In *Ecclesia militans*, Ivan the Terrible follows the Archangel Michael in leading away a large group of military saints (including Constantine I) from the conquered city of Kazan and towards the New Jerusalem represented in the left corner of the icon. Based on this parallel, Liviu Pilat explains that the Moldavian scene of Pătrăuți is the representation of the taking of Jerusalem by earthly soldiers, before the New Jerusalem descends.<sup>131</sup> The historian explains that the final scope of the Orthodox Crusade was the liberation of Jerusalem, while the liberation of Constantinople was “just a stage, the final point being the Emperor’s entrance in Jerusalem.”<sup>132</sup> While making this comparison, it should be stressed that Jerusalem may be identified with the image of the Cross (as in the scene of the Mounted Procession), especially in a monastery dedicated to the Holy Cross (as the Pătrăuți Monastery was).<sup>133</sup> Stephen the Great may thus be identified in the scene of the Mounted Procession of the Holy Cross with the Last Emperor, while liberating Jerusalem and allowing the end of days to begin.



Fig. 21: *Ecclesia Militans*, Tretyakov Gallery. Image source: Wikimedia Foundation, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blessed\\_Be\\_the\\_Host\\_of\\_the\\_King\\_of\\_Heaven#mediaviewer/File:Blessed\\_Be\\_the\\_Host\\_of\\_the\\_King\\_of\\_Heaven%E2%80%A6\\_-\\_Google\\_Art\\_Project.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blessed_Be_the_Host_of_the_King_of_Heaven#mediaviewer/File:Blessed_Be_the_Host_of_the_King_of_Heaven%E2%80%A6_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg) (accessed: January 4, 2016)

### ***One shall not ... forget the prince's face!***

The functions of images and iconography are varied and although they may initially seem to have a solely spiritual purpose, spirituality rarely remains the only attribute of images. One of the imperative functions of images is that of proclaiming and promoting power. Within every church commissioned by Stephen the Great, the northern wall of the naos usually accommodated the votive portrait of the ruler. Facing the altar and highly visible to all participants at the mass, votive portraits

<sup>131</sup> See the full explanation in: Pilat, “Mesianism și escatologie în imaginarul epocii lui Ștefan cel Mare,” 111-113.

<sup>132</sup> Ibidem, 112.

<sup>133</sup> Ibidem.

represented the donor while offering the model of the church to Christ. Being visible was a vital part of political life as it meant eligibility for public life.<sup>134</sup> Thus the visibility of the ruler within a public (and holy) space such as a church or monastery was a needful strategy: art and visual means were part of creating a public persona and reputation.<sup>135</sup>

It is difficult however to find intact votive portraits. There are only six remaining votive images which were commissioned by Stephen the Great in Moldavia: in the Church of St. Elijah in Suceava, in the monastery of Voroneț, the Church of St. Nicholas in Rădăuți, the monastery of Pătrăuți, the St. Nicholas Church in Dorohoi, and the monastery of Dobrovăț.<sup>136</sup> Apart from these six portraits of the ruler, there is another relevant one: the votive image in the manuscript of the Gospels of Humor. A recent study by Ion Solcanu demonstrated that only two of these images are original ones: the votive image of Voroneț and the one preserved in the manuscript of Humor.<sup>137</sup> Therefore, these two images are the only sources for the genuine, “original” face of Stephen the Great.

### Stephen's face on the wall

The Monastery of Voroneț was built by Stephen the Great between May and September 1488 on the place of a former monastery with the same name and dedicated to the same saint: St. George.<sup>138</sup> The votive portrait of Voroneț presents Stephen the Great while offering the model of the monastery to Christ (Fig. 22). The act of offering is mediated by the patron saint of the church, Saint George, while

<sup>134</sup> For more on general manners regarding sight and social practice, see: Patricia Lee Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 113-114.

<sup>135</sup> Eadem, 114.

<sup>136</sup> All these six votive images were painted in churches and monasteries. However, there are also a few other remaining images, not painted on church walls, which bear the figure of Stephen the Great: there are two stoles, one from Pătrăuți and another from Dobrovăț; there is the veil (*dvěři*) of the altar door of Putna; and, last but not least, there is the bas-relief from the Vatopedi Monastery on Mount Athos.

<sup>137</sup> All the other five votive portraits were destroyed intentionally either by the Ottoman troops in their 1538 campaign in Moldavia or by personal enemies of Stephen. The votive images were repainted at an unknown time after 1538. It is however possible that also the votive image of the church of Pătrăuți remained in its original state, but this theory remains uncertain. See more: Ion I. Solcanu, “Portretul lui Ștefan cel Mare în pictura epocii sale. Noi considerații” [The portrait of Stephen the Great in the painting of his time. New considerations] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt – Portret în Istorie*, 117-130.

<sup>138</sup> For a recent and detailed history of the monastery, especially from an archaeological point of view, see: Nicolae N. Pușcașu and Voica Maria Pușcașu, “Mănăstirea Voronețului. Arheologie și istorie” (The Voroneț Monastery. Archaeology and history) *Analele Putnei* 1 (2009): 75-138. See also the history of Voroneț from the *ktetors* point of view: Maria Magdalena Székely, “Ctitorii Voronețului” (The founders of the Voroneț Monastery) *Analele Putnei* 1 (2009): 139-156.

Stephen is followed by three members of his family: his daughter Maria, wife Maria Voichița, and son Bogdan III. A particular harmonious relationship between Stephen and Saint George is visible in the saint's body language: he is holding the ruler by his shoulder, tightly, as if in a gesture of encouragement when presenting him to Christ. Considering that votive images canonically present the ruler in a static position without revealing feelings or personal traits, the gesture of the saint highlights an aura of the ruler which can only be seen in another votive painting, in the Saint Elijah Church of Suceava. At St. Elijah, Stephen's hand is held by the patron saint of the church while presented to Christ. Stephen is introduced in an almost familial environment although he is facing the highest authority: Christ. This suggests that Stephen's votive portraits were conceived in such a way that they presented the prince as a person beloved by saints and appreciated by the Son of God. A further theory was hypothesised on the basis of this type of imagery, which referred to the fact that Stephen was presented in an almost saint-like manner, on the same level with the patron saints who introduced him to Christ.<sup>139</sup>

Returning to the actual physical aspect of the ruler, the viewer can see him wearing his princely vestments and his crown, both embroidered and decorated with precious stones. Considering that the wall painting was finished during the reign of Stephen, it should be assumed that the painter was acquainted with the physiognomy of the ruler and thus painted him in the most realistic way for the possibilities of the time: Stephen had a roundish face with a large forehead, with thick arched eyebrows above his blue eyes and his thin, pointed nose. His hair was long and blonde, just as his beard and prominent moustache. Most likely, this is the closest image to what may be called the "real," historical Stephen the Great. Analysing the image of Stephen at Voroneț, the art historian Vasile Drăguț said that within the solemn beauty of the votive portrait, the preoccupation of Stephen the Great with royal authority, as well as with the stability of the throne was obvious.<sup>140</sup> But did the fifteenth-century viewer understand Stephen by looking at his portrait? It is difficult to say, although one issue is certain: by painting his portrait so accurately, Stephen made sure that his physical image, his face, would not fade away with time. His face was not to be forgotten.

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<sup>139</sup> For this presentation, see: Gorovei and Székely. *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 505-506.

<sup>140</sup> Drăguț, *Pictura murală în Moldova. Secolele XV-XVI*, 17.



Fig. 22: Votive image, Voroneț Monastery. Image source: <http://www.orthphoto.net> (accessed February 4, 2016)

### Stephen's face on parchment

The same may be said about Stephen's image in the manuscript of the Gospels of Humor (Fig. 23). The major difference however is the audience of the two images: while the portrait at Voroneț was seen by a variety of people who entered the church, the portrait in the Gospels was seen by a significantly smaller number of people.

The physical appearance of Stephen in the Gospels manuscript is similar to his representation at Voroneț, with the observation that here Stephen is some twenty years younger (as the Gospels of Humor were commissioned in 1473). The prince's round face and pink cheeks suggest the representation of a younger man. The same blue eyes with thick eyebrows framed by long blonde hair and his pronounced moustache (without the beard) are gazing up to an enthroned Virgin Mary with her Son, while Stephen is presenting Christ with the manuscript he had just commissioned. On this occasion, the Mother of God is the mediator between the commissioner and Her Son.





Fig. 23: Votive portrait of Stephen the Great in the manuscript of the Gospels of Humor.  
 Image source: <http://www.stefancelmare.ro/Tetraevangelul-de-la-Humor-1473-s6-ss22-c5.htm>

Apart from the realistic physical image of the ruler, there are two significant issues which strike the eye: the kneeling position of the ruler and a white space on the right side of the image which must be the place where another figure should have been painted. The fact that the prince kneels is compelling because he never kneels in any of his other votive images. In all the other five votive portraits, Stephen appears in a typical Byzantine standing position before Christ. A further particular element of the representation is the act of mediation done by the Virgin Mary herself – a fact

particularly relevant as the Virgin never appears in any other votive images of Stephen. The fact that he is kneeling may therefore be related to the presence of Mary – yet another connection to the Byzantine Empire whose capital was symbolically placed under the protection of the Mother of Christ.<sup>141</sup>

While kneeling, Stephen faces a white space, which surely should have accommodated a second kneeling character. The white space seems to never have been painted, although the intention of having somebody represented there is apparent. Ovidiu Pecican asks himself who was supposed to be represented as the second kneeling character. He presents a new hypothesis<sup>142</sup> which disturbs the logical supposition that the second character should have been Stephen's wife at the time of the manuscript's commission, Maria of Mangup.<sup>143</sup> The manuscript was commissioned in 1473 when Stephen was still married to Maria of Mangup. In 1478, after a short mourning period, Stephen married Maria Voichița. The year 1473 is also the year when Stephen took Maria Voichița hostage, a year which marked the beginning of one of the most tumultuous periods in Stephen's reign: two more clashes with the Wallachians in 1473 and 1474, as well as two major military conflicts with the Ottoman Empire in 1475 and 1476. Observing these circumstances, Ovidiu Pecican concludes that the work of the Humor miniaturist "could have been stopped by a higher cleric (a father superior, a bishop, or even the Metropolitan himself) who, paying attention to both Stephen's policies and to the marriage to Maria of Mangup who had given the ruler only daughters, would have preferred, because of transparent reasons, calmer times in order to decide who would be the best one to stand next to the prince."<sup>144</sup> Should this hypothesis be accepted, a further argument could be given to the alleged "higher cleric's" reasoning on the ruler's wife: Maria of Mangup lost her ideological importance when the Ottoman Empire conquered the Principality of Mangup. Stephen thus lost his interest in both a possible Moldavian conquest of the princess' principality of origin and, consequently, for the princess herself.<sup>145</sup> Whether this hypothesis is accepted or not, it points out an important element in the ruler's image: the image of the ruler's wife which was just

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<sup>141</sup> However, one cannot disregard Western examples of donor portraits where the donor is depicted kneeling. Given that kneeling is a typical position for donors in the West, a Western/gothic influence should not be omitted. See the hypothesis concerning western influences in: Pecican, *Sânge și trandafiri*, 47-50.

<sup>142</sup> See the presentation of the whole theory in: Ibidem, 50-58.

<sup>143</sup> Certainly, the first hypothesis which comes to mind is that the wife who was supposed to be portrayed in the white space was the prince's wife at the time of the commission. Just like the Stole of the Dobrovăț Monastery (commissioned in 1504) had the images of Stephen the Great and Maria Voichița represented in the lower register of the cloth, the Gospels of Humor logically should have borne the representations of Stephen and his current wife in 1473, Maria of Mangup.

<sup>144</sup> Pecican, *Sânge și trandafiri*, 57.

<sup>145</sup> See more in the subdivision of this study "Let us marry an empress" and in: Gertsen and Gertsen, "Moldova și principatul Theodoro la 1475", 145.

as relevant as that of Stephen's. The wife was an integral part of the ruler's image and her visual appearance in the presence of the ruler was carefully constructed.

Analysing these two votive portraits which surely became examples for later representations of the ruler, it is evident that the remembrance of the ruler's face was essential. Stephen was represented as a handsome man, full of potential, an image he is still identified with today. The exterior beauty is particularly significant as in the Middle Ages a beautiful exterior was the reflection of a beautiful interior.<sup>146</sup> Stephen the Great was physically portrayed on one side as the expression of beauty, inside and out, and on the other side as the expression of authority embellished with all his regalia, including his red shoes, signalling greatness, power, and highest status. The existence of red shoes brings the discussion back to Stephen's ambition of becoming a genuine Byzantine (imperial) continuator. The miniature in the Gospels of Humor, the votive portraits in the Rădăuți and Dorohoi monasteries, the representation of Stephen on the Veil of the Crucifixion at the Putna altar door and on the Stole of Dobrovăț, all still show the red colour of the prince's shoes. Red shoes were among the chief signs of Byzantine imperial rank and a preeminent symbol of power.<sup>147</sup> Unsurprisingly, Stephen was to be identified (and remembered) with the attributes of this type of imperial ranking.

#### *Another way to create memory: the Church of Războieni*

Occasionally, Stephen veritably created memory. In 1496, Stephen commissioned the St. Michael Church of Războieni with a particular purpose: for the remembrance of his soldiers who died twenty years before in the Battle of Valea Albă or Pârâul Alb,<sup>148</sup> close to the church. The battle took place in 1476 and was the direct consequence of the Battle of Vaslui where Stephen defeated the Ottoman armies in 1475. Consequently, Mehmet II himself headed the Ottoman army which attacked Moldavia one year later and defeated the weakened Moldavian army.<sup>149</sup> Twenty years

<sup>146</sup> The "other," the bad, the misunderstood is always the one with an unusual exterior, with a malformation, a different skin colour, a different religion, and so on. By contrast, the good is always the beautiful one, the one who fits the norms of the society. For a brief introduction to the medieval self and "other," see: Albrecht Classen, "The Self, the Other and Everything in Between: Xenological Phenomenology of the Middle Ages" in *Meeting the Foreign in the Middle Ages*, ed. Albrecht Classen (New York: Routledge, 2002), xi-lxxiii.

<sup>147</sup> For a discussion on red shoes as a symbol of Byzantine power, see: Warren T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon. Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 145-146.

<sup>148</sup> Valea Albă or Pârâul Alb should be translated as "The White Stream."

<sup>149</sup> Mehmed II attacked Moldavia at the same time the Tartars attacked it from the North. Stephen was thus forced to divide his army and allow his men to return to their lands in the North in order to defend them. As a consequence, Stephen only faced the sultan with the so-called "Small Army" formed only of his trained boyars and soldiers. For the battle of Valea Albă, see: Constantiniu, *O istorie sinceră a poporului român*, 111-112. Also, for the political circumstances of surrounding the battles of Vaslui and Valea Albă, see: Bogdan Murgescu,

later, Stephen commissioned the Church of Războieni and had the following inscription added to the new edifice:

In the days of the good-Christian and Christ-loving ruler, *Io* Prince Stephen, ruler of Moldavia with the mercy of God, son of Prince Bogdan, in the year 6984 (1476), in the twentieth year of his reign, the powerful Turkish emperor Mehmet II rose with all his eastern powers; and also Prince Basarab, known as Laiotă, came with him, with all of his Wallachian country. And they came to raid and take the Moldavian country; and they came up until here, at the place known as Pârâul Alb. And we, Prince Stephen, with my son Alexander, went before them and made great war with them, in the month of July, 26; and with the will of God, the Christians were defeated by the pagans. And a great number of Moldavian soldiers fell there that day... Because of this, *Io* Prince Stephen with all his good will, built this house in the name of the Archangel Michael; and for the remembrance of himself, of his wife Maria and his sons Alexander and Bogdan, and for the remembrance and acknowledgement of all the Christians who died here. In the year 7004 (1496), the 40<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, the month of November, 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>150</sup>

This sole inscription is unique for the reign of Stephen the Great, but in August, 1973<sup>151</sup> archaeologists discovered that not only the inscription was unique, but also the church itself. It was, just like the Putna Monastery, a *lieu de memoire*, but in a more literal sense. A large ossuary was found underneath the church, placed in exceptional positions underneath the altar and the naos suggesting tombs of martyrs,<sup>152</sup> which gathered the remains of the men who fought and died at the battle of Valea Albă/Războieni, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1476, as the inscription of the church indicates.

The existence of this church with its remarkable inscription and ossuary is however not the only indication of Stephen's method of designing memory. Ștefan Andreescu pointed to the recently-edited memoirs of the Dominican friar Martin Gruneweg (1562-about 1618). At the end of the sixteenth century, the friar travelled through Moldavia and observed that

[Moldavia] rarely has peace and is continuously robbed at all its borders, because of which large spillings of blood occur, but wherever a great battle took place, the field is marked with one of these pillars instead of a cross. Such

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*Țările române între Imperiul Otoman și Europa Creștină* [The Romanian Principalities between the Ottoman Empire and Christian Europe] (Bucharest: Polirom, 2012), 17-20.

<sup>150</sup> See the inscription in in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt 1504–2004. Biserica. O lecție de istorie*, 124-125.

<sup>151</sup> Ștefan Andreescu, "Câmpurile de bătălie – locuri ale memoriei. O nouă mărturie" (The Battlefields – Places of Memory. A New Testimony) *Analele Putnei* 1 (2010): 304.

<sup>152</sup> The connection between the positions of the bones at Războieni and the tombs of martyrs was made by the archaeologist Gh. I. Cantacuzino. See: *Ibidem*.

pillars can be seen very often, especially where an important person had died.<sup>153</sup>

The fact that Stephen marked his battle fields with pillars is evident when studying other documents which point to the existence of battle-field pillars. In 1583, Prince Peter Șchiopul issued a donation act with the following words: "... and from Verboveț to Olovăț, up there on the road, between the land of Olhoveț and Sucevița, then downstream, by the fountain, where Prince Stephen's cross and pillar stand..."<sup>154</sup> Similarly, the Polish traveller Maciej Strykowski, on his way through Moldavia saw the "remains" of the battle of Vaslui, 1475:

... and there, with a few men, he defeated a hundred thousand Turks and Tartars, with the help of God. He ordered that the bodies of the dead be burnt, whose bones are still visible today in large piles, which I saw with my own eyes... and also three crosses, which were built there as a sign of that victory.<sup>155</sup>

Stephen thus had his military deeds remembered – although not only by visual schemes, but also with the help of written means. As the ruler of his principality, Stephen was able to manipulate (his) time as he desired. In some of the documents he issued, a unique chronology was used, creating something which may be called "the time of Stephen the Great."<sup>156</sup> Instead of dating the document with the actual chronological time, Stephen had it dated with "his own" time. This way, the boyar Hanco received the gypsies brought from "the County of Basarabia, when I [Stephen the Great] made war and burnt Floci and Ialomița."<sup>157</sup> Other similar documents refer to the fact that valuable documents of donation were lost or destroyed: some privileges from Princes Alexander the Good, Iliaș and Stephen were lost "when the Turks robbed Horincea,"<sup>158</sup> other privileges were destroyed "when the Turkish emperor came and plundered our country,"<sup>159</sup> similarly, other documents from Alexander the Good went missing when "the Turks came upon us, at Pârâul Alb."<sup>160</sup>

<sup>153</sup> See the original text quoted by Ștefan Andreescu (at page 305) in: Almuert Bues (Hg.), *Die Aufzeichnungen des Dominikaners Martin Gruneweg (1562 – ca. 1618) über seine Familie in Danzig, seine Handelsreisen in Osteuropa und sein Klosterleben in Polen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), 701-714.

<sup>154</sup> Document quoted in Ibidem, 306.

<sup>155</sup> *Călători străini despre Țările Române II* [Foreign Travellers on the Romanian Principalities], ed. Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1968), 452-453.

<sup>156</sup> For more details on the concept of "the time of Stephen the Great," see Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, chapter "Timpul și spațiul unui suveran" [The time and the space of a sovereign], 485-491.

<sup>157</sup> Quoted in Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 489. Originally in *Documenta Romaniae Historica. A. Moldavia II* (1449-1486), ed. Leon Șimanschi (Bucharest: Academiei, 1976), document no. 191; 286. (henceforth: DRH A. II)

<sup>158</sup> Ibidem. Originally in DRH A.II, document no. 209; 317.

<sup>159</sup> Ibidem. Originally in DRH A.II, document no. 230; 352.

<sup>160</sup> Ibidem. Originally in DRH A.II, document no. 126; 246.

The context of the event described, whether it be the destruction of certain documents or acts of privileges, thus became more important than the event itself. The event of the document became subdued to the context – a context which highlighted the acts of Stephen the Great. Stephen thus designed, in a way, his own history textbook.

### ***Building Stephen's myth from the outside: perceptions of Stephen***

Although until the sixteenth century, Stephen was not recalled in external sources as “the Great,” the fifteenth century abounds in references to the ruler which testify his outstanding deeds. Christians, non-Christians, allies, and enemies, all recorded their perception of Stephen.

The pope: Stephen, the champion of Christ

The title *Athleta Christi*, or Champion of Christ, awarded by the Pope to men who successfully defended Christianity in military campaigns, was also bestowed on Stephen the Great. The title which initially evoked an image of struggle<sup>161</sup> represented a significant honour in the Late Middle Ages as rulers such as John Hunyadi or George Kastrioti Skanderbeg received it following their battles with the Ottomans.<sup>162</sup> Usually, successful military encounters against the Ottoman Empire resulted in the bestowal of this papal title, thus Stephen received it after defeating Suleyman Pasha at the notorious battle of Vaslui.<sup>163</sup>

The title *Athleta Christi* is probably the most distinguished that Stephen ever received from one of his contemporaries. However, Stephen was not named “*Athleta Christi*,” but “*verus christiane fidei athleta*,” the true champion of the Christian faith:

... as all people of the earth know, the lawless Turks will not stop conspiring against the Christian faith and against those who received the holy baptism of rebirth and above all, against the beloved son, the noble man, Prince Stephen, duke of Moldavia, and against his dominions ... and although the above-mentioned Stephen, as a true champion of the Christian faith, is prepared to resist the foulness and the attacks of the Turks, in order to carry such a heavy burden and in order to bring it to an end, his sole powers are not sufficient.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> See the late antique and hagiographical origins of the title in: Thomas Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of Saints: The Diocese of Orléans, 800-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 113-114.

<sup>162</sup> For the circumstances in which Skanderbeg was named “*Athleta Christi*,” see: Robert Elsie, *Historical Dictionary of Albania* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 74-75.

<sup>163</sup> For a contextualisation of the events surrounding 1475 within the Eastern European frame, see: Ion Grumeza, *The Roots of Balkanization: Eastern Europe C.E. 500-1500* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2010), 98-99.

<sup>164</sup> *Documente privitoare la istoria Românilor. 1451-1510* [Documents regarding the history of Romanians. 1451-1510], II, Part 2, collected by Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki (Bucharest: 1891),

Analyzing this extract, Ștefan Gorovei revealed the political connection between Stephen the Great and Pope Sixtus IV, within the anti-Ottoman league initiated under the Pope's guidance.<sup>165</sup> Between 1476 and 1477, a set of letters between the Pope and the prince divulged the existence of this unique partnership. The exceptionality of this relationship is betrayed by the content of the written dialogues between Stephen and Pope Sixtus.

Stephen was the initiator of this "dialogue" with a letter in which he asked the Pope to invest a man suggested by him as the new bishop of Baia. The Pope accepts the plea and invests the man – "ex... desiderium tuum,"<sup>166</sup> as Sixtus IV points in his response. Furthermore, in a different letter, Stephen also asked for financial help from the Holy See. The Pope once more answered positively: he would give Stephen all the funds collected from indulgences in the Catholic Churches of Baia and those in the fortress of Cetatea Albă. It was within this response that Stephen was named "verus christiane fidei athleta" and it is certainly remarkable to see how the head of the Catholic Church decides to fund an orthodox prince with the indulgences collected from the most important catholic churches in the Moldavian territory.<sup>167</sup>

Poland, Hungary, and others

Sources show that Polish writers (whether they were chroniclers, diplomats, geographers, or travellers through Moldavia) were the strongest admirers of Stephen amongst the neighbours of the principality. Although they occasionally portrayed Stephen as a blood-thirsty ruler, his general contemporary perception was one which displayed amazement.

Polish sources recall that Stephen the Great "was different from others by means of his perfidy, restlessness, agility, and deftness"<sup>168</sup> while he inflicted a deep fear in Polish soldiers because "many Polish men were disgracefully chased away"<sup>169</sup> by him. However, despite these deeds (or maybe because of them!), he was known as "the most famous prince and warrior of that time, known because of victories against the Turks."<sup>170</sup> When describing Stephen, Polish sources were imbibed with the

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document no. CCXVI, 241 (entire text of the Pope's letter: 241-243). (henceforth: Hurmuzaki II.2).

<sup>165</sup> For the entire study on the connection between Stephen and the Pope, see: Ștefan S. Gorovei, "1473: Ștefan, Moldova și lumea catolică" [1473: Stephen, Moldavia and the Catholic world] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt – Portret în Istorie*, 395-406.

<sup>166</sup> *Documente privitoare la istoria Românilor. 1451-1575* [Documents regarding the history of Romanians. 1451-1575], II, Part 1, collected by Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki (Bucharest: 1891), document no. XVII, 14 (entire text of the Pope's letter: 14-15). (henceforth: Hurmuzaki II.1).

<sup>167</sup> See a thorough discussion of the significance of this issue in: Gorovei, "1473: Ștefan, Moldova și lumea catolică", 401-402.

<sup>168</sup> Jan Długosz, *Historia Polonica* in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 159.

<sup>169</sup> Maciej Miechowita, *Chronica Polonorum* in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 173.

<sup>170</sup> Bernard Wapowski, *Chronicorum Partem Posterorem* in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 176.

leitmotif of the hero. He was the “brilliant warrior,”<sup>171</sup> the “lucky, wise and brave,”<sup>172</sup> “with a heart of a rarely-found bravery, always happy and tireless,”<sup>173</sup> and “a grand soul.”<sup>174</sup>

The impact of Stephen was strong enough to generate signs able to suggest a future defeat of the Polish army:

1494. In the city of Cracow, a woman gave birth to a child and a snake, who ate the back of the child and filled him with wounds. In a slum of the same city, another woman gave birth to an even uglier monster, which had rabbit neck and ears, and instead of his stomach it had a deformed intestine and opened a large and unbound mouth. This eeriness was born on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October. Three years later, in the last days of the same month, the loud and unlucky battle against the Moldavians was fought.<sup>175</sup>

The “loud and unlucky battle” was that of Codrîi Cozminului, fought in October 1497, when Poland’s King John I Albert entered Moldavia to dethrone Stephen. Nature often symbolically announced imminent threats (just like it happened with the death of Stephen<sup>176</sup>). In the case of Codrîi Cozminului, the imminent threat was none other than Stephen. This image of the fearful enemy inspired three of the most concise and relevant Polish characterisations of Stephen the Great. Jan Długosz acclaimed the ruler with the following words:

Oh, wonderful man, you are nothing less than other heroic commanders, who all amaze us so much! In our days, he, the first of the princes of the world, wins a brilliant victory over the Turks. In my opinion, he is the most worthy man to lead and rule the world and he is especially worthy of the honour of being the commander against the Turks, with the advice, understanding and determination of all Christians...<sup>177</sup>

Maciej Miechowita had similar thoughts on Stephen the Great:

Oh, triumphal and victorious man, who fought down all neighbouring kings! Oh, happy man, who was bestowed with all gifts, as others receive only some of these gifts from nature: some are wise and crafty, others are brave and righteous, and others are lucky against enemies. You are the only one who was given all these gifts together: righteous, foreseeing, crafty, victorious over all

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<sup>171</sup> Ibidem, 181.

<sup>172</sup> Maciej Miechowita, *Chronica Polonorum*, 175.

<sup>173</sup> Jan Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 170.

<sup>174</sup> Bernard Wapowski, *Chronicorum Partem Posterorem in Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 177. A similar characterisation of Stephen as a man with a great soul can be found in Jan Długosz, *Historia Polonica in Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 172.

<sup>175</sup> Bernard Wapowski, *Chronicorum Partem Posterorem*, 179.

<sup>176</sup> Polish Chronicler Bernard Wapowski recalled nature’s reaction on the eve of Stephen’s death: “the rivers swelled from the numerous rains and they spilled outside their channels as never seen before; and not long afterwards, Stephen, the prince of Moldavia, died.” See: Ibidem, 190-191.

<sup>177</sup> Jan Długosz, *Historia Polonica*, 165-166.



enemies! It is not in vain that he should be considered one of the heroes of our century.<sup>178</sup>

Finally, Bernard Wapowski also had only words of praise for the prince of Moldavia:

Indeed, he was brave, crafty, and lucky in war. Because he won over Matthias, the king of Hungary ... He drove the Tartars away many times. Mehmed, the emperor of the Turks, who after taking Constantinople, crossed the Danube with 120.000 Turks and robbed Moldavia, was defeated ... Apart from these, he also defeated King Albert ... Stephen was gifted with the virtues of a hero, therefore, he may rightfully be considered among the famous men of the art of war.<sup>179</sup>

When one compares Polish sources to Hungarian ones, their contrasting nature is apparent. Although Stephen's bravery and the successful military aspects of his reign were never omitted by Hungarian chroniclers, the accent however fell on the rebellious nature of the Moldavian prince.

He was "a good protector of his country and his people, ready to die for them."<sup>180</sup> Nevertheless, Antonio Bonfini perceived him filled with revolutionary spirit: "As a subject of the king of Hungary, he [Stephen] had to pay all his taxes and to obey all orders, but he, driven by craze and his fierce temper, although fervent and terrific in war, would not obey in any way."<sup>181</sup> The negative characterisations of Stephen were almost always connected to the Battle of Baia, where King Matthias was defeated in 1467.<sup>182</sup> Hungarian chroniclers agreed that Moldavia, altogether, was rebellious under the guidance of Stephen,<sup>183</sup> although they also agreed that guided by Stephen, Moldavia "defeated Suleyman Pasha and the commander of Rumelia so that out of 30.000 Turks, very few, those who by chance rode very fast horses, managed to get away."<sup>184</sup> Still, regardless of the success against the Ottoman armies, when the clashes between Stephen and Matthias were described, the Moldavian prince became perfidious:

In that time, the entire province was ruled by a man with a unique boldness; his name was Stephen. This man, gathering a great number of people, hurried to

<sup>178</sup> Maciej Miechowita, *Chronica Polonorum*, 175.

<sup>179</sup> Bernard Wapowski, *Chronicorum Partem Posterorem*, 191.

<sup>180</sup> *Chronicon Dubnicense in Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 207.

<sup>181</sup> Antonio Bonfini, *Historia Pannonica ab Origine Gentis ad Annum 1495 in Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 208.

<sup>182</sup> For a detailed description of the Battle of Baia, see: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, subchapter "Lupta de la Baia" [The Battle of Baia], 59-70.

<sup>183</sup> "Moldavia also revolted." See: Petrus Ranzanus, *Epitome Rerum Hungaricarum in Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 211. Or, as in another instance: "Matthias headed the reins of his horses towards Moldavia, which was a rebel at that time." See: Ioannes de Thurocz, *Chronica Hungarorum in Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 212.

<sup>184</sup> Felix Petancic, "Despre drumurile pe care trebuie să se pornească expediția contra turcilor" [About the roads on which the campaign against the Turks should debut] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 214.

set fire in many places of the city [the Fortress of Baia], after midnight, so that the king and all his men, dizzy with sleep and wine, would transform into ashes.<sup>185</sup>

Hungarian chronicles contemporary to Stephen show him in both positive and negative terms, a fact best summarised in the sixteenth-century work of Miklós Istvánffy: "...it is therefore seen that he must rightfully be considered among the men worth remembering of his time. But he was changing and unstable. He was proud and his unusual cruelty erased some of the fame and glory of his deeds."<sup>186</sup>

Other sources from beyond Moldavian borders combine the two contrasting views on Stephen: the veritable hero versus the brave rebel. Stephen's preeminent image is somewhat faded as he ceased to be the man Długosz, Miechowski, and Wapowski described, although he still remained the brave and strong commander. Chronicles originating in German and Russian territories also add to Stephen's characterisation with negative epithets: Stephen is once more a brutal, merciless ruler.

In the eyes of Jakob Unrest, the Moldavian ruler was wise and it was with the help of this virtue that he accomplished the victory of 1475 against Suleyman Pasha.<sup>187</sup> As the 1475 victory echoed outside Moldavia, he was unsurprisingly portrayed as a ruler who accomplished the almost un-accomplishable: "The prince ... soon afterwards killed 13,000 and caught 5,000 of them [the Ottomans]. And such a cry went all the way to Constantinople and such a cry rose, because for many years something similar had not been heard..."<sup>188</sup> A similar echo was recorded by an anonymous chronicle after the battle of Codrîi Cozminului when Stephen defeated the Polish king:

And the defeat of the Polish was so great, that the king barely returned with ten men, after which the king became sick. And then this saying was born: during the time of King Albert, the Polish army [*szlachta*] perished.<sup>189</sup>

These chronicles, however, also described a cruel ruler, such as during the events when the Tartar army tried to invade Moldavia and Stephen captured the Khan's son:

And envoys from his father came, threatening Prince Stephen. Stephen, however, ordered that the son of the Khan be killed in front of them and he impaled all of them [the envoys], except for one, whose nose and ears he cut down and sent him back like this to the tsar of the Tartars.<sup>190</sup>

<sup>185</sup> Petrus Ranzanus, *Epitome Rerum Hungaricarum*, 212.

<sup>186</sup> Miklós Istvánffy, *Regni Hungarici Historia in Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 216.

<sup>187</sup> "... again Stephen voivode entered Moldavia, where six groups of Ottoman armies were ... whom he defeated with his wisdom and he made them run..." See: Jakob Unrest, *Chronicon Austriacum in Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 222.

<sup>188</sup> *Cronică germană* [The German Chronicle] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 222.

<sup>189</sup> *Cronica de la mănăstirea Hustânscaia* [The Chronicle of the Hustynska Monastery] in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 225.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibidem*, 224.

A Lithuanian chronicle fills the lack of information in the above-cited extract and explains how the son of the Khan was actually executed: "... very few escaped with the Khan, and his eldest son was captured by the Moldavians and cut to pieces."<sup>191</sup> Unsurprisingly, there are similar accounts of how Stephen punished his enemies after Stephen's most famous battle, that of Vaslui in 1475: "... he [Stephen the Great] ordered that the 11,000 captured Turks and Tartars be impaled, within ten rows of stakes."<sup>192</sup>

However, probably the most relevant characterisation of Stephen is the following: "1504. Stephen died, the prince of Moldavia, brave warrior just like a second Alexander."<sup>193</sup> He was not simply praised for his military deeds, but was compared to one of the already-mythical king-figures, Alexander the Great. The sheer comparison with the Macedonian king offers Stephen a magnificent dimension which surpasses the borders of his humble principality.

### Ottomans on Stephen

Stephen the Great's reign was marked by Moldavia's relationship with the Ottoman Empire. He eventually subdued and accepted to pay the Ottoman tribute, but not before a long series of conflicts which were mainly fought without substantial help from any Christian power of the time.<sup>194</sup>

In accordance with this tumultuous relationship, Ottoman sources do not present the prince in a positive perspective. Documents and chronicles mainly focus on the two events which shook the Moldavian-Ottoman relations: the 1475 Moldavian victory at Vaslui and the 1476 Ottoman counter-victory at Podul Înalt (Războieni). In almost all Ottoman instances, the battle of Vaslui is presented briefly, while the battle of Războieni is described in its entire amplexity. Aşık Paşazade is a fine example in this sense: while he describes the events of the year 1475 in no more than five sentences, he elaborates the conflict of 1476 in a space which encompasses more than six times the space used for 1475.<sup>195</sup> The explanation for the Ottoman disproportionate allocation of space for these events is self-explanatory. Nobody expected that the Ottoman army led by Süleyman Paşa would be defeated in 1475, thus the outcome of the battle created a wave of shock in the Ottoman world which

<sup>191</sup> *Cronica Lituaniană* [Lithuanian Chronicle] in *Ştefan cel Mare şi Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 226-227.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibidem*, 227.

<sup>193</sup> *Cronica de la mănăstirea Hustânscaia*, 226.

<sup>194</sup> For insights to all the relevant conflicts between Stephen's Moldavia and the Ottoman Empire, see: Tahsin Gemil, *Românii şi otomanii în secolele XIV-XVI* [Romanians and Ottomans from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 1991), chapter "Românii în faţa unui nou imperiu" [Romanians in front of a new empire]; Cazan and Denize. *Marile puteri şi spaţiul românesc*, Chapter III "Domnia lui Ştefan cel Mare – epoca de maximă afirmare politică a Moldovei medievale" [Stephen the Great – Medieval Moldavia's period of maximal political affirmation].

<sup>195</sup> See: Aşık Paşazade in *Ştefan cel Mare şi Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 248-249.

substantially contributed to the negative characterisations of Stephen in Ottoman perspective.

Kara-Bogdan-oglu<sup>196</sup> was “the enemy from Moldavia,”<sup>197</sup> “the leader of the devils in Moldavia,”<sup>198</sup> the “unworthy giaour”<sup>199</sup> as Tursun Bei described him, and the “damned unfaithful”<sup>200</sup> as Aşık Paşazade named him. Stephen was disliked mainly because he disobeyed the Sultan and refused to pay the taxes, and because, on top of his disobedience, he was victorious in 1475. Nevertheless, one year later, the Ottomans were avenged: because he “had shown recklessness in submission and in paying the tribute, he was defeated and punished as he deserved.”<sup>201</sup>

Thus Sultan Mehmed rearranged the Ottoman-Moldavian balance in 1476 and, less than ten years later, his successor Bayezid II took control over Stephen’s most beloved fortresses: the ports of Chilia and Akkerman. With this conquest, Bayezid ended in 1485 Stephen’s hostile policy towards the Ottoman Empire.<sup>202</sup> In fact, Aşık Paşazade highlighted that Stephen not only abandoned his hostile attitude, but took shelter in Poland until the situation of the fortresses was clear. In this context, Aşık Paşazade made a thorough characterisation of the prince, rhetorically asking himself why Stephen abandoned his principality in what he perceived as a cowardly gesture:

What kind of unfaithful man is this Kara-Bogdan-oglu that when such miseries come upon his vilayet that he could not find a place to guard his head! To this question, I answered in verses:

He stepped on the Hungarian king,  
He broke the bow of Süleyman-bei,  
He scared even the one in Wallachia,  
And many times his [the Wallachian prince’s] principality as well.  
Also, he stood face to face with Sultan Mehmed.  
His army was destroyed, but he fought well.  
He saved his head from the hands of his enemy.  
This is the unfaithful who defeated many armies.  
He was vain and rogue and full of himself,

<sup>196</sup> This was the name by which Stephen the Great was known in the Ottoman Empire. See in: Aşık Paşazade, “Tevarih-I Al-I Osman” in *Cronici turceşti privind Țările Române. Extrase. Sec. XV – mijlocul sec. XVII I* [Turkish Chronicles regarding the Romanian Principalities. Extracts. From the fifteenth century to the mid-seventeenth century], ed. Mihail Gublogu and Mustafa Mehmet (Bucharest: Academiei, 1966), 100.

<sup>197</sup> Tursun Bei, “Tarih-I Ebu-l Feth-I Sultan Mehmed-Han” in *Cronici turceşti privind Țările Române*, 69.

<sup>198</sup> Ibidem, 77.

<sup>199</sup> Ibidem, 78.

<sup>200</sup> Aşık Paşazade, “Tevarih-I Al-I Osman” in *Cronici turceşti privind Țările Române*, 96.

<sup>201</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>202</sup> After the year 1485, Stephen’s reign entered the new phase of building and adorning churches and focusing on a more spiritual side of his reign. Ovidiu Pecican argues that it was the deep disappointment that Stephen felt when he lost these two fortresses that made him give up his hostile attitude towards the Ottomans. See Pecican, *Sânge și trandafiri*, 43.

But he ran without shame from Ali-bei.  
The greatness of Bayezid-han made him run away,  
And go in the country of the Polish ruler.<sup>203</sup>

Aşık Paşazade both praised and denigrated the ruler. Stephen had enough power to defeat a Pasha (Suleyman), but had no courage to stand in front of the new sultan, Bayezid. Although Stephen was a skilled warrior, the position of Moldavia to the Empire did not allow the prince to be seen positively. Thus, other fifteenth-century Ottoman historians had similar views to Aşık Paşazade. Mehmed Neşri also thought that Stephen was a “damned”<sup>204</sup> “giaour”<sup>205</sup> but, interestingly, he also made a eulogising statement regarding the prince: “Istefan-bei from Moldavia, a very skilled man and great master in wars against giaours, served very well Sultan Murad and Sultan Mehmed.”<sup>206</sup>

One must argue therefore that the figure of Stephen was not completely negative and this is a significant element when discussing the image of the Moldavian prince. The fact that a representative of the Ottoman Empire admitted that a man who probably caused the Sultan some sleepless nights was in fact a skilled warrior, may be seen as a strike to his ego. Nevertheless, Stephen’s courage is present in all his characterisations, although it was probably words like these ones that the Sultan mostly enjoyed: “Bogdan”<sup>207</sup> ran with his face darkened, with tears in his eyes and his heart broken.<sup>208</sup>

<sup>203</sup> Aşık Paşazade, “Tevarih-I Al-I Osman” in *Cronici turceşti privind Tărilor Române*, 102.

<sup>204</sup> Mehmed Neşri, “Djihanna, Tarih-I Al-I Osman” in *Cronici turceşti privind Tărilor Române*, 127.

<sup>205</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>206</sup> Mehmed Neşri in *Ştefan cel Mare şi Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 263.

<sup>207</sup> Stephen the Great.

<sup>208</sup> The characterisation of Stephen the Great after the defeat at Podul Înalt in 1476. See: Şemseddin Ahmed bin Suleiman Kemal Paşazade in *Ştefan cel Mare şi Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 271.

## IV The great successor and the pursuit of the dynastic project: Prince Peter Rareș

The fifteenth-century followers of Stephen the Great all tried to emulate the image of their great predecessor: from his son Bogdan III to the illegitimate claimants to the throne.<sup>209</sup> However, none of them followed in the footsteps of Stephen as much as his illegitimate son Peter Rareș (1527-1538; 1541-1546) did. The “swan with golden feathers,” as Rareș’s personal chronicler Macarie called him,<sup>210</sup> had an immense ambition animated by his vision of justice – this was visible throughout the actions of his entire reign, but was also verbalised by the prince himself: “God helps the one who does not slug, the one who welcomes hardships and calls God for his help, God helps the one who loves justice and who judges with righteousness, because justice is true happiness for God, and for the tsar it is true wisdom.”<sup>211</sup>

Peter Rareș was seeking justice – a justice which may be called his own two-fold justice. On the one hand, like any righteous medieval ruler, Rareș promoted and followed divine justice: “True justice is Christ ... and God lives in the empire where there is justice and he gives it [the empire] his saintly help; and God’s wrath never rises against that empire.”<sup>212</sup> On the other hand, there was the justice that Rareș followed in the footsteps of his father, a justice which was more of a guideline that allowed him to engage in purposeful projects similar to his father’s.

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<sup>209</sup> See Teodora Artimon, “The Proto-Myth of Stephen the Great of Moldavia” doctoral dissertation (Budapest: Central European University, 2015), chapter “The Pursuit of the Dynastic Project: Stephen’s Successors.”

<sup>210</sup> “Cronica lui Macarie” [The Chronicle of Macarie] in Ioan Bogdan, *Vechile cronice moldovenesci până la Urechia* (Bucharest: Lito-Tipografia Carol Gobl, 1891), 212 (henceforth: “The Chronicle of Macarie”).

<sup>211</sup> Ivan Peresvetov, “Jalba cea mare” [The large letter], in *Călători străini despre Țările Române I*, 453.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibidem*, 457.

### *(Illegitimate) origins and (legitimate) enthronement*

The origins of Peter Rareș are covered in shade. While his official chronicler omits any information about his mother and only focuses on his descentance from Stephen the Great,<sup>213</sup> Grigore Ureche adds information on both his mother and on the way he was appointed to the Moldavian throne:

After the death of his predecessor Stephen the Young, the boyars gathered and discussed whom they will choose as ruler, because custom did not allow the reign of somebody who had no princely blood. And discussing with each other, they learned from the Metropolitan about events that happened before Prince Stephen [the Young] and because Prince Stephen [the Young] was sick at Hotin, he ordered that if he died, nobody should come to the throne except Peter Măjariul, nicknamed Rareș, by the name of his mother who was named after another man [her husband], merchant in Hârlău, called Rareș. Thus, confirming that he was descending from the bone of Prince Stephen [the Great], they all raised him prince, on January 20.<sup>214</sup>

One learns from this excerpt that Peter was the illegitimate son of Stephen the Great, raised under the protection of a man named Rareș, in the town of Hârlău. This was the general historiographical opinion for a long time<sup>215</sup> until it was proved that Peter Rareș was not the fish merchant living unknowingly of his princely status,<sup>216</sup> but a man raised either within a family of boyars with noble connections in Hârlău and Baia,<sup>217</sup> or within the powerful boyar family of Cernat.<sup>218</sup>

Chronicles consented, as seen in the above quotation from Ureche, that it was Stephen the Young who appointed Rareș to the Moldavian throne. It is difficult to know how correct this information is,<sup>219</sup> but it is certain that the Royal Council decided to appoint Rareș disregarding the sons of Stephen the Young.<sup>220</sup> This may be explained by the fact that Stephen's sons were still under-aged, but also by the fact

<sup>213</sup> "... Prince Peter, the son of old Prince Stephen..." See: "The Chronicle of Macarie," 203.

<sup>214</sup> Ureche, *The Chronicle of Moldavia*, 91.

<sup>215</sup> And it most likely remains so for several historians.

<sup>216</sup> For this opinion, see: Ion Toderașcu, "Înscăunarea" [The enthronement], in *Petru Rareș*, ed. Leon Șimanschi (Bucharest: Academiei, 1978), 63.

<sup>217</sup> It may have been that Maria, Rareș's mother, descended from the logothete Isaia's family from Baia, while her husband descended from a boyar named Bărlă from Hârlău. See: Maria Magdalena Székely, "Neamul dinspre mamă a lui Petru Rareș" [The family of Peter Rareș descending from his mother], *Arhiva Genealogică* 5 (1998): 169-178.

<sup>218</sup> Ștefan Gorovei, *Petru Rareș* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1982), 269. See also: Șerban Orașcu, "Mama lui Petru Rareș" [The mother of Peter Rareș], *Magazin Istoric* 11 (1977): 36.

<sup>219</sup> Ovidiu Pecican hypothesised that the story of Rareș's enthronement as appointed by Stephen the Young is most likely a well-imbibed motif in Moldavian and Wallachian cultures, which had at least three more manifestations in three different rulers of Wallachia. See: Ovidiu Pecican, *Evul mediu fictiv* [Fictional Middle Ages] (Bucharest: Tracus Arte, 2012), 120.

<sup>220</sup> Stephen the Young's sons were the later prince John the Brave and the aspirant to the throne, Ivan Bogdan. See: Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică*, 560.

that Stephen the Great's notoriety at the time could not allow the boyars to appoint anyone else to the throne but his closest descendant. Whichever the circumstances, it is certain that in 1527, upon receiving the throne of Moldavia, Peter Rareș was congratulated by King Sigismund I for becoming the follower of Stephen the Young.<sup>221</sup>

### *The first reign: matching the father?*

Peter Rareș wanted to be known as the son of Stephen the Great and evidence shows that he was deeply pleased with this status. During his reign, he commissioned a chronicle from bishop Macarie which was meant to show the history of his reign, preceded by short histories of Bogdan III and Stephen the Young. The introduction of the chronicle is relevant:

And we try, as we can, to continue the story and to bring it up to our days, not because we want to brag ourselves in rhetorical boosts, but because we are following the princely orders of our illustrious and feared-by-enemies Prince Peter, the son of Stephen the Brave ... to not allow the deeds of the past fall into the grave of oblivion.<sup>222</sup>

Peter, therefore, through the words of his chronicler, made his ambitions clear from the very beginning of his own story. Although the text refers to the continuation of the previous chronicles written in the fifteenth century, it nevertheless implies something more subtle (which may or may not have been intentional): Peter Rareș was going to "continue the story" of his father. But he could not continue the story if he was not known as the son of his father – which is why he became furious when Sigismund I confused him for the son of Bogdan III (the father of Stephen the Young and the legitimate son of Stephen the Great). During the conflict with Poland over Pokkutia, the strip of land for which both his father and his brother Bogdan III fought, Peter and Sigismund exchanged a number of letters. In one of them, Sigismund mistakenly mentioned Peter as the son of Bogdan. Peter's answer to this assertion came promptly, in 1531:

And you say that I am not the son of Prince Stephen the Great, but that I am the son of Prince Bogdan, who was my brother. Here, your writer was misinformed and he was wrong to deny my father. And that part of Pokkutia, Prince Stephen the Great, my beloved father, kept for a long time in his possession.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> *Documente privitoare la istoria Românilor. 1510-1530* [Documents regarding the history of Romanians. 1510-1530], II, Part 3, collected by Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki (Bucharest: 1892), document no. CCCCVII, 600 (henceforth: Hurmzaki II.3)

<sup>222</sup> "The Chronicle of Macarie," 198-199.

<sup>223</sup> See the entire letter of Peter in: *Scrisori domnești* [Royal letters], ed. Nicolae Iorga (Vălenii de Munte: Tipografia "Neamul Românesc," 1912), 46-49, esp. 47.



The very tone of this answer indicated that Stephen the Great represented a model for Peter. Nevertheless, while he tried to follow his father's "recipe," he failed to do one thing which led to the fatal end of his first reign: he omitted the fact that Stephen never confronted two enemies at the same time, and he concomitantly entered in conflict with two powers which, combined, could only lead to an unfortunate outcome – the Polish Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire.

The conflict with King Sigismund and Suleyman the Magnificent not only shows that Rareș tried to accomplish more than he physically could,<sup>224</sup> but it also unveils his way of conducting his policy and his larger-than-life personality. The "tyrant," as he was viewed by some from the very beginning of his reign,<sup>225</sup> started his relationship with Poland in good terms by signing an alliance which referred to maintaining peace between Moldavia and Poland and offering reciprocal help, when necessary.<sup>226</sup> Nevertheless, soon after signing this treaty, Peter Rareș sent Sigismund a letter in which he was asking back territory of Pokkutia<sup>227</sup> – arguing that it rightfully belonged to Moldavia not only since the time of Bogdan III, but even before. As expected, the answer was negative, which led to military conflicts between the two rulers. In December 1530, Peter occupied Pokkutia. As a consequence, Sigismund asked Rareș to respect their alliance and to free the territory. He refused, so the voivode of Galicia Ian Tarnowski re-conquered Pokkutia once more for the Polish Kingdom. When he defeated Peter's armies left in Pokkutia, the Moldavian prince responded promptly by leaving for Pokkutia with a new army. This fatally led to "the most embarrassing defeat that the world has ever seen"<sup>228</sup> when "over 7,000 Moldavians were slaughtered"<sup>229</sup> at Obertyn on August 22, 1531.<sup>230</sup>

Not only did the Polish slaughter the Moldavians, but they also diminished Rareș's pride when they took all the artillery which was comprised of 50 bronze cannons and three gilded flags, of which one is thought to have been the investment flag received from the sultan. And these flags are now hung in the

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<sup>224</sup> Meaning that he tried to gain Moldavia's independence from both the Ottoman Empire and the Polish Kingdom. While he managed to do so with Sigismund, he greatly failed at doing so with Suleyman the Magnificent. See: Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică*, 562.

<sup>225</sup> In 1528, Tranquillo Andreis sent a letter to Jan Tarnowski, the commander of the Polish army, telling him about the situation in Wallachia. In this context, he mentioned Rareș saying that the only way towards Wallachia is by Moldavia – referring to the prince, he mentioned him as "that tyrant." See: *Călători străini despre Țările Române* I, 246.

<sup>226</sup> See the entire text of the treaty in: Hurmuzaki II.3, document no. CCCCX, 602-606. For a discussion of this document, see: Veniamin Ciobanu, "Apărător al moștenirii lui Ștefan cel Mare" [Defender of Stephen the Great's legacy], in *Petru Rareș*, ed. Leon Șimanschi (Bucharest: Academiei, 1978), 111-112.

<sup>227</sup> Gorovei, *Mușatinii*, 89.

<sup>228</sup> Ercole the Dalmatian described the events surrounding the conquest of the Pokkutia as he was in Moldavia at the time. See: *Călători străini despre Țările Române* I, 315.

<sup>229</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>230</sup> For the thorough descriptions of the conquest of Pokkutia and the defeat at Obertyn, see: Ciobanu, "Apărător al moștenirii lui Ștefan cel Mare," 107-135; Gorovei, *Mușatinii*, 84-85.

Cracow Cathedral. The cannons ... once belonged to the King of Poland, who was defeated by the Moldavian prince, that also brave captain Stephen [the Great].<sup>231</sup>

The humiliation was even greater as Peter himself was wounded twice and some of his most important boyars were taken prisoners in Poland – the logothete Toader Bubuio, governor Huru, and cup-bearer Popescu.<sup>232</sup>

While Peter's precipitation to jump into battle with Jan Tarnowski without properly considering his strategy, inherently characterises him as a poor military strategist,<sup>233</sup> he still remained "rebellis inventus."<sup>234</sup> Although throughout the letters and the messengers sent between Moldavia and Poland after Obertyn, Peter tempered his demands and gave up on Pokkutia, he was still asking for compensation after his defeat in Poland.<sup>235</sup> In this context, Nicholas Iskrzycki, the chamberlain of Camenitsa, was sent to negotiate with the Moldavian prince. The initiative failed and Peter Rareș ended their dialogue with the following sharp words:

... and if His Highness the King will not want to finish fighting with me, do you see this icon of the Resurrection above my head? I swore on it before and I swear now that I will not stop revenging, even if my head falls ... even if the entire world falls on me.<sup>236</sup>

In 1533, however, it came to knowledge (and also to Peter's knowledge)<sup>237</sup> that Sigismund did not want to "finish fighting" with Peter, and signed a peace treaty with the Ottoman Empire that would surround Moldavia with enemies, isolate it, and eventually depose Peter Rareș.<sup>238</sup> In 1532, Peter Opalinski, Sigismund's judge, was sent to the Porte in order to discuss the Polish-Ottoman treaty. Reporting back to his king, while secluded in the Transylvanian fortress of Mediaș by Peter's men, he told Sigismund about the "terrible traps that the price of Moldavia prepared [for me], both when I went and when I returned, in Moldavia, Hungary, and Transylvania, as well."<sup>239</sup> Opalinski eventually escaped from Peter's "few thousands Vlachs."<sup>240</sup> Any vengeance from Peter was, however, useless because in 1538 Moldavia was attacked from three different parts: from the south by the Ottoman army led by Suleyman the

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<sup>231</sup> Ercole the Dalmatian, in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* I, 315.

<sup>232</sup> Gorovei, *Mușatinii*, 84.

<sup>233</sup> Maria Magdalena Székely, *Sfetcii lui Petru Rareș* [The Boyars of Peter Rareș] (Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza, 2002), 11.

<sup>234</sup> As Andrew Mihalevich called him in one of his letters to Ferdinand of Habsburg. See: *Călători străini despre Țările Române* I, 302.

<sup>235</sup> *Călători străini despre Țările Române* I, 351.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibidem*, 355.

<sup>237</sup> Sigismund's messenger, Peter Opalinski reported to his king that "...the prince of Moldavia foresaw that I would go to the Turk." See: *Călători străini despre Țările Române* I, 347.

<sup>238</sup> For a thorough description of what happened after the treaty, see: Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică*, 563-567.

<sup>239</sup> *Călători străini despre Țările Române* I, 344.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibidem*, 348.

Magnificent himself and accompanied by a Wallachian army; from the north by the Polish army; and from the east by the Tartar army.<sup>241</sup> Peter Rareș, therefore, found himself trapped between his neighbours: “And the head of Moldavia was struggling in the middle. There was no hope for any help.”<sup>242</sup>

Peter thus committed the fatal mistake that his father had always avoided: in a mismatched diplomatic strategy, he raised all neighbouring powers against him. “Learning about the arrival of the Turks, Peter was stricken with fear”<sup>243</sup> and was forced to flee to Transylvania before Suleyman the Magnificent reached the gates of Suceava. However, before running to Transylvania, documents show that he did not abandon his seat without a military response. Peter Rareș thoroughly prepared for the clash with the Polish army and after another confrontation with Jan Tamowski, he signed a peace treaty with the Polish Kingdom. Peace with the Ottomans, on the other hand, was not possible: although he defeated the Tartar army at Ștefănești,<sup>244</sup> he did not have the chance to confront Suleyman’s men because of the treason of his most important boyars. It was only when his trusted boyar Huru told him about the plot of the Royal Council to ally with the sultan<sup>245</sup> that Peter left Moldavia and took shelter in Transylvania. It was the end of his first reign, dated 14<sup>th</sup> of September 1538.<sup>246</sup>

### **A man of (still) dynamic personality: the second reign**

Although in 1538, Peter Rareș, as Abdülaziz Efendi described, “showed his hidden rebellion, spitting his filthy poison from his snake-like mouth,”<sup>247</sup> he still followed his interests and managed to retie the relationship with the Ottoman Porte. In 1539, he approached Sultan Suleyman for the first time and shortly afterwards, in 1540, he left for Istanbul to pay his dues for regaining the throne.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> “Next to the Turks came the Tartars as well, with their beastly faces, and next to the Turks came the leaders of the Wallachian armies too, and from the north [came] the low-minded Poles.” See: “The Chronicle of Macarie,” 207.

<sup>242</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>243</sup> The Chronicle of Mustafa Celalzade (“Tabakat al-memalik ve daradjat al-mesalik”), in *Cronici turcești privind Țările Române. Extrase* [Turkish Chronicles on the Romanian Principalities] I, ed. Mihail Guboglu and Mustafa Mehmet (Bucharest: Academiei, 1966), 264.

<sup>244</sup> Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică*, 564.

<sup>245</sup> “But the keeper of the royal chamber, whose name was Hâră, learning about all this, told the prince everything and he said: oh, prince, the boyars are counselling to abandon you.” See: “The Chronicle of Macarie,” 208.

<sup>246</sup> The official date of the end of his first reign is September 14, 1538, as noted by Macarie in his chronicle. See: Ibidem.

<sup>247</sup> The chronicle of Abdülaziz Efendi, “Suleimanname,” in *Cronici turcești privind Țările Române*, 534.

<sup>248</sup> Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică*, 566.

Peter became one of the sultan's men again. This is visible not only in the communication between Sultan Suleyman and King Sigismund,<sup>249</sup> but also in a letter written by a man named Husein, a messenger of the sultan to the Polish King. Husein was advising Sigismund to keep good relations with Peter because "the sultan has shown him [Răeș] such a great honour that he has not shown to anyone in a long time."<sup>250</sup>

However, regardless of the sultan's actions, Mehmed bin Mehmed's words regarding the events of 1538 still seem to be valid for his second reign: "he was subdued only in appearance and in fact he was a rebel."<sup>251</sup> Following the anti-Ottoman policy pursued by his father and risking to violate the treaty with the Ottoman Empire, Peter demonstrated that he was still in the anti-Ottoman camp. In 1544, upon learning that Joachim II Hector of Brandenburg was about to initiate an anti-Ottoman campaign, he promised Joachim II all his help, including money and animals, as well as the commitment of "selling" the sultan to the Christians. Peter's messenger said that "he [Răeș] wants to stay with the Christians and believes that he could help them more than others could."<sup>252</sup> Moreover, his anti-Ottoman position was visible on other occasions as well: in 1542, while passing through Moldavia, Nicholas the Armenian recorded Răeș's words about his Ottoman policy: "... if I saw that a Christian king rose with power and faith against the Turks, I would join him with faith and help him with all my powers."<sup>253</sup>

The policy of Stephen the Great therefore still lived on during both reigns of Peter Răeș, because of two of his most prominent actions: his campaign for Pokkutia and his anti-Ottoman campaign. But Stephen's legacy most visibly lived through a different aspect: cultural and artistic growth. Peter was, without a doubt, the most resourceful continuator of his father's artistic endeavours.

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<sup>249</sup> See the letters between Suleyman and Sigismund in which the sultan announced the second enthronement of Peter, as well as Sigismund's acceptance of the situation. See, for example, Sigismund's letter to the Sultan of April 20<sup>th</sup> 1541 and Suleyman's letter to the Polish King from the beginning of 1541 in: *Documente privitoare la istoria României culese din arhivele polone. Secolul XVI*. [Documents regarding the history of Romania from Polish archives. The sixteenth century], ed. Ilie Corfiș (Bucharest: Academiei, 1979), letters no. 27 and 28, 34-36.

<sup>250</sup> Ibidem, letter no. 29, 37.

<sup>251</sup> The chronicle of Mehmed bin Mehmed, "Nuhnet-ut-Tevarih ve'l-ahbar," in *Cronici turcești privind Țările Române*, 411.

<sup>252</sup> *Scrisori domnești*, ed. Nicolae Iorga, letter no. XXVII, 59.

<sup>253</sup> *Călători străini despre Țările Române* I, 387.

## Recycling, remembering, and modernising

After a period of experimentation, Stephen the Great's art reached what art historians call the period of maturity in Moldavian art.<sup>255</sup> On the one hand, the so-called "Moldavian style in medieval architecture,"<sup>256</sup> was developed, while on the other hand, mural painting bloomed and became the most significant decorative element of Stephen's artistic legacy. Following the example of his father, Peter Rareș made two relevant steps: firstly, he used the artistic patterns of his father and commissioned a number of edifices which recalled the art of Stephen, and secondly, he modernised the already established forms of Stephen the Great.

Peter and his family commissioned a large number of ecclesiastic edifices: the Church of Probota, his main commission as princely necropolis, the Humor Monastery, the Moldovița Monastery, the Saint Demetrius and the Dormition churches of Suceava, Precista Church of Baia, Saint Paraschiva Church of Roman, Râșca Monastery, Saint Paraschiva Church of Târgu Frumos.<sup>257</sup> A relevant aspect of Rareș's commissions is that he re-commissioned edifices commissioned by his predecessors, thus confirming his family ties to his father's dynasty.<sup>258</sup>

The same type of confirmation was revealed by the construction of his most important commission, the Probota Monastery. Built in 1530,<sup>259</sup> the monastery was meant to replace Stephen the Great's main commission of Putna, as princely burial place. This decision was received with concern by the monastic authorities of Putna, especially since Peter somewhat ignored Putna during his first reign.<sup>260</sup> In order to settle these anxieties, the prince built his necropolis in the proximity of an edifice once commissioned by his father, reinforcing, this way, the continuity between himself and his father. But this continuity was much more visible in the architectural resemblance between Probota and Putna: the two monasteries, with minor details, are

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<sup>254</sup> A study of Peter Rareș's artistic endeavours would require much more space than this. Because of practical reasons, this part will only focus on the relationship between Peter's art to that of Stephen's.

<sup>255</sup> Drăguț, *Pictura murală din Moldova. Secolele XV-XVI*, 12.

<sup>256</sup> For a description of the Moldavian style, see: *Ibidem*.

<sup>257</sup> See: Ion Solcanu, "Realizări artistice" [Artistic achievements], in *Petru Rareș*, ed. Leon Șimanschi, 297.

<sup>258</sup> See more in: Maria Crăciun, "Apud Ecclesia: church burial and the development of funerary rooms in Moldavia," in *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 144-166.

<sup>259</sup> Drăguț, *Dicționar enciclopedic de artă medievală românească*, 247.

<sup>260</sup> Bogdan-Petru Maelon, "Mănăstirea Probota între ierarhia ecleziastică și domnie. Semnificațiile unor privilegii din secolele XV-XVI – The Probota monastery between the ecclesiastic hierarchy and the reign. The significance of some privileges during the 15th and 16th centuries," *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 14 (2006): 141.

in perfect architectural concordance.<sup>261</sup> It can easily be argued that Putna was a model for Probota. So Peter did not simply set a new princely burial location while abandoning his father's princely burial place. On the contrary, it seems that, in an act of ambition so characteristic of Peter Rareș, he wanted to build a new necropolis detaching himself from his father's commission but at the same time following his artistic precepts. Therefore, he wanted to build something new, but something new within the lines of his father. Moreover, the inaugural inscription of the church invokes Stephen the Great's imperial legacy, indicating his belief in his legitimate right to build his own burial place:<sup>262</sup>

With the will of the Father, and with the help of the Son and the action of the Holy Spirit, I, the slave of Jesus Christ, *Io* Prince Peter, ruler of Moldavia with the mercy of God, son of Prince Stephen the Old, with my good will, in the fourth year of my *imperial rule*, I built this church in the name of the miracle-doer Saint Nicholas, father superior being Grigore, in the year 1738, in October.<sup>263</sup>

Indeed, the son of Stephen seemed to have had grand plans, able to minimise his illegitimate origin. Analysing the architectural dynamism of Probota, Ion Solceanu concludes that the monastery portrays the "ambition of the prince to equal, if not even to exceed, Stephen the Great's constructions of Putna and Neamț."<sup>264</sup> Peter's monastery is not a simple replica of Putna, but a development of Putna's forms.<sup>265</sup> However, Probota was not the only monastery commissioned by Peter which owed its form to commissions of Stephen the Great. This was also the case of the Saint Demetrius Church of Hârlău which was a "veritable copy"<sup>266</sup> of Stephen's commission from the same town. Moreover, most of Peter's commissions added novelties to the already established architectural forms of Stephen the Great. By modernising an already-established form, Peter identified himself with the art of Stephen, thus revealing his "awareness of the capacity of imagery to fix identity."<sup>267</sup> Peter was constructing his image through the legacy of his father, thus building his own identity upon and with the help of the identity of Stephen the Great. At the same time, he was opening the door for new approaches in art, particularly in mural

<sup>261</sup> Probota was built respecting the architectural plan of Putna monastery, commissioned by Stephen the Great. See: Drăguș, *Pictura murală din Moldova. Secolele XV-XVI*, 23; A second architectural plan however, which inspired Probota was that of Neamț monastery, also commissioned by Stephen. See: Adam, *Ctitorii mușatine*, 90.

<sup>262</sup> Maelon, "Mănăstirea Probota între ierarhia ecleziastică și domnie," 143.

<sup>263</sup> Sergiu Adam, *Ctitorii mușatine. Biserici, mănăstiri, cetăți, curți domnești. Secolele XIV-XVI* [Commissions of the Mușatin dynasty. Churches, monasteries, royal courts. Fourteenth-sixteenth centuries] (Cluj: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2001), 90.

<sup>264</sup> Ion Solcanu, "Realizări artistice" [Artistic achievements], in *Petru Rareș*, ed. Leon Șimanschi, 296.

<sup>265</sup> For the description of the architectural developments at Probota, see: Ibidem, 296-297.

<sup>266</sup> Ibidem, 297.

<sup>267</sup> Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, 55.

painting. One of the most efficient functions of images is that of promoting and proclaiming power and Peter Rareș used this function on both the interior and exterior of his churches.

Just like other rulers in the Christian world, Peter “sold” himself, his image, and his authority, by using the Church as mediator. He firstly did so by using an already-established method: commissioning the incorporation of his votive image within the iconographic programme of the church interior. Probably two of his best-known votive images are those of the Humor (Fig. 24) and Moldovița monasteries. In both images, in a devotional act mediated by the Holy Virgin, Christ is seated on a throne, his left hand holding the Bible and his right hand blessing the prince who is presenting him with the model of the monastery. Rareș is shown in all his sumptuousness: dressed in ceremonial clothing, he wears an ample crown and a brocade mantle with broad sleeves, everything embroidered in gold.<sup>268</sup>

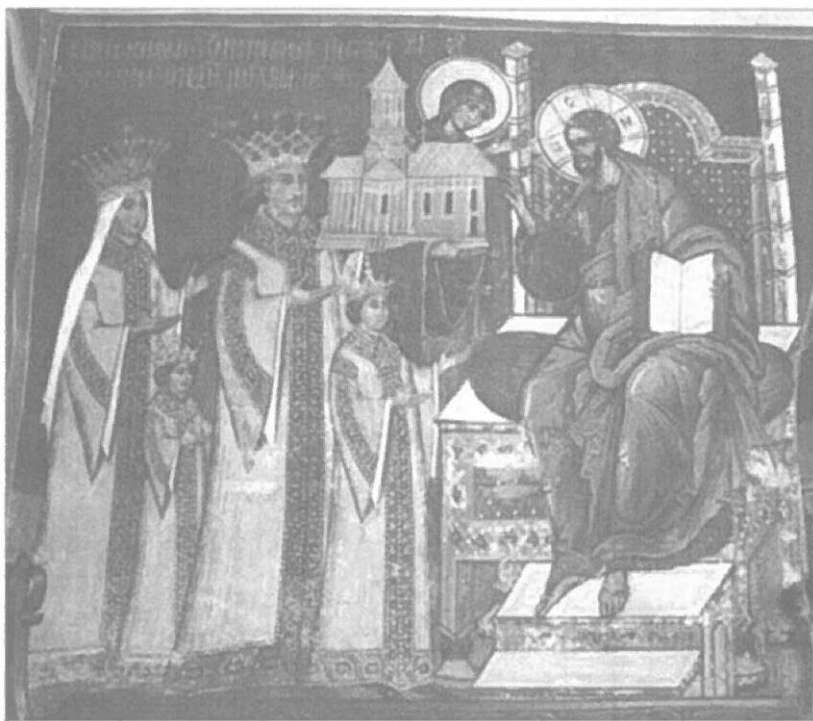


Fig. 24: Votive image, Moldovița Monastery. Image source: Tudor Photo Blog, <http://tudorphotoblog.blogspot.ro/2013/04/manastirea-moldovita-unesco.html>

<sup>268</sup> For a detailed description of the Humor votive image, see: Vasile Drăguț, *Humor* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1973), 18.

The most significant votive images (from the point of view of mythical genesis) are the so-called dynastic votive portraits.<sup>269</sup> The importance of belonging to the family of Stephen, so strongly manifested in Peter, is proven by the fact that all dynastic representations of this type painted after the death of Stephen the Great, were created during the reign of Rareș.<sup>270</sup> In 1529, Peter made his first commission by finishing one of Stephen the Great's last commissions, the monastery of Dobrovăț. The monastery, built during the last two years of Stephen's life, was left unpainted<sup>271</sup> until Peter adorned it with its iconography. Described as a "connecting bridge"<sup>272</sup> between the reigns of Stephen the Great and Peter Rareș, the monastery bears "one of the most beautiful votive images in the painting of medieval Moldavia."<sup>273</sup> The mural painting (Fig. 25) shows three Moldavian princes, without any other members of their families: Stephen the Great, Bogdan III (Stephen's legitimate son), and Peter Rareș. A similar dynastic votive image was painted in the same year of 1529, at the Bistrița monastery. In this scene, Stephen the Great, accompanied by Saint John the New, is followed by Peter, while on the opposite of them stand Bogdan III and Stephen the Young.<sup>274</sup> The Church of Dorohoi also bears a similar representation: Stephen the Great with his wife Maria, accompanied by Bogdan III, Stephen the Young, and Peter Rareș.<sup>275</sup> Nevertheless, the fact that Peter integrated the dynastic idea in his votive images was not the only technique used by the prince to demonstrate his connection to his great predecessor. A study made by Teodora Voinescu pointed to the fact that the portraits of Peter found in the Humor and Moldovița monasteries directly resembled the portraits of Stephen the Great – the similarities of their physiognomies were proven to be striking.<sup>276</sup> The most apparent example for the physiognomy resemblances is the votive image of Dobrovăț in which one can observe the

<sup>269</sup> For the dynastic votive images commissioned by Peter Rareș, see: Elena Firea, "Conceptie dinastică în tablourile votive ale lui Petru Rareș" [Dynastic concept in the votive images of Peter Rareș], *Ars Transylvanica* 14-15 (2004-2005): 143-161.

<sup>270</sup> Székely, "Bogdan al III-lea – note de antropologie politică," 273.

<sup>271</sup> Drăguț, *Dicționar enciclopedic*, 128.

<sup>272</sup> Drăguț, *Pictura murală din Moldova*, 22.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibidem*, 24.

<sup>274</sup> The image was painted on the façade of the monastery's tower. See: Maria Magdalena Székely, "Bogdan al III-lea: note de antropologie politică – Bogdan III: political anthropology," *Analele Putnei* 1 (2008): 272-273.

<sup>275</sup> Some historians, following the hypothesis of Sorin Ulea, believe that the "Peter" in this votive image is not Peter Rareș, but the brother of Stephen the Young, also bearing the name Peter. See: Sorin Ulea, "Datarea ansamblului de pictură de la Sf. Nicolaie-Dorohoi" [Dating the painting of Saint Nicholas in Dorohoi], *Studii și Cercetări de Istoria Artei, seria Artă Plastică* 11 (1964): 74-79. However, M. M. Székely believes that the image must represent Peter Rareș, as Stephen the Young was too little interested in representing dynastic continuity through art. See: Székely, "Bogdan al III-lea – note de antropologie politică," 273.

<sup>276</sup> Teodora Voinescu, "Portretele lui Ștefan cel Mare în arta epocii sale" [The portraits of Stephen the Great in the art of his time], in *Cultura moldovenească în timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare* [Moldavian culture during the time of Stephen the Great], ed. M. Berza (Bucharest: Academiei, 1964), 463-478.



comparability between Stephen, Bogdan III, and Peter Rareș:<sup>277</sup> identical clothing and crowns, round faces with arched eyebrows, the same moustache, chin, and long hair. Stephen was the model which inspired the figures of Bogdan and Peter and the fact that his physiognomy was copied by his successors is proof of his growing myth.



Fig. 25: Votive image, Dobrovăț Monastery.

Stephen the Great followed by Bogdan III and Peter Rareș. Image source: Cezar Suceveanu, 2009

### Mobilisation: an artistic anti-Ottoman crusade?<sup>278</sup>

Studies have already pointed out Stephen the Great's way of using painting in his own service. He used church iconography not only for its religious role or for expressing princely authority, but he also used it in order to instruct about whom

<sup>277</sup> For a discussion of the votive images of Stephen the Great and their resemblance in their successors' votive pictures, see: Solcanu, "Portretul lui Ștefan cel Mare în pictura epocii sale", 117-129, esp. 128-129.

<sup>278</sup> This subchapter is inspired from: Teodora Artimon, "Peter Rareș and His Visual Concept: An Ambitious Sixteenth-Century PR Campaign?" Master thesis (Budapest: Central European University, 2010).

people should fear and to mobilise against Moldavia's most powerful enemy of the time – the Ottoman Empire. Leaning on his father's artistic language, Peter Rareș, aided by his cousin and archbishop Grigorie Roșca,<sup>279</sup> seemed to have made a few steps further: most historians agree that they developed Stephen's (iconographic) language and took it outside churches and monasteries in a decoration incorporated within the entirety of the walls, from the apses to the narthex. This theory was however dismantled by Dumitru Năstase who demonstrated that the exterior iconography as developed during Peter's reign was in fact initiated by Stephen the Great.<sup>280</sup> Năstase studied the Saint Nicholas Church of Bălinești, commissioned by the logothete Ioan Tăutul, and its following aspects: the analysis of its exterior painting and the placement of architectural decoration, its votive image (and the model of the church represented in the votive image), and the placement of its founding inscription. Based on his analysis, Năstase concluded that sometime around the year 1499 it was decided that the church be painted both on the inside and on the outside. As such elaborate exterior painting had not been commissioned before, certain architectural mutations needed to be done – all of which stand as proof that the promoter of exterior iconography was in fact Stephen the Great. The typical Moldavian exterior of Bălinești, embellished with slabs, ceramics, and enamelled discs, was sacrificed in the expectation of its exterior iconography.<sup>281</sup> The same change in the exterior layout of churches is visible in the monastic commissions dating from 1499 up to Stephen's death: three princely commissions (the churches of Volovăț, Dobrovăț, and Reuseni) and one commission of the boyar Arbure (the Arbure Monastery). All exterior decorations of these edifices suddenly disappeared, including the typical system of blind arches and niches, thus suggesting the preparation of the space for full mural painting.<sup>282</sup> It will be seen that the exterior painting which was to cover the walls was imbued with anti-Ottoman messages. From this point of view, there is a compelling correlation between the initiation of this new type of art after 1499 and the historical circumstances of Moldavia: in 1499, Stephen signed a peace treaty with Poland, officially positioning itself in the anti-Ottoman camp, while in 1500, Stephen refused once more to pay the tribute which was equivalent to engaging in a conflict with the Ottoman Empire.<sup>283</sup>

<sup>279</sup> Archbishop Dosoftei first mentioned Grigorie Roșca as Rareș's cousin. The same blood link was made between Archbishop Roșca and Toader by Matei Coruga, thus linking him to Peter Rareș. See: Matei V. Coruga, *Gheorghe al II-lea și Grigorie de la Neamț, doi mitropoliți necunoscuți ai Moldovei din secolul al XVI-lea* [Gheorghe II and Grigorie of Neamț, two unknown archbishops of sixteenth-century Moldavia], in *Biserica Ortodoxă Română* 89 (1997): 1230-1243.

<sup>280</sup> Dumitru Năstase, "Biserica din Bălinești și pictura ei exterioară" [The Church of Bălinești and its exterior painting], *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei. Seria artă plastică* 43 (1996): 3-18.

<sup>281</sup> Ibidem, 9.

<sup>282</sup> Năstase takes the example of the Church of Volovăț and thoroughly describes all its architectural changes. Ibidem, 10-13.

<sup>283</sup> Ibidem, 16.

The sheer fact that there is no extant exterior mural painting dating from the time of Stephen the Great (except maybe for the one at Bălinești), does not automatically imply that it was a novelty introduced by Peter Rareș. Rather, it suggests that between the period of exterior iconography of Stephen's time, up until the time of Peter, there was a period of experimentation with the new mural techniques. Peter's flourishing art with its quality and resistance must have been the result of an artistic evolution. The only visible remnants of this experimental period are the church walls stripped off their characteristic architectural decorations, seemingly awaiting their iconographic clothing.

Nathan Knobler talked about the "necessity of human beings to transform their experiences into visual symbols."<sup>284</sup> The exterior iconography, as known during Peter's time, relied on past historical experience to create a visual dialogue<sup>285</sup> between the image and the viewer. Some historical experiences were evoked in scenes such as the Last Judgment (Fig. 26) or the Akathistos Hymn (Fig. 27) where Moldavian-Ottoman clashes were subtly recalled. With the reign of Stephen the Great still present in collective memory,<sup>286</sup> images such as doomed Ottomans and Tartars going towards the mouth of Hell (Fig. 28), as well as the triumph of Christians over the Ottoman-attacked Constantinople (Fig. 29) could have easily echoed the victories of Stephen the Great and inspired the viewers with courage for possible future conflicts.

<sup>284</sup> Nathan Knobler, *Dialogul vizual* [The Visual Dialogue] I, trans. Sorin Mărculescu (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1983), 12.

<sup>285</sup> Idem, *Dialogul vizual* [The Visual Dialogue] II, trans. Sorin Mărculescu (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1983), 172.

<sup>286</sup> By making a simple calculation, M. M. Székely and Ș. Gorovei, concluded that the image of Stephen was kept alive by generations of people who lived during his time, up until the reign of Prince Alexander Lăpușneanu, the illegitimate son of Bogdan III: the children born in the ninth and tenth decades of the fifteenth century must have lived up until mid-sixteenth century. See: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 539.



Fig. 26: Last Judgement, Voroneţ Monastery. Image source: Teodora Artimon

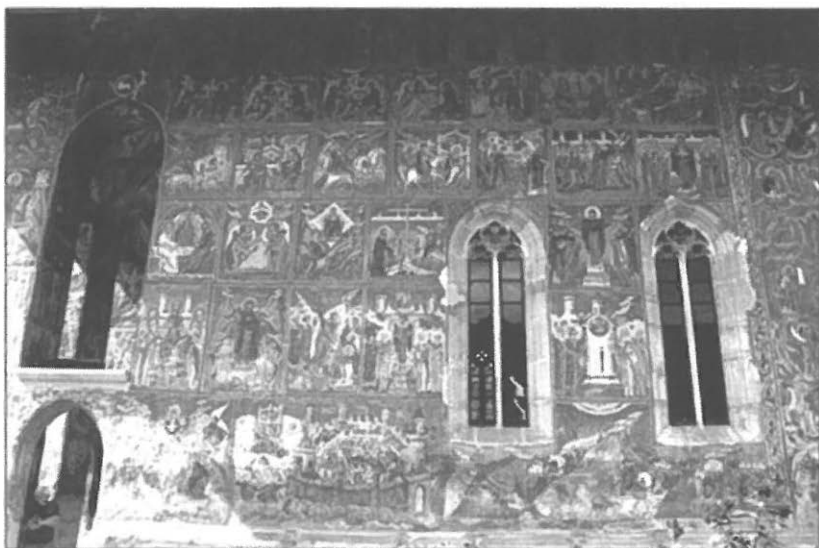


Fig. 27: Akathistos Hymn, Moldovița Monastery. Image source: Teodora Artimon



Fig. 28: Last Judgement, Humor Monastery. Detail: Sinners' group. Image source: Teodora Artimon



Fig. 29: The siege of Constantinople, Moldovița Monastery. Detail from the Akathistos Hymn  
Image source: Teodora Artimon



Fig. 30: Celestial Hierarchy, Moldovița Monastery. Southern and central apses.  
Image source: Teodora Artimon

Four mural scenes were painted on all exterior walls and repeated in an unchanged manner on each and every church. The three apses always represent the Celestial Hierarchy (Fig. 30), a scene with a great number of characters arranged on usually six horizontal registers representing different groups of saints, angels, prophets, apostles, holy fathers, and martyrs.<sup>287</sup> Further on, either the northern or the southern façade bears the Akathistos Hymn, accompanied by the representation of the Siege of Constantinople (Fig. 29),<sup>288</sup> while the Tree of Jesse (Fig. 31)<sup>289</sup> appears on the opposite façade. The fourth grand theme is that of the Last Judgement (Fig. 26),<sup>290</sup> almost always present on the western wall.

<sup>287</sup> For a presentation of the scene of the Celestial Hierarchy from Humor, one of the best preserved such scenes, see: Vasile Drăguț, Vasile Florea, Dan Grigorescu, and Marin Mihalache, *Pictura românească în imagini* [Romanian painting in images] (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1970), 62.

<sup>288</sup> The Akathistos Hymn, probably written sometime after the Persian siege of Constantinople in 626, inspired the iconography of the Akathistos murals. See: Egon Wellesz, "The Akathistos. A Study in Byzantine Hymnography," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 9 (1956): 141-174.

<sup>289</sup> For the origins and model which inspired the Moldavian Tree of Jesse, see: Michael D. Taylor, "A Historiated Tree of Jesse," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 34 (1980-1981): 125-176.

<sup>290</sup> For a presentation of the most famous exterior painting of the time of Rareș, the *Last Judgment* from the Voroneț monastery, see: Drăguț and all, *Pictura românească în imagini*, 71-72.

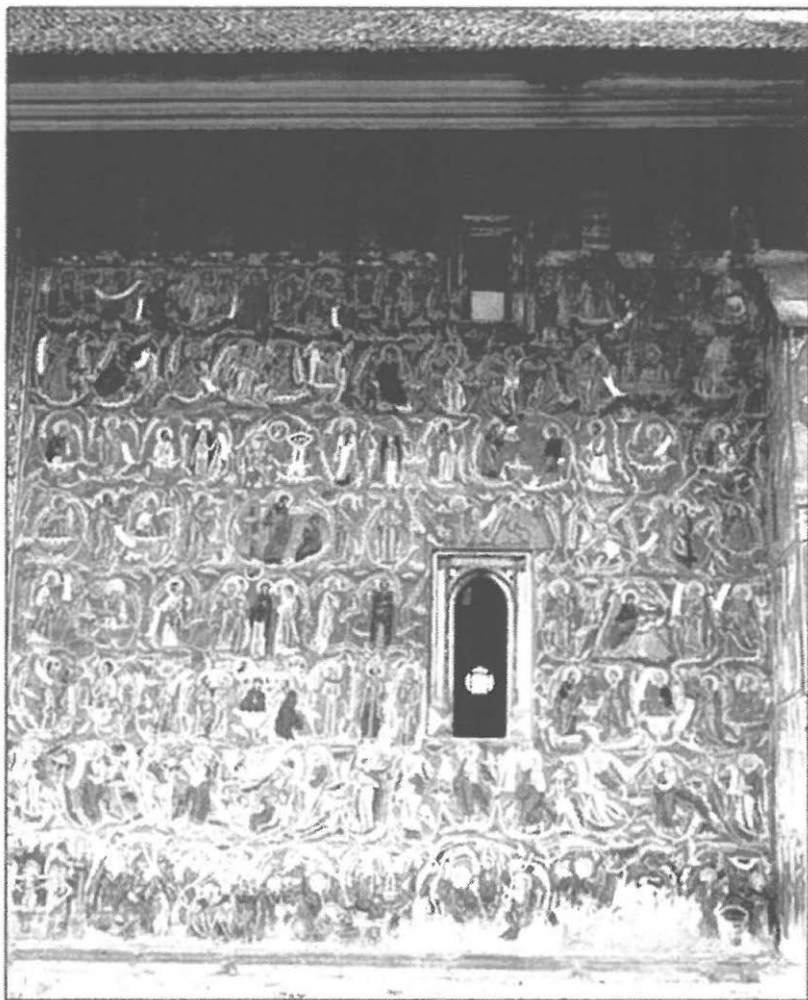


Fig. 31: The Tree of Jesse. Moldovița Monastery. Image source: Teodora Artimon

Peter Rareș and Grigorie Roșca were behind the exterior painting of a significant number of churches and monasteries: Probota (1532); Humor (1535), with the best preserved exterior murals; Moldovița (1537); Arbore (1541); Baia (1535-1538); Saint George of Suceava (1534); Saint George of Hârlău (1530); Coșula

(1536-1538); Râșca (1551-152); Voroneț (1547);<sup>291</sup> and most likely Dobrovăț, which is yet to be dated. What is striking in all of these walls is the harmonisation of the scenes in such a way that they seem to suggest an anti-Ottoman manifesto. Sorin Ulea was the first art historian to hypothesise this opinion,<sup>292</sup> but others supported and reaffirmed his opinion as well.<sup>293</sup> All four exterior scenes bear (sometimes less) visible elements which point to Rareș's political ideals:

- While the *Akathistos Hymn* is frequently represented in church iconography, the Moldavian Akathistos is the only one which contains an additional scene: the Siege of Constantinople (Fig. 29). The scene is a (metaphorical) representation of a besieged Constantinople, which, with the divine help of the Holy Virgin, withstands its assaulters. It is usually identified with the Persian siege of Constantinople from 626. However, two details set the battle and the siege not in Byzantine territory, but rather on Moldavian lands: first, the besiegers are dressed in Ottoman clothing and use cannons for breaking the walls;<sup>294</sup> second, the fortress is defended by a rider who is attacking his enemies while wearing typical fifteenth-sixteenth century Moldavian clothing.<sup>295</sup> Thus the fortress cannot be identified with Constantinople in 626, but instead should be identified with Suceava, represented in a moment of hypothetical military success over the Ottomans.
- While the key point in the Akathistos Hymn is the Moldavian rider, the key point in the *Last Judgement* is the group of the damned. As an essential part of church iconography, the Last Judgement was meant as a self-assessment of the person looking at the scene, designed to "allow viewers to judge themselves when they see the Last Judgment."<sup>296</sup> However, the Moldavian Last Judgment seems to bear a second message as well, given by its key element. Characterised as the

<sup>291</sup> The Râșca and Voroneț monasteries were painted on the exterior after the death of Peter Rareș but under the guidance of bishops Macarie and Grigorie Roșca who continued the legacy and ideology of the late ruler.

<sup>292</sup> See his two most relevant articles on this subject: Sorin Ulea, "Originea și semnificația ideologică a picturii exterioare moldovenești I" [The origin and the ideological meaning of the Moldavian exterior painting I] *Studii și cercetări de Istoria Artei. Seria Artă Plastică* 10 (1963): 57-93; Idem, "Originea și semnificația ideologică a picturii exterioare moldovenești II" [The origin and the ideological meaning of the Moldavian exterior painting II], *Studii și cercetări de Istoria Artei. Seria Artă Plastică* 19 (1972): 37-54.

<sup>293</sup> See, for example, Drăguț, *Pictura murală din Moldova. Secolele XV-XVI* and Idem, *Pictura românească în imagini*.

<sup>294</sup> Ștefan Andreescu, "Pătrăuți și Arezzo: O comparație și consecințele ei" [Pătrăuți and Arezzo: A comparison and its consequences], in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Atlet al Credinței Creștine* [Stephen the Great and the Saint. Champion of the Christian Faith] (Suceava: Mușatinii, 2004), 386.

<sup>295</sup> Ulea, "Originea și semnificația ideologică a picturii exterioare moldovenești I", 72.

<sup>296</sup> Cynthia Hahn, "Vision" in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 56.



“psychological centre of the composition,”<sup>297</sup> the two groups represented by the Ottomans and the Tartars (Fig. 28) within the entire group of the damned seem highly individualised: compared to the other groups of the Armenians, Latins, and Jews, they are not merely faces with similar physiognomy, but they are individualised portraits: Sorin Ulea argued that this individualisation was “mirroring the anti-Ottoman feelings of the masses.”<sup>298</sup>

- *The Celestial Hierarchy* is a saints’ procession, divided, upon the three church apses, in several registers comprised of different groups of holy people. Also named “the prayer of all saints,” the scene is a representation of a prayer: the well-known prayer scene of *Deisis* in which Christ, flanked by his Holy Mother and John the Baptist, appears in the middle of the central apse – therefore at the very core of the scene. While Sorin Ulea’s interpretation might be somewhat far-fetched, he offers a unique explanation for the Celestial Hierarchy: connecting the scene with those of the Last Judgment and the Akathistos Hymn, the scholar argued that it was an “explicit iconographic replay and transposition”<sup>299</sup> of the anti-Ottoman prayer suggested by the Siege of Constantinople, the Akathistos Hymn, and the Last Judgment altogether. Therefore, seeing all three scenes as a grand prayer for the Moldavian cause, Ulea suggested that Peter was a prince well-aware of the visual persuasion possibilities.
- *The Tree of Jesse* is a representation of Christ’s genealogy, linking him as direct descendant to the kings of Israel and thus evoking Biblical history.<sup>300</sup> Being among the most complex representations of this type,<sup>301</sup> one hypothesis states that the Moldavian Tree of Jesse was introduced in the exterior iconographic programme as a means of completing the message of the Celestial Hierarchy<sup>302</sup> and thus supporting its military purpose. A second interpretation however, might link Peter Rareș to his father. Discussing the scene, Michael Taylor argued that the liturgical role of the Tree is complemented by a dynastic role. Therefore, it is particularly interesting how at the Sopocani and Arilje monasteries, the Tree is correlated with dynastic images of Stephen Dragutin’s sons, Uros and Vladislav, and with a dynastic procession. The most relevant development of such correlations is the creation of the genealogical tree of the Nemanjid dynasty (such as the one at Pec) which derived from the Tree of Jesse and which equates the descendants of Stephen Nemanja to those of Jesse, implying thus a divine ordination of their rule.<sup>303</sup> Could it be that similar dynastic implications were suggested by the Moldavian Tree of Jesse?

<sup>297</sup> Drăguț and all, *Pictura românească în imagini*, 71.

<sup>298</sup> Ulea, “Originea și semnificația ideologică a picturii exterioare moldovenești I,” 78.

<sup>299</sup> Ibidem, 84.

<sup>300</sup> For the meaning of the Tree of Jesse and its various visual representations, see: Arthur Watson, *The Early Iconography of the Tree of Jesse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934).

<sup>301</sup> Drăguț and all, *Pictura românească în imagini*, 64.

<sup>302</sup> Ulea, “Originea și semnificația ideologică a picturii exterioare moldovenești I,” 88.

<sup>303</sup> For the detailed explanation of this argument, see: Taylor, “A Historiated Tree of Jesse,” 164.

While the legitimation through the Tree of Jesse may be debatable, the militating messages of Peter's other exterior paintings point to a fact which directly connects him to Stephen the Great and which, indirectly, legitimise his actions: Peter finished what Stephen had started 30 years earlier. He perfected the exterior iconography as seemingly initiated by Stephen in the churches of Volovăț, Dobrovăț, Reusenî, and also at Bălinești and Arbure.

### ***"The great" continuator***

The most important monastic commission of Peter Rareș was that of Probota. Designed as the new princely burial place, Probota must have been a "jewel" for Peter, just like Putna was for his father. Moreover, the inauguration inscription of Probota gives a hint on the ruling aspirations of the prince: "...in the fourth year of my *imperial rule*, I built this church..."<sup>304</sup> This affirmation may go unnoticed, if not for his father's imperial aspirations. Considering the history of Stephen the Great, the inscription suggests that Peter inherited his father's entire ideology, including that of a type of imperial ruling over Moldavia.<sup>305</sup> This argument is reinforced by the words of Rareș's official chronicler, Macarie, who described the seat of Moldavia as the "imperial town of Suceava."<sup>306</sup> Furthermore, the messengers of Ferdinand I to Moldavia also reinforced Peter's Byzantine aspirations when they recalled the prince's statement on his anti-Ottoman position in 1536. Peter allegedly explained his affinity to the western anti-Ottoman league with the following words: "And when His Highness will want to start a general campaign against the Turks, he should send 15,000 soldiers, to whom I will add 45,000 chosen soldiers from my country, 20,000 from Transylvania and 25,000 from Wallachia."<sup>307</sup> The messengers then explained the prince's plans with these armies: "With these men, with the help of God, he wants to go to Constantinople."<sup>308</sup> The fact that "he wants to go to Constantinople" reveals two details: on the one hand, the existence of his desired association to the Byzantine Empire, just like in the case of his father; and on the other hand, his exceptional (but improbable) desire to liberate Constantinople by starting a military offensive against the most threatening force of the time.

Returning to Probota, the monastery holds yet another symbolic message which can most likely be attributed directly to Peter: Saint Mercury, painted within the interior iconography, holds a shield with a unique symbol on its inside – the

<sup>304</sup> Adam, *Ctitorii mușatine*, 90.

<sup>305</sup> B. P. Maleon argued that the imperial inheritance of Stephen implied an "exceptional mission, that of defending the right faith within the Orthodox world, without meaning that the ruler would have any claim on a universal sovereignty." See: Maleon, "Mănăstirea Probota între ierarhia ecleziastică și domnie," 143.

<sup>306</sup> "The Chronicle of Macarie," 212.

<sup>307</sup> Marc Pemfflinger and Balthazar Banffy's report to Ferdinand I in *Călători străini în Țările Române* I, 378.

<sup>308</sup> Ibidem.

double-headed eagle.<sup>309</sup> Analysing the symbol (well camouflaged within the shield in such a way that only a few initiated people would understand its message),<sup>310</sup> M. M. Székely decrypted one of its possible messages. Considering that Saint Mercury was a military saint and that the double-headed eagle was an imperial symbol for the rebirth of Christianity, it might be that these two elements (the saint and the symbol) were painted together with a precise purpose: a call for a fight against the enemies of Christianity, the Ottomans.<sup>311</sup>

Peter Rareș seems to have been the successor who most thoroughly followed the “recipe” of Stephen the Great’s dynastic project: he fought for Stephen’s goals and ideals (see not only the anti-Ottoman campaigns, but also somewhat smaller endeavours such as that for Pokkutia); he was the most thorough continuator of Stephen’s art (Peter gave a rebirth to the Moldavian art as established by Stephen); he continued the “imperial” legacy of his father (not only by the affirmations as seen above in Probota’s commissioning inscription, but also by smaller facts, such as marrying an Orthodox woman with imperial origins<sup>312</sup>). Moreover, he was also... “the great.” In a Transylvanian letter dating from 1543, Peter Rareș was named by the appellation of his father: “Moldavus magnus, dux Valachorum.”<sup>313</sup> For the moment, this is the only known document in which he is called as “the great Moldavian,” therefore his fame was not perpetuated by his name, as it happened with his father. Nevertheless, this nomination calls attention to the dimension of Peter’s reign.

As a veritable heir, although illegitimate, Peter Rareș inherited Stephen’s ambitions, as well as his ways of thinking and acting. But the fact that the same blood was running through their veins, seems to also have brought certain negative aspects with it. By the end of his reign, just like it happened by end of his father’s reign, Peter was frequently accompanied by a doctor who took care of a never-healing ulcer. The question which is yet to be answered is the following: was he suffering from diabetes, just like Stephen did, having a similar ulcer which did not heal until his death?<sup>314</sup> It may certainly be the case, as Peter purchased a pair of glasses in 1546, because of an

<sup>309</sup> In her article dealing with this issue, Maria Magdalena Székely concludes that the two-headed eagle may have been either Peter’s direct contribution, or it may have also been the personal contribution of the church painters. See: Maria Magdalena Székely, “Un manifest de putere la mănăstirea Probota?,” in *De Potestate. Semne și expresii ale puterii în evul mediu românesc* [De Potestate. Signs and expressions of power in the Romanian Middle Ages] (Iași: Editura Universității “Alexandru Ioan Cuza,” 2006).

<sup>310</sup> Eadem, 514.

<sup>311</sup> Eadem, 515.

<sup>312</sup> Peter was married for the second time (or third time, as he might have had two wives before the last one) with Jelena Branković, the daughter of the Serbian despot Iovan Branković. See: Ștefan S. Gorovei, “Familia lui Petru Rareș” [The family of Peter Rareș], in *Peter Rareș*, ed. Leon Șimanschi, 266-271.

<sup>313</sup> Quoted by Gorovei, *Mușatinii*, 95.

<sup>314</sup> M. M. Székely explained Peter’s physical distress. For a full explanation of the issue and the questions posed by the historian, see: Maria Magdalena Székely, “La curte, la Petru Vođă” [At the court of Prince Peter], *Revista Istorică* 7-8 (1997): 494-495.



eye disease which may have been easily caused by diabetes.<sup>315</sup> Peter was a genuine continuator of Stephen the Great, mentally, politically, and... physically.

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<sup>315</sup> ~~don~~, 494.  
*Ibidem*

## V Stephen's impact in the sixteenth century

Because finite individual memory opens out into the limitlessness of collective memory,<sup>316</sup> this section will explore certain mental patterns of the sixteenth century which point to Stephen's most relevant traits. They will be highlighted in sources springing from the court, from internal and external letters and documents, from foreigners travelling through Moldavia, from external allies or enemies. The juxtaposition of all these sources will allow sight beyond visual representations and rhetorical expressions of the time. It will allow sight into the imaginary of Stephen the Great.

Although collective memory implies a societal unity of thought, the memories of people who witnessed a common event are not identical because memory evokes different associations and feelings for each of them.<sup>317</sup> Nevertheless, in case of ideal monarchs such as Stephen the Great, most mental evocations are grouped around certain characteristics which reunite rulers under the sphere of sainthood, warfare, and generally speaking, under the sphere of exceptionality. Descending from a long line of princely ancestors, having a special relationship with God, bringing back peace and prosperity after decades of trouble, Stephen the Great continuously accumulated, improved, produced, and changed<sup>318</sup> the principles of his reign. Without a doubt, he may be included in the stereotyped categories of hero monarchs developed in medieval thought.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Michael Uebel, "The Pathogenesis of Medieval History," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 41 (2002): 51.

<sup>317</sup> Amos Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness," *History and Memory* 1 (1989): 6.

<sup>318</sup> Accumulation, improvement, production, and change are the four ideals of governmentality, as defined by Jürgen Pieters and Alexander Roose. See: Jürgen Pieters and Alexander Roose, "The Art of Saying 'No'. Premonitions of Foucault's 'Governmentality' in Étienne de La Boétie's *Discours de la servitude volontaire*," in *Mystifying the Monarch. Studies on Discourse, Power, and History*, ed. Jeroen Deploige and Gita Deneckere (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 96.

<sup>319</sup> See more: Pecican, *Sânge și trandafiri*, 73.

## *Stephen, the warrior: echoes in the sixteenth century*

The divine was an essential factor for an ideal reign as the ruler could not overcome the difficulties of his reign without godly support. War was one such unavoidable difficulty during which the monarch had to demonstrate his qualities and his privileged connection to the divine by leading his (Christian) army to victory and re-establishing the pace and harmony of his reign.<sup>320</sup>

Stephen the Great succeeded a significant number of times to re-establish peace and harmony which is why he remained in collective memory as a veritable army commander. Sources eulogise his victories during his lifetime, but his military success is just as strongly echoed in the sixteenth century. For instance, the prince notoriously celebrated his military victories with feasts which sometimes lasted for up to three days.<sup>321</sup> This allowed the creation, in collective memory, of a link between the image of the prince and the concept of a victorious reign, which boosted Stephen's prestige both during his lifetime and in the aftermath of his reign.<sup>322</sup> His qualities as military commander, his bravery, his strength and heroism, his military strategies, were continuously evoked in the sixteenth-century as well, in a manner which highlighted a certain gallant image of the ruler.

### War-time descriptions and recollections

The several resounding victories of Stephen allowed the prince to be perceived as a man of many military skills. The chronicles of the sixteenth century made generous descriptions not only of the battle of Vaslui, but also of his military enterprises altogether. Moreover, many writings recall not only one achievement at a time, but highlight Stephen's three-fold victories against his neighbours: the Ottomans, the Polish, and the Hungarians. However, Stephen was not praised alone: often, chroniclers presented the "warrior"<sup>323</sup> Moldavian army which, under Stephen's command, was capable of defeating large armies.

Some of the first reports to appear soon after Stephen's death in 1504 indirectly pointed to the prince's military significance. Such is the example of King Ladislas II of Hungary who ordered that the northern-Transylvanian territory of Maramureș,

<sup>320</sup> For more on the divine implications on war in Stephen the Great's Moldavia, see: Ovidiu Cristea, "Declanșarea războiului, victorii și înfrâri triumfale în Moldova lui Ștefan cel Mare: evenimente, reprezentări, interpretări – War outbreak, victories and triumphal entries in Moldavia of Stephen the Great: events, representations, interpretations," *Analele Putnei* 1 (2008): 105-132, esp. 129.

<sup>321</sup> See, for instance, the battle with Wallachia's Prince Radu the Fair in 1473, whom Stephen dethroned after which "... he stayed there for three days, rejoicing." See: "Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia," 16.

<sup>322</sup> Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 454.

<sup>323</sup> Anonymous description of Moldavia dated 1587. See: *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign travellers on the Romanian Principalities] III, ed. Maria Holban (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1971), 201.

neighbouring Moldavia, prepared for war. In his letter, the king explained that the prince of Moldavia had died, thus they must be prepared to proceed to Moldavia in order to retain it from being conquered by enemies.<sup>324</sup> Naturally, the death of a prince often caused turmoil both on the inside and outside of a principality or kingdom, but in his letter, Ladislav was not only concerned with a territory under his subjection, but also made a subtle implication: Stephen preserved Moldavia's territorial integrity without major intrusions. Without Stephen, Moldavia was vulnerable.

Following 1504, an abundance of direct and indirect recollections of Stephen's military campaigns emerged. In 1514, King Sigismund I reported to Pope Leo X about the Ottoman advance. In this context, he recalled "Stephen, the old prince,"<sup>325</sup> who defeated the Ottoman Empire three times regardless of their numerous armies which descended upon the principality. The king additionally mentioned the trouble Stephen had caused to both kings Matthias and John Albert.<sup>326</sup> Blaise de Vigenère was similarly contemplating on the three-fold victories that Stephen ("the bravest and most famous army commander of his time"<sup>327</sup>) was renowned for: the French diplomat remembered "the greatest man of his time ... who gained the most beautiful victories over Mehmed, the Ottoman sultan, Matthias, the king of Hungary and John Albert, the king of Poland."<sup>328</sup> The fact that Stephen defeated the three fundamental powers in Moldavia's surroundings became somewhat of a leitmotif in sixteenth-century literature and Stephen consequently became the ultimate almost-undefeatable warrior.<sup>329</sup>

Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century official internal documents and Moldavian chronicles highlighted the large numerical discrepancy between the local and invader armies.<sup>330</sup> External sources also emphasised this aspect, offering Stephen a plus of heroic traits as he was portrayed plunging into battle with little concern of his numerical inferiority: "... sending 120,000 soldiers against Prince Stephen who had

<sup>324</sup> See the original letter in: Hurmuzaki II.2, document no. CCCCXXIII, 525.

<sup>325</sup> Hurmuzaki II.3, document no. CLVII, 171.

<sup>326</sup> See the entire original reference to Stephen in: Ibidem.

<sup>327</sup> Blaise de Vigenère (*Description du royaume de la Pologne*), in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* II, 640.

<sup>328</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>329</sup> See other relevant descriptions of Stephen's victories against the Ottomans, Hungarians, and Poles: in 1587, Johannes C. Decius Barovius referred to Stephen as "that prince of Moldavia who often defeated the greatest armies of the people of Moscow, Scythians, and Turks, and who destroyed Suleyman Pasha, the bey of Rumelia..." See: Johannes C. Decius Barovius in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* III, 216. In the same year of 1587, an anonymous description inspired by the history written by Matthias Miechowski praised Stephen: "... during Pope Sixtus' pontificate, to whom he sent envoys with booty earned by defeating Sultan Mehmed, the Turks, the Polish, the Tartars and the great King Matthias Corvinus." See: "Anonymous Description of Moldavia from 1587," in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* III, 201.

<sup>330</sup> See for instance: Chapter II, subchapter "How to remember the prince's deeds: creating memory." See also: "The Moldavian-German Chronicle," 26.

only 40,000 men, [the Ottomans] were defeated and only five or six thousand of them survived.”<sup>331</sup> Stephen not only “defeated the unspeakably numerous Turkish army,”<sup>332</sup> but also the numerous Polish armies. In 1570, the Polish diplomat Andrzej Taranowski, recalled his recent journey through Moldavia:

... I travelled from Poland to Constantinople through Moldavia, through the beech forest<sup>333</sup> where 73 years ago, in the year 1497, 50,000 Polish men were killed by the Moldavians in one day.<sup>334</sup>

Unsurprisingly, for a certain period of time Moldavia was perceived with the same attributes as its Prince Stephen was: invincible and unconquerable. By the end of the sixteenth century, the image of the undefeatable Moldavia became synonymous with Stephen the Great. Sources hinted to a Moldavian military “golden age:”

This country of Bogdania, whose leading settlement is Iași, used to be called Moldavia; but since the Ottoman sultans had it subdued 50 years ago, its name was changed to Bogdania or Karabogdan, meaning black land and this is due to the endless blood which shed while taking this province.<sup>335</sup>

#### Remains of war, remains of victories

However, while passing through Moldavia, most travellers not only remembered Stephen the Great’s victories, but they also experienced the impact Stephen had in Moldavia: they either witnessed local people’s ways of remembering the prince or they physically observed the remains of Stephen’s reign.

In probably the most thorough (and famous) description of Stephen’s reign, Maciej Strykowski described how the people of the sixteenth century kept Stephen’s memory and legacy alive. Based on Strykowski’s account, both his deeds and his physical image were well-imbedded in collective memory:

Moldavians and Wallachians always play their violins and sing in their language at all their gatherings: “Stephen, Prince Stephen, Stephen, Prince Stephen who defeated the Turks, defeated the Tartars, defeated the Hungarians, the Russians and the Polish.” When I went to the Ottoman Empire, I saw at

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<sup>331</sup> Blaise de Vigenère (*Description du royaume de la Pologne*) in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* II, 640.

<sup>332</sup> Giovanni Francesco Commendone’s short description of Wallachia and Moldavia, in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* II, 376.

<sup>333</sup> Taranowski referred to the forest of Codrii Cosminului, where the Moldavian-Polish battle took place on October 26, 1497.

<sup>334</sup> Andrzej Taranowski’s description of his journey through Moldavia (1570), in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* II, 398.

<sup>335</sup> In reality, Moldavia had been called “Karabogdan” by the Ottomans since the fifteenth century. Moreover, the author of the excerpt made confusion between Karabogdan (referring to Moldavia) and Karabildan (referring to black soils, as a consequence of bloodshed). See the original text: François de Pavie’s description of his 1585 journey to the Ottoman Empire, in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* III, 182.



Bucharest, the seat of the Wallachian Prince where I had dined, that on the wall of the Prince's bedroom a face was painted on wood, in old style, showing this Stephen as a tall man with his royal crown on his head.<sup>336</sup>

With his description, Stryzowski unveiled the actual impact Stephen had not only in Moldavia, but also in the neighbouring Wallachia. The fact that the Wallachian prince owned a painted image of Stephen is remarkable, considering the rather unfriendly relationships between the Wallachian and Moldavian princes, especially during Stephen's reign. The painted image in the royal bedroom does have an ideological explanation however. Stryzowski travelled through Wallachia during the time of Prince Alexander II Mircea (1568-1577), at the turn 1574. This was a turbulent period for both Moldavia and Wallachia: Alexander's brother, Peter Șchiopul [the Crippled]<sup>337</sup> had taken over the seat of Moldavia with the help of the Wallachian prince. Alexander's desire to take over Moldavia seemed to be just as great as Peter's. He was not only actively and physically involved in the taking of Moldavia,<sup>338</sup> but he also added a significant ideological aspect to the entire operation: he used the image of the most iconic Moldavian prince and incorporated it into his reign. In other words, Alexander symbolically welcomed Stephen into Wallachian history, thus symbolically merging the two principalities – just like Stephen wanted to merge them during his own reign.

Stryzowski's description also shows Stephen's relevance in Moldavian collective memory. Already in the second half of the sixteenth century, the ruler seemed to have surpassed the realm of the humane. As songs were sang about him he entered the world of the immortal, of myth. Without a doubt, rulers remembered in such folkloric manners were beyond what the average ruler meant: they were not only heroes, but they were rulers *chosen* to be remembered as such in the aftermath of their death. This mythical aura of Stephen the Great was further on enhanced by physical remains of his heroic deeds. References to still-visible bodily remains of Moldavian, Ottoman, and Polish soldiers who fought both at Vaslui and Războieni were explicit and numerous. Stryzowski's detailed portrayal of Stephen also included information on these almost-relics, with reference to the Battle of Vaslui:

He [Stephen] ordered that the bodies of the dead be burnt, and this left behind bones and high piles which I saw with my own eyes when I went to Turkey in

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<sup>336</sup> Maciej Stryzowski's description of his travel through Moldavia and Wallachia, in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* II, 454.

<sup>337</sup> Three times Moldavian prince: June 1574 – November 1577; January 1578 – November 1579; October 1583 – August 1591.

<sup>338</sup> The proof for his active involvement in the taking of Moldavia stands in the words of his logothete Tatul, who on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April 1574 issued a document "in the town of Râmnicu Sărat, when our Prince Alexander was away in the Principality of Moldavia in order to enthrone his brother Prince Peter as prince of the Principality of Moldavia." See: *Documenta Romaniae Historica* B. Țara Românească VII (1571-1575), ed. Ștefan Ștefănescu and Olimpia Diaconescu (Bucharest: Academiei, 1988), 229-231.

the year 1575, and I saw as well three crosses which were built as a sign of that victory.<sup>339</sup>

The text was referring to the bodies of the Ottomans, explaining at the same time that the Moldavians defeated “100,000 Turks and Tartars.”<sup>340</sup> The piles of bones were a factor in Stephen’s propagation in the realm of myth. Therefore should one have passed by the river of Bârlad, where the clash took place, one would have possibly seen the remains of a Moldavian victory. Stryzowski’s text is even more significant as the author describes the battle scene on its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As described by the Polish diplomat, the scene seems to have still been vibrant and charged with emotions even 100 years after the celebrated confrontation. Before Stryzowski, however, the battle scene was almost identically described by Marcin Bielski<sup>341</sup> who emphasised both the piles of bones and the stone crosses erected there for the remembrance of the victory. The preservation of these tokens until almost the end of the sixteenth century and the reactions of the sixteenth-century observers to them proves that Stephen’s intention of protecting and perpetuating his reputation was a success. There are no sources describing the Moldavian feelings regarding the battle scenes, but should one recognise the impact they had on foreign travellers through Moldavia, one must assume that their impact on the local community was just as strong, if not much stronger.

The Battle of Codrii Cosminului, where Stephen the Great defeated the Polish army in 1497 echoed not only amazement, but also fear. In 1563, the Veronese mercenary Alessandro Guagnini was part of the army which dethroned Jacob Heraclides, the then prince of Moldavia.<sup>342</sup> While describing the expedition, he claimed to have seen the whitened bones, reminders and remains of the Polish defeat.<sup>343</sup> His account was confirmed by another similar recording,<sup>344</sup> that of Antonio

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<sup>339</sup> Maciej Stryzowski’s description of his travel through Moldavia and Wallachia in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* II, 453.

<sup>340</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>341</sup> “... and the bodies, he [Stephen] ordered that they be gathered, in such a way that piles of bones are visible up until today, next to three stone crosses reminding of that victory.” See: Marcin Bielski, “Kronika Polska,” in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 198.

<sup>342</sup> The text of Alessandro Guagnini has several errors: the mercenary wrote that the campaign took place in 1562, although the correct date is 1563; similarly, the text claims that Alessandro took part in the campaign on the side of Jacob Heraclides, although historical evidence shows the opposite. See more details in: *Călători străini despre Țările Române* II, 291.

<sup>343</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>344</sup> Certainly, these two accounts of the human remains in the Codrii Cosminului forest were not the only extant ones. A different account was given by Stanislaus Sarnicius who suggested that among the bones must have also been Moldavian ones: “... in the year 1562, they saw in those forests the bones of those who were surrounded and killed by the Moldavians. But I believe that there are also bones of the Moldavians among them.” See: Stanislaus Sarnicius, “Annales seu de origine et rebus gestis Polonorum et Lithuanorum,” in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 196.

Maria Graziani, the biographer of Heraclides. In his text, Graziani presented the retreat of the Polish army after the prince's death:

But after they advanced this way without facing the enemy, they felt fear that a trap might have been prepared for them; and their concern and suspicion was amplified by the fact that they were retreating through the same woods in which the memory of King John Albert's great defeat by the Moldavians headed by Stephen, their tireless and fearless "king," was still alive.<sup>345</sup>

Graziani does not mention the human remains of the Polish army, but he does mention something of profound impact: "the memory ... [was] still alive." This memory generated an amalgam of feelings which combined awe and fear. The "fearless and tireless king" was still alive in that forest and the fact that he evoked such dynamic feelings is proof for the existence of the myth.

A sixteenth-century "definition" of Stephen, the warrior

The large number of descriptions concerning Stephen's actions on the battlefield resulted in texts which may be seen a veritable "definitions" of the Moldavian ruler as warrior. The most particularised and complex definition belongs to the Polish Maciej Strykowski who touched upon different levels of Stephen's reign. His report begins with the description of Stephen in his most acclaimed battle: Vaslui, 1475. In this context, Strykowski recounts the composition of both armies, as well as the strategy and deployment of the Moldavians. Further on, he describes the booty and prisoners taken by the Moldavians, as well as the human remains still visible 100 years after the end of the battle. A large part of Strykowski's description relates to the ruler's victories against the Ottomans, Polish, and Hungarians – consequently, Stephen was the "clever and lucky"<sup>346</sup> prince, who not only overcame all these enemies, but who additionally also "wounded the king himself [Matthias] with three spears"<sup>347</sup> in the Battle of Baia. The fact that Stephen was in such close combat with both Matthias and John Albert is emphasised by the Polish historian who concluded that "any historian can rightfully eulogise him [Stephen] for this blessed luck with such a small country."<sup>348</sup>

This description must have been the result of the combination of two different sources: previously-written histories such as that of Maciej Miechowita<sup>349</sup> and contemporary accounts, most likely Moldavian, gathered while travelling through Moldavia. Strykowski's definition of Stephen's heroism was not singular however,

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<sup>345</sup> Antonio Maria Graziani in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* II, 621.

<sup>346</sup> Maciej Strykowski in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* II, 454.

<sup>347</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>348</sup> Ibidem. Also, see the entire description of Stephen written by Strykowski in *Călători străini despre Țările Române* II, 452-454.

<sup>349</sup> Miechowita wrote *Chronica Polonorum* in which Stephen was named an "admirable and victorious man." See: *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 173-176.

as several others emerged. Martin Cromer revoked the Moldavian as “a man worth remembering at all times for the greatness of his soul, for his ingenuity, for his competence in the art of war and for his lucky wars against the Turks, Hungarians, Polish, and Tartars.”<sup>350</sup> Similarly, for Joachim Cureus, Stephen was “an unspeakably brave and tireless man.”<sup>351</sup> Moreover, he emphasised that it was difficult to find another warrior more heroic than Stephen was in his time.<sup>352</sup>

Indirect accounts also pointed to a certain admiration neighbouring countries had for the prince. The rivalry between the Hungarians and Poles seats indirectly revealed Stephen's perception outside Moldavian borders: “This way, this great warrior who defeated the Turks, Tartars, and Hungarians, subdued to the Polish king. Should such a submission have been made to Matthias, he would have surely been proud of it.”<sup>353</sup> This affirmation summarises the positive image Stephen had, an image which inspired all the praises of the sixteenth century.

Of course, negative traits also emerged within these “definitions.” Cureus highlighted that Stephen was “not only a fearless man, but also a cruel one,” continuing to describe how, after the clash with the Tartars in 1468, Stephen had the son of the Khan cut into four pieces in front of his envoys and had his head sent back to his father.<sup>354</sup> Stephen was thus perceived as a brave man, but nonetheless as devious and unstable.<sup>355</sup> As one would expect, all negative understandings came from enemies of the principality. While they all agreed on Stephen's fame in war and his braveness,<sup>356</sup> negative accounts were explicit: “[he defeated] King Matthias, although rather by means of deceit which he often used, than by means of real power ... he was unstable ... he was proud and his unusual cruelty erased a little from the fame and glory of his deeds.”<sup>357</sup> Recalling the Battle of Baia where Matthias was defeated, the Hungarians were not eager to praise Stephen. Neither were the Ottomans, especially when remembering the Battle of Vaslui: “...that damned prince of Moldavia, who surpassed in wickedness the Devil himself.”<sup>358</sup> Not surprisingly, negative portrayals also appear in Wallachian descriptions of Stephen's heroic deeds:

He was a brave man and he made many wars ... he would not stay to rest and, with luck on his side, he defeated many. He was however ungrateful for the good he received and he was ungrateful to Prince Radu, the Wallachian, with

<sup>350</sup> Martin Cromer, “Polonia sive de origine et rebus gestis Polonorum,” in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 194.

<sup>351</sup> Joachim Cureus, “Gentis Silesiae Annales,” in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 334.

<sup>352</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>353</sup> Marcin Bielski, “Kronika Polska,” in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 200.

<sup>354</sup> Joachim Cureus, “Gentis Silesiae Annales,” in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 334.

<sup>355</sup> Miklós Istvánffy actually referred to him as a “man famous for his wars, but changeable when it comes to his temper and faith.” See: Miklós Istvánffy, “Regni Hungarici Historia,” in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 215.

<sup>356</sup> Istvánffy said that he “proved himself to be above all his enemies.” See: Ibidem.

<sup>357</sup> Ibidem, 216.

<sup>358</sup> Kemal Paşazade in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 276.

whose help he gained the Moldavian throne and afterwards came with war upon him unexpectedly, and Radu fled to the Ottomans, while Stephen took his wife and daughter Voichița, whom he then married.<sup>359</sup>

Just like the Hungarians and the Ottomans, the Wallachians admitted that Stephen was a hero, but given the rivalry between the two principalities, they did not offer him the acknowledgement other accounts did. The above-quoted fragment is dated seventeenth century, but because there are no similar sources originating in the sixteenth century, one must assume that this chronicle relied on older texts which did not survive beyond their time.

### *The sixteenth-century public image of Stephen the Great*

Stephen the Great became in the sixteenth century the representation of an ideal leader. Folklore shaped collective memory by means of popular songs such as the one described by Strijkowski, but also by exploiting the remnants of Stephen's life: on the one hand, the physical image of the prince still visible in his church foundations, his impressive tomb at the Putna Monastery, or the battlefields and their markers erected at Stephen's order; on the other hand, the recollections of people who lived during the prince's reign.

#### The coloniser

Stephen the Great ruled for 47 years. At least two generations of children were born in the 1480s and 1490s who lived roughly until 1550<sup>360</sup> and who must have been able to perpetuate their memories of the ruler all throughout their lives – therefore, up until the middle of the sixteenth century. Similarly, a second group of people were likely to preserve a positive image of the prince: landowners. Two large volumes<sup>361</sup> of documents issuing donations from Stephen the Great were published – most of these documents being land donations. As anticipated, all people who received these donations had their existence tied to the name of Stephen the Great. Colonisers from Transylvania and Poland also had their names tied to Stephen as the prince brought them to Moldavia, offering them land privileges, particularly during the Moldavian-

<sup>359</sup> Radu Popescu, "Istoriile Domnilor Țării Românești" [The histories of the Wallachian princes], in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 152.

<sup>360</sup> Gorovei and Székely calculated that the generations born in the 1480s and 1490s must have been able to perpetuate Stephen's image up until mid sixteenth century. See: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 539.

<sup>361</sup> *Documenta Romaniae Historica. A. Moldavia II (1449-1486)*, ed. Leon Șimanschi (Bucharest: Academiei, 1976), document no. 191; 286. (henceforth: DRH A. II) and *Documenta Romaniae Historica. A. Moldova III (1487-1504)*, ed. C. Cihodaru, I. Caproșu, N. Ciocan (Bucharest: Academiei, 1980), 529. (henceforth: DRH A. III).

Polish conflicts and Transylvanian persecutions.<sup>362</sup> These colonisations had two-way advantages: while Stephen offered colonisers unoccupied lands, they were obliged to be part of Stephen's so-called small host, the permanent princely army.<sup>363</sup> Moreover, with this strategy, Stephen also strengthened central power and diminished the chances of political anarchy. Fifteenth-century Moldavia benefited from vast so-called "deserted"<sup>364</sup> territories which were given by the central power to colonisers in order to organise new settlements and work the lands for agricultural purposes. Colonisers received tax-free lands and were exempt from obligations to the principality<sup>365</sup> – except for the obligation of military service, of course. Considered to be small boyars as part of the lower nobility,<sup>366</sup> historians see this social category as a catalyst for the preservation of Stephen the Great's memory: "I think that the preservation of Stephen's name up until today (while the names of other rulers were erased in light of tradition) is owed to a great extent to this act of colonisation."<sup>367</sup>

Stephen was thus supported by a large number of subjects who, already before the time of his death, had perceived him as a ruler with a mythical aura.<sup>368</sup> The fact that the length of Stephen's reign was overstated both during his lifetime and afterwards, is proof for this superhuman perception: in 1497, an Ottoman source claimed that Stephen had been ruling in Moldavia for 52 years,<sup>369</sup> just like one

<sup>362</sup> See more information on the propagation of Stephen's memory through landowners and colonisers in: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 539-540.

<sup>363</sup> The Moldavian army was formed of two military divisions. The first one was the small host (or small army) which was the Moldavian permanent army comprised of boyars and their personal armies. The second type of army (the large host) mainly comprised of peasants, was only called at war in times of imminent danger when large numbers of soldiers were needed. See: Nicolae Stoicescu, *Curteni și slujitori. Contribuții la istoria armatei române* [Courtiers and servants. Contributions to the history of the Romanian army] (Bucharest: Militară, 1968), 6-7.

<sup>364</sup> A deserted territory was considered to be a territory without an owner – therefore not belonging to any boyar or the Church, it was under the control of the prince. See more: Petre P. Panaiteșcu, *Obștea jărănească în Țara Românească și Moldova – Orânduirea feudală* [Peasants in Wallachia and Moldavia – Feudal Organisation] (Bucharest: Academiei, 1964), 96.

<sup>365</sup> Matei D. Vlad, *Colonizarea rurală în Țara Românească și Moldova (secolele XV-XVIII)* [Rural colonisation in Wallachia and Moldavia (Fifteenth – eighteenth centuries)] (Bucharest: Academiei, 1973), 18.

<sup>366</sup> Panaiteșcu, "Ștefan cel Mare. O încercare de caracterizare," 16.

<sup>367</sup> Ibidem, 17.

<sup>368</sup> Arnold van Gennep explained that any ruler who was able to surround himself with a large number of faithful subjects was eventually perceived by them as immortal: one could not understand the death of a man who was appreciated as superior from all points of view and who had a substantial influence on one's life. See: Arnold Van Gennep, *La formation des légendes* (Paris: Ernest Flammarion, 1929), 121. From this point of view, Romanian historians compared Stephen the Great to other "immortal" rulers such as King Arthur, Frederick I Barbarossa, Frederick II, or Constantine XI. See: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 484-489.

<sup>369</sup> *Der fromme Sultan Bayezid. Die Geschichte seiner Herrschaft (1481-1512) nach den altosmanischen Chroniken des Oruc und des Anonymus Hanivaldanus*, ed. Richard F. Kreutel 9 (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1978), 93. Also quoted in: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 485.

century later, Kodja Husein was emphasising that the prince, “a master in war,” was “famous among Christian kings for his wiliness and was an evil-doer who ruled for 90 years.”<sup>370</sup> The impact of Stephen the Great becomes apparent once one comes in contact with such sources highlighting the outstanding nature of his reign. The fact that the Moldavian’s exceptionality was perpetuated is verified by sources which particularly emphasise the transmission of Stephen’s prominence in time: at the end of the sixteenth century, the Transylvanian Valentin Prepostvari was using Stephen as an example to the Moldavian Prince Aron the Tyrant – should Aron have been inspired by the acts of his predecessor, he would have gained a name comparable to that of Stephen the Great whose “brave fame and name” still lived “today and will live until this world will exist.”<sup>371</sup> One should thus conclude that Stephen’s image was very much present in the memories of the sixteenth-century Moldavians. Not surprisingly, Prince Stephen received the appellation “the Great.”

## The Great

Until recently, it was believed that the appellation “the Great” was attached to Stephen’s name in the sixteenth century. The earliest attestations of the designation were believed to spring from two sources: the account of the Austrian Baron Sigismund von Herberstein and a communication between Prince Peter Rareș and King Sigismund I. As a diplomat, Herberstein travelled twice to Moscow (in 1517 and 1526) and subsequently wrote his *Rerum Moscoviticarum Commentarii*<sup>372</sup> which detailed his expeditions but which also mentioned the name of the Moldavian prince twice. There are three original versions of the text (Latin, German, Italian), thus Stephen’s name appears six times altogether. Of these six times, the Moldavian is presented with his “the Great” app four times, suggesting that during Herberstein’s travels to Moscow Stephen was commonly known as “the Great.”<sup>373</sup> Years later, in February 1531, Peter Rareș received a letter from Sigismund I in which the Polish king referred to Stephen as *Stephanus ille Magnus*.<sup>374</sup> Furthermore, Stephen was

<sup>370</sup> Kodja Husein, “Beda’i ul-veka’i,” in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 289.

<sup>371</sup> *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei și Țării Românești* [Documents concerning the history of Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia], ed. Andrei Veress, IV *Acte și scrisori (1593–1595)* [Documents and letters (1593–1595)] (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1932), document no. 27, 45–55. Also quoted and exemplified by Cristea in “Declanșarea războiului,” 106.

<sup>372</sup> Three editions of the book are available at: <http://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/dms/load/img>, last time accessed: February 4, 2016.

<sup>373</sup> For the thorough explanation of this hypothesis, see: Gorovei, “<Cel Mare>. Mărturii și interpretări,” 8–13.

<sup>374</sup> See the letter in: *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor. 1510–1600* [Documents regarding the history of Romanians. 1510–1600] Suplement II, vol. I, ed. Ioan Bogdan (Bucharest: 1893), 21–22. (henceforth: Hurmuzaki Suplement II vol. I).

known as “the Great” also to the sixteenth-century Ottomans who were familiar to him as “Qodjea Istefan.”<sup>375</sup>

In the fifteenth century, Moldavia and Wallachia were externally known as *Valahia Minor* (Moldavia) and *Valahia Major* (Wallachia) – denominations showing both territorial and political limitations.<sup>376</sup> During the reign of Stephen the Great however, *Valahia Minor* wanted to hold political power over the neighbouring *Valahia Major*. As Moldavia attempted to increase its influence over Wallachia, diplomatic reports became indicative of one principality’s (claimed) “greatness” over the other. Consequently, in August 1473, a foreign report referred to Stephen as “grossen Walachen.”<sup>377</sup> As the “great Wallachian” syntagm also referred to a “great” Wallachia, one can notice a change in the perception of both principalities: at a certain time during the reign of Stephen, Moldavia became *Valahia Major* and Wallachia was transformed into *Valahia Minor*. This change in perception was owed to Stephen’s anti-Ottoman policy which progressively tried to integrate Wallachia as well.<sup>378</sup> The fact that the two principalities interchanged their nominations during Stephen’s reign reflects the extent of the prince’s influence. Not only did his principality gain the “Major” title, but Stephen himself gained a new title<sup>379</sup> which shortly afterwards received a deeper symbolic understanding: he became the “great Wallachian,” the self-proclaimed suzerain of the Wallachian principality, as sources divulge.<sup>380</sup> This was the beginning of a titling process which propelled Stephen’s name into posterity. He was soon transformed from the “great Wallachian” into a

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<sup>375</sup> Bayezid II referred to Stephen as such in a document dated 1581. “Qodjea” was used as a synonym for “old,” but also for “great” or “enormous.” See: Gorovei and Székely, *Princesps Omni Laude Maior*, 538-539.

<sup>376</sup> For a short historical presentation of the *Valahia Minor* and *Valahia Major* nominations, see: Papacostea, “The Foreign Policy of Stephen the Great: the Polish option (1459-1473),” 22-23.

<sup>377</sup> The report reproduced the latest news coming from Poland and was sent from Strasbourg and destined to Albrecht III Achilles, Elector of Brandenburg. See: Papacostea, “The Foreign Policy of Stephen the Great,” 25 (the original text of the report is reproduced in footnote 27).

<sup>378</sup> Papacostea, “The Foreign Policy of Stephen the Great,” 22-23.

<sup>379</sup> For intitulation of Stephen the Great, see: Gorovei, “Titlurile lui Ștefan cel Mare. Tradiție diplomatică și vocabular politic”, 41-78 (Subchapter no. VIII referring particularly to the titling “the great”).

<sup>380</sup> The terminology used by intenal sources indicates a feudal relationship between Moldavia and Wallachia, where Moldavia had the suzerain role. Șerban Papacostea highlighted two particular examples. The first one refers to the chronicle of Grigore Ureche where the chronicler states that Vlad Călugărul, the Wallachian prince, turned his back on “his lord, Prince Stephen” – suggesting a feudal-like relationship between princes Stephen and Vlad. The second example points to a 1481 document in which Stephen announced the inhabitants of the Wallachian borderline that he would appoint to the Wallachian throne Mircea, “the son of my reign” – making reference to the “father” and “son” relationship which evoked the suzerain-vassal relationship between two rulers. See: Papacostea, “The Foreign Policy of Stephen the Great,” 24-25.



more personal and individual “Stephen the Great.” A recent thorough analysis<sup>381</sup> presents the stages of this transformation:

- The first known instance of “the great” Stephen appears in 1473, in the above-cited document which mentions the prince as “grossen Walachen.”
- The second known instance is dated 1481<sup>382</sup> and appears in the inscription of the entrance tower at the Putna Monastery: “the great Prince Stephen, son of the great Prince Bogdan.”<sup>383</sup>
- A third instance is documented for 1491 in the Gospel written by Teodor Mărișescu for Alexander, Stephen’s the eldest son. It describes Alexander as follows: “the son of the great Prince Stephen.”<sup>384</sup>
- Soon after Stephen’s death, in 1510, a funeral inscription from Suceava refers in Greek to Manoil Murati, the deceased who lived during the time of Prince Bogdan, the son of “the great Prince Stephen.”<sup>385</sup>
- In 1514, King Sigismund wrote to Pope Leo X about the Eastern European relationship between Christians and Ottomans.<sup>386</sup> Within the letter, the adjective “magnanimus” is used twice with reference to Stephen: “De quibus vojevodam illum magnanimum olim Stephanum – (is enim Stephanus ... erat ... natura vafer, subdolos, varius, strenuus et magnanimous, ob que a teneris appellabatur vulpis astuta)”<sup>387</sup>
- The other two relevant sources describing Stephen as “the great” are the ones belonging to Sigismund von Herberstein between the years 1517 and 1527 (“Stephanus ille magnus Vuaivoda Moldaviae,” “der groß Stephan Weyda,” “quel gran Stephano Vuayuuda di Moldauia,” “magnus ille Stephanus Moldaviae

<sup>381</sup> Ștefan S. Gorovei, “<Cel Mare>. Mărturii și interpretări” – “Le Grand”. Témoignages et interpretations,” *Analele Putnei* 2 (2012): 7-37.

<sup>382</sup> Although the inscription is dated 1481, the present inscription was re-carved in the eighteenth century, based on the original one.

<sup>383</sup> Gorovei, “<Cel Mare>. Mărturii și interpretări,” 15. See also the original text in: *Repertoriul monumentelor și obiectelor de artă*, ed. Mihai Berza, 49.

<sup>384</sup> Gorovei, “<Cel Mare>. Mărturii și interpretări,” 15. See also: Mihai Berza, “Trei Tetraevanghele ale lui Teodor Mărișescu în Muzeul Istoric de la Moscova” [Three Gospels written by Teodor Mărișescu at the Moscow Historical Museum] in *Cultura moldovenească în timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare* [Moldavian culture during the time of Stephen the Great], ed. Mihai Berza (Bucharest: Academiei, 1964), 590.

<sup>385</sup> Ștefan S. Gorovei, “Trei ‘probleme’ din biografia lui Ștefan cel Mare – Trois ‘questions’ de la biographie d’Étienne le Grand,” *Analele Putnei* 1 (2010): 249. It should be highlighted that Ștefan Gorovei also points to another inscription dated between 1491 and 1510. He discusses a fourth description which does not make direct reference to Stephen the Great, but to his father Bogdan: the Menaion of March 1504 written at the Putna Monastery makes reference to Stephen as “the son of the great Prince Bogdan.” See: Ibidem, 15-16 and *Repertoriul monumentelor și obiectelor de artă din timpul lui Ștefan cel Mare*, ed. Mihai Berza, 422-423.

<sup>386</sup> See the entire letter in: Hurmuzaki II.3, document no. CLVII, 168-182.

<sup>387</sup> Ibidem, 171. See also the discussion on this part of the text in: Ștefan S. Gorovei, “Trei ‘probleme’ din biografia lui Ștefan cel Mare,” 248-249.

palatines,” and “quel gran Stephano Pallatino”<sup>388</sup>) and to King Sigismund I in 1531 (“Stephanus ille Magnus, Stephanus Magnus”<sup>389</sup>)

This sequence of sources show a history of the meaning of Stephen’s greatness, as one can see the intitulation transforms from a feudal connotation into a clear indication of personal “greatness,” by the end of the prince’s life. More relevantly, Stephen was not simply a self-proclaimed “great” prince in the Moldavian-Wallachian relationship, but he was “great” outside the Moldavian borders as well, allowing more complex understandings of the prince’s greatness. The development of Stephen’s intitulation shows that already in the first half of the sixteenth century, Stephen’s “greatness” was perceived inside and outside Moldavia in terms of personal identity.

### The over-imagined

As the sixteenth century invoked and mystified Stephen the Great, his myth successively developed. One of the most compelling proofs for the mystification of the prince is the fake documentation claimed to have been written during his reign. While one cannot estimate with precision which documents were written when, they are a confirmation of the role Stephen played in collective memory, regardless of their time of conception.

Roughly 37 fake documents<sup>390</sup> referring to Stephen the Great are known to have survived up until today. Being relatively easily identifiable by usually analysing the lists of boyars who “signed” them,<sup>391</sup> fake documents relate to all periods of Stephen’s reign. The vast majority refer to land donations and property

<sup>388</sup> See all the excerpts of Herberstein’s text with reference to Stephen the Great (in original languages), as well as their discussion, in: Gorovei, “<Cel Mare>. Mărturii și interpretări,” 8-13.

<sup>389</sup> See the original letter in: Hurmuzaki Suplement II vol. I, 21-22.

<sup>390</sup> *Documenta Romaniae Historica* is the most comprehensive collection and sums up a number of 37 fake documents for the entire period of Stephen’s reign. See: *Documente privind istoria României. Veacul XVI. A. Moldova* [Documents regarding the history of Romania. The Sixteenth Century. A. Moldavia] II (1551-1570), ed. Mihail Roller (Bucharest: Academiei, 1951), 414-460 (henceforth: DIR A.2) (24 documents); and *Documente privind istoria României. Veacul XVI. A. Moldova III (1571-1590)* [Documents regarding the history of Romania. Sixteenth century. A. Moldavia III (1571-1590)], ed. Mihail Roller (Bucharest: Academiei, 1951) (henceforth: DIR A.3) (13 documents). Other collections also include fake documents dating from Stephen’s time. See: *Documente privitoare la istoria orașului Iași* [Documents regarding the history of the city of Iași] I *Acte interne (1408-1660)* [Internal documents (1408-1660)], ed. Ioan Caproșu, Petronel Zahariuc (Iași: Dosoftei, 1999), 545. See also: Ioan Bogdan, *Documente false atribuite lui Ștefan cel Mare* [Fake documents attributed to Stephen the Great] (Bucharest: Socec, 1913) – this collection also consists of the documents found in *Documenta Romaniae Historica* volumes cited above.

<sup>391</sup> See one of the first analyses done on three such documents in: Francisc Pall, “Acte suspecte și false în colecția <Documentele lui Ștefan cel Mare> a lui Ioan Bogdan” [Suspicious and fake documents in the Ioan Bogdan’s collection “The Documents of Stephen the Great”], *Revista Istorică* 4-6 (1933): 105-113.

confirmations. They clarify whom the land was given to and signal territorial borderlands, as donation acts usually do. These forged property confirmations indicate that certain people relied on the name of Stephen in order to gain rights to certain lands. The effect of documents signed by Stephen and his Council becomes more apparent when analysing documents which hint to certain territorial disputes. There are a number of documents which delimit a land or a settlement between two boyar families or groups of families;<sup>392</sup> similarly, there is a document which details the fact that a certain boyar Bogdan sold his lands to Stephen the Great who afterwards donated them to another boyar, Avram Frîncu.<sup>393</sup> As these documents may reveal certain boyar disputes, an issue becomes certain: the (probable) disagreement was solved by invoking a document “issued” by Stephen the Great. Indirectly, the image of Stephen “the judge”<sup>394</sup> becomes visible in posterity. During his reign, the prince solved disputes in such a way that there were no complaints or re-judgements of his decisions after his death (as it often happened with other princes).<sup>395</sup> The righteousness of his decisions was then propagated in the aftermath of his reign, which resulted in such forged documents.

Stephen’s righteousness may be tied to other types of fake documents as well: donations of settlements or lands,<sup>396</sup> as well as donations to monasteries such as Bistrița, Neamț, or Humor.<sup>397</sup> All these documents, regardless their type, indicate a high level of trust in the late ruler, whose name on a document was sufficient for the acceptance of certain land donations or rights.

The most captivating forged documents, however, are those relating to the fight against Ottomans and Tartars in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Highlighting the bravery against the “other,” these documents genuinely show Stephen’s image: that of a veritable propagator of the Christian cause and a restless commander against the Ottoman threat. All three documents to be presented were proved to be written between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Their relevance for the mythical genesis however does not fade as they are emulations of the pre-seventeenth-century collective memory. The documents closest in time of the mythical genesis are two donation acts which reward the bravery of two boyars with lands. Dated May 12, 1475 (therefore shortly after the Battle of Vaslui), but conceived after 1610,<sup>398</sup> an act “issued” by Stephen signalled the donation of a land by the River Bârlad to a certain Avram Huiban because of “his bravery in the battle with the Turks from upper

<sup>392</sup> For instance: DRH A.3, document VII, 543-545; DRH A.2, document X, 433-435.

<sup>393</sup> DRH A.2, document XX, 453-455.

<sup>394</sup> For the image of Stephen as judge and the disputes he settled during his reign, see: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 462-468.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibidem*, 462.

<sup>396</sup> See, as examples, documents XII or XIV in DRH A.2, 438 and 444.

<sup>397</sup> See the acts of donation to these monasteries in: DRH A.2, documents III and IV, 416-420; and DRH A.3, documents I, IV, X, 532-533, 538-540, 550-551.

<sup>398</sup> The extant document is a supposed 1610 translation of an original Slavonic document. However, in 1610, Slavonic documents were not yet translated. See: DRH A.2, 452.

Vaslui.”<sup>399</sup> Supposedly ten years later, in 1485, Stephen issued a new document in gratitude to another Moldavian act of bravery: Malușca and Cozma Rizan, together with their brothers, received lands by the banks of the Vișnovăț River in order to establish new settlements. The document stated that these lands were a reward to the four men for their bravery in defending the Moldavian border from Tartar attacks.<sup>400</sup> The third document is the most fascinating one, although it was most likely written sometime in mid-nineteenth century.<sup>401</sup> Dated September 7, 1474, the document accommodates Stephen’s orders regarding the imminent Ottoman attack, materialised in the 1475 Battle of Vaslui. Through his boyar Gavril Boldur, Stephen ordered that all Moldavian boyars, part of the so-called small host, be prepared for the confrontation. The instructions to the Moldavian soldiers end in a paragraph which not only sums the orders of Stephen, but also sums the way Stephen was perceived in posterity: “Be healthy and merciless, just like your parents and your grandparents were. Have trust ... do not be afraid of the pagan multitude...”<sup>402</sup>

A last type of forged documents completes the collection of documents which delineate the image of Stephen the Great in collective memory. A document dated 1480 showed that the Moldavian prince was the establisher of the guild of the poor in the town of Iași: “... the poor of the market of Iași have gathered ... and discussed among us and we were willingly organised in a guild, by the order of the above-mentioned prince, Stephen the old.”<sup>403</sup> The good, compassionate, and giving Stephen the Great transpired in this document.

Analyzing these documents altogether, an “imagined” image of the ruler may easily be highlighted: Stephen the Great was the humane protector of the poor, the supreme judge whose decisions were irrefutable, merciful with the helpless and merciless with enemies. Undoubtedly, these characteristics were the intrinsic elements of Stephen’s image in the aftermath of his death. Because any type of mythical narrative is the direct result of collective memory processes,<sup>404</sup> this image was also the catalyst for the large amount of legends surrounding the ruler’s life and deeds.

### The legendary

A significant number of legends detail aspects of Stephen the Great’s life, some of which can be traced back to the ruler’s life, uncovering the veracity of some of these stories. At the turn of the seventeenth century, Ion Neculce compiled his “Collection of words.” A quarter of the 42 legends present in Neculce’s compilation

<sup>399</sup> Ibidem, document XIX, 452.

<sup>400</sup> Ibidem, document XXIV, 460.

<sup>401</sup> The document was written in a style which points to nineteenth-century forgery. See more: Ibidem, 452.

<sup>402</sup> See entire document: Ibidem, 450-452, esp. 452.

<sup>403</sup> Ibidem, document XXI, 456.

<sup>404</sup> van Gennep, *La formation des légendes*, 5.

relate to Stephen's reign, a fact which demonstrates the impact he had on collective memory, as well as the reaction of collective memory to his image. Neculce's collection includes two of Stephen's most well-known legends, both of which mingle between truth and legend.

The image of Stephen as righteous judge and protector of the poor also emerges in these legends. The story known as the "The Hillock of Purcel"<sup>405</sup> shows Stephen on a Sunday morning, while going to mass in Vaslui. Once he left his court, he heard a man calling his oxen to plough his land. Surprised that somebody would work on a Sunday, the prince ordered that the man be brought to him. The man named Purcel was ploughing his land ("now known as the Hillock of Purcel")<sup>406</sup> when he was summoned to Stephen. Purcel explained to the ruler that, being a poor man, he had to work on Sundays, especially because his brother did not agree to lend him his plough only on this day of the week. Consequently, Stephen decided to "take the plough of the rich brother and give it to the poor brother, to be his."<sup>407</sup> It has already been shown that this legend seems to have its origin in historical truth:<sup>408</sup> the story was propagated by the P(B)urcel<sup>409</sup> family and was transmitted to Neculce in the seventeenth century by a follower of the family. Surely, while one cannot attest the truthfulness of the entire legend, it is more relevant to highlight the fact that the Purcel family kept the righteous judgement of Stephen in their memory for centuries.

The second legend which broke historical boundaries presented Stephen in an atypical and non-princely situation: a defeated prince who had fallen off his horse. As the fifth legend in Neculce's collection, the story describes the events which took place at the battle of Șcheia, where Stephen was defeated by a claimant to the throne, Peter Hroirot.<sup>410</sup> During this battle, Stephen fell off his horse and was not able to return to safety. In Neculce's version of the events, the boyar Purice offered the prince his horse but still he could not mount because "he was a small man."<sup>411</sup> Consequently, the boyar offered that he crouched in front of the horse in such a way that Stephen could step on his back and then mount the horse. "I will crouch into a small hillock"<sup>412</sup> and so he did. Stephen then replied: "Poor Purice, should you and I

<sup>405</sup> See legend number VII in Ion Neculce, "O samă de cuvinte" [A collection of words], in *Letopiseșul Țării Moldovei* [The Chronicle of Moldavia], ed. Anatol and Dan Vidrașcu (Bucharest: Litera Internațional, 2001), 16-17.

<sup>406</sup> Ibidem, 17.

<sup>407</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>408</sup> Mircea Ciubotaru, "De la Vilnești la Movila lui Burcel. Observații onomastice și istorice" [From Vilnești to the hillock of Burcel. Identity and historical observations], *Arhiva Genealogică* VI (1994): 143-149. See also: Ștefan S. Gorovei, "Ion Neculce și tradițiile Putnei" [Ion Neculce and the traditions of Putna] *Analele Putnei* 1 (2005): 55.

<sup>409</sup> The family name was changed into Burcel in the nineteenth century. See: Ciubotaru, "De la Vilnești la Movila lui Burcel. Observații onomastice și istorice," 143-149.

<sup>410</sup> See information on the Battle of Șcheia in: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 235-238.

<sup>411</sup> See legend number V in Ion Neculce, "O samă de cuvinte," 16.

<sup>412</sup> Ibidem.

be able to escape safely, you shall change your name to Movilă (meaning “hillock”).”<sup>413</sup> They both escaped and Stephen eventually returned to his throne. The legend said that Stephen rewarded the boyar with a high dignity, as well as with a new name – that of Movilă. A century later, at the end of the sixteenth century, the Movilă family became the ruling family of Moldavia. The legend, in the version presented by Neculce, stressed the connection between Stephen the Great and the new dynasty of the Movilă family. Historical sources however presented a somewhat different image: Purice did help Stephen out of the battle, but only after the prince had spent half a day “among the dead.”<sup>414</sup> Moreover, the name-change of Purice was not mentioned in original sources, thus suggesting that Neculce’s legend suffered a transformation with the domination of the Movilă family, under whose reign the legend was widespread.<sup>415</sup>

Analyzing these two legends, one may notice two propagation channels for Stephen’s image: one popular and another princely. The P(B)urcel family, whose representative was aided by Stephen the Great, was a small family of boyars originating in Lower Moldavia.<sup>416</sup> They propagated among themselves the story of Stephen’s righteous judgement for several generations through oral tradition. Oppositely, the legend of Stephen’s defeat was propagated on a much higher level, that of the princely court of the Movilă family,<sup>417</sup> and was altered in such a way that it suited the legitimatised discourse of the throne. Surely, both of these channels had their own particularities and interests in propagating the image of Stephen – especially the princely spheres. The genesis of Stephen’s public (imagined) image was thus a complex process born on different layers (both legendary and historical) and continuously developed from the time of his death.

All this information leads once more to the discussion on Stephen’s designations: he was “the great,” suggesting that his close followers were well aware of his immortal dimension. However, his immortal dimension did not only include his “the great” appellative, but others as well – all of which reveal the perception of the prince in the sixteenth century. In 1509, five years after the prince’s death, a monk from the Putna Monastery named the ruler “Prince Stephen the Good and the Old.”<sup>418</sup> Given the designation “the Old,” one would expect the existence of a “Stephen the Young,” but as Stephen the Young was only enthroned in 1517, Ștefan Gorovei concluded that “the old” naming must be a synonym for “the great.”<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>413</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>414</sup> “The Moldavian-German Chronicle,” 28.

<sup>415</sup> Pecican, *Sânge și trandafiri*, 35.

<sup>416</sup> Ciubotaru, “De la Vilnești la Movila lui Burcel. Observații onomastice și istorice,” 147-148.

<sup>417</sup> Pecican, *Sânge și trandafiri*, 35.

<sup>418</sup> See: Damaschin Mioc, “Materiale românești din arhive străine” [Romanian documents in foreign archives], *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 6 (1973): 333-334.

<sup>419</sup> Of course, after the reign of Stephen the Young, “the old” designation needs no more explanation as rulers such as Peter Rareș, Alexander Lăpușneanul or the Movilă family

However, “the old” appellation may also refer to another one of Stephen’s dimensions: the wise Stephen, transforming his naming into a legitimate “Prince Stephen the Good and the Wise.”

Should one collate all of Stephen’s designations in the sixteenth century, three of them would be prominent: the good, the old, and the great. These designations are in opposition to the ones of the seventeenth century, when the image of Stephen slightly changes as he becomes the good, the old, and the saint.<sup>420</sup> By comparing Stephen’s cognomina of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, one of them stands out: “the saint.” The prince seems to become saint only in the seventeenth century. Thus what happens in the sixteenth century? Is Stephen the Great saint also in the sixteenth century?

Stephen, the saint?

Stephen is a saintly hero – a hero considered saint,<sup>421</sup> although not canonised until recently.<sup>422</sup> The parameters for canonisation in the Orthodox Church were very broad in the Middle Ages as three main general criteria emerged: orthodoxy; perfection in virtue which could be demonstrated by defending the faith even to the point of death; and evidence of supernatural signs and miracles.<sup>423</sup> Stephen only accomplished the first two criteria, thus he was not sanctified until the end of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the time between his lifetime and canonisation allowed the evolution of the idea that Stephen was in fact saint, bestowing on him various saintly characteristics which made the transition from man to saint.

Although lacking any signs of miracles performed during his lifetime or by his tomb after his death, the Prince lived a life imbibed with Christianity: following the Battle of Vaslui, Stephen fasted for forty days on water and bread only, he built the Church of Războinei on the bodily remains of those fallen in battle, as well as he attributed all his victories to God while he considered all his defeats divine punishments.<sup>424</sup> Stephen however should not be seen as a man who lived in full piety,

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frequently use it. See the analysis of the text in: Gorovei, “<Cel Mare>. Mărturi și interpretări,” 18-19.

<sup>420</sup> See the chronicles of Grigore Ureche, Miron Costin, or Ion Neculce, all cited before. See also: Gorovei, “<Cel Mare>. Mărturi și interpretări,” 19-20.

<sup>421</sup> Pecican, *Sânge și trandafiri*, 82.

<sup>422</sup> Stephen the Great was canonised on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, 1992 by the Romanian Orthodox Church. His sanctification is still contested by many.

<sup>423</sup> James C. Skedros, “Reading the Lives of the Saints” in *Thinking through Faith. New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars*, ed. Aristotle Papanikolaou and Elizabeth H. Prodromou (New York: SVS Press, 2008), 172.

<sup>424</sup> Jan Długosz emphasises some of these aspects in Stephen’s reign: “Following this victory [that of Vaslui], Stephen did not become conceited, but he fasted for 40 days with water and bread. And he ordered in the entire principality that nobody should dare to assign this victory to him, but only to God, although everybody knew that the victory of this day was only owed to him.”

but rather as a princely saint beatified for acts of bravery, church building, commissions, while he was also known for un-saintly acts.<sup>425</sup> Altogether, the sanctity of Stephen has depended on his very person and personality. Divine kinship was dependent on the corroboration of several elements, not unknown to Stephen's reign: a unique individual, special circumstances, and specific means.<sup>426</sup> Moreover, in order to reach veneration, a prince had to outstrip his predecessors and peers and to rise to extraordinary power.<sup>427</sup> Eventually, his sanctity may easily be seen as a declaration or confirmation of excellence. The extraordinary nature of Stephen's reign and personality has already been highlighted in this paper. Not surprisingly, all these factors led to the perception of the prince as an authentic hero-saint.

Stephen the Great continuously supported the Church and had close relationships with certain members of the clergy such as the Metropolitan Teoctist or the Hermit Daniil. Meeting Daniil had a profound impact on the life and accomplishments of the Moldavian prince. Two of the most visible outcomes of the connection between Daniil and Stephen are the constructions of the Putna and Voroneț monasteries.<sup>428</sup> Later narratives show that the relationship between the two men seems to have been much deeper – on a mythological level. Whether the story known as “A collection of words” narrated by Ion Neculce at the turn of the seventeenth century<sup>429</sup> is historically accurate is not important – what is relevant in the following account is that, almost three centuries after his death, the prince was still present in collective memory, in both his heroic and saintly form. Out of the 42 short stories/legends presented by Neculce, 9 of them refer directly to the reign of Stephen, two of which are particularly relevant for the perception of Stephen as a saintly figure. The first story details the relationship and the influence Hermit Daniil had on Stephen: following the Battle of Războieni where the prince was defeated by the Ottoman army, Stephen seeks refuge and advice with the hermit. The prince asks Daniil whether he should subdue Moldavia to the Porte. The hermit's answer is definite: no, “the war is his [Stephen's].”<sup>430</sup> Consequently, Stephen returned to the battlefield and upon Ottoman retreat, he built the Monastery of Voroneț, as Daniil

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Jan Długosz, “Historia Polonica,” in *Portret în cronică*, 164. See also: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 474.

<sup>425</sup> His conflicts with the boyars, sometimes violent, are probably the most thorough example for this.

<sup>426</sup> Gábor Klaniczay, *Holy Rulers and Blessed Princesses: Dynastic Cults in Medieval Central Europe* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), 19.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>428</sup> See a comprehensive study on the life of Hermit Daniil: Constantin Turcu, “Daniil Sihastru. Figură istorică, legendară și bisericească” [Hermit Daniil. Historical, legendary and church character], in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt (1504-2004): Portret în istorie*, 178-192.

<sup>429</sup> Ion Neculce wrote a chronicle of Moldavia together with the so-called “A collection of words.” The “Collection” presents a number of 42 stories/legends connected to the history of Moldavia and based on oral tradition – therefore, they are stories “heard from man to man,” as the chronicler himself points out. See the collection in: Ion Neculce, “O samă de cuvinte”, 13-33.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibidem*, 15.



asked him to. The relevance of this legend stands in the relationship between the ruler and God, a relationship mediated by Hermit Daniil. Ovidiu Cristea highlights that defeat (such as the one at Războieni, which leaves the prince exhausted) was interpreted as a sign of God's anger for the sins committed by the ruler. Consequently, Stephen seeks a way to reconcile with divinity and thus approaches Daniil, a representative of God. Once the prince comes in contact with the hermit, the reconciliation process begins. Daniil promises Stephen that he will be triumphant, although this comes at a price, or a "gift exchange."<sup>431</sup> God offers Stephen victory, while Stephen offers God the Monastery of Voroneț.<sup>432</sup>

The other legend narrated by Neculce and connected to the divinity is much shorter, but just as suggestive. The story, second in the line of 42 legends of the "Collection," is accommodated within two telling sentences: "Prince Stephen the Good won many wars. And it is heard from the old and elderly that he built as many churches as wars he had won."<sup>433</sup> This account of the connection between the battles and the churches built is not singular. The Syrian Paul of Aleppo, while passing through Moldavia at the time Neculce wrote his chronicle, reported that Stephen had built 44 churches, equivalent to his military victories.<sup>434</sup> The chronicler Grigore Ureche, decades earlier, reported the same number of churches.<sup>435</sup> It thus becomes evident that the legend concerning Stephen's 44 churches<sup>436</sup> was already being propagated during Stephen's lifetime.

Both legends of Daniil's advice and that of the 44 churches hint to Stephen's connection to the divine. Both stories intuitively conclude that war led the prince closer to the divine and that there was an interactive relationship between the prince and God. God rewarded Stephen with military and political success and Stephen showed his gratitude with his church and monastic foundations. But the connections between Stephen's war and the divine were more profound.

<sup>431</sup> Ovidiu Cristea, "Despre raportul dintre principe și "omul sfânt" în Țările Române. Întâlnirea lui Ștefan cel Mare cu Daniil Sisastrul" [The relationship between the prince and the "holy man" in the Romanian Principalities. Stephen the Great meeting Hermit Daniil], in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt – Portret în Istorie*, 196.

<sup>432</sup> See the entire interpretation of the meeting between Stephen and Daniil in Neculce's legend: Ibidem, 195-197.

<sup>433</sup> Ion Neculce, "O samă de cuvinte," 13.

<sup>434</sup> "Stephen was a famous hero in war and feared by all. He had 44 campaigns or battles against the Turks, Tartars, Polish and Hungarians. He defeated all of them many times, therefore his name became famous and was feared by all and this was due to his abilities and sharp mind. Among his foundations are 44 monasteries and stone churches." See: Paul of Aleppo in *Călători străini despre Țările Române VI* [Foreign Travellers on the Romanian Principalities], ed. M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru and Mustafa Ali Mehmet (Bucharest: Științifică și Academică, 1976), 28-29.

<sup>435</sup> "Prince Stephen ruled for 47 years, two months and three weeks and he built 44 churches..." In: Ureche, *The Chronicle of Moldavia*, 66.

<sup>436</sup> It is still uncertain how the counting up to number 44 occurred. It might have happened that more churches, now destroyed, were known in the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries when these accounts are dated. See also: Gorovei and Székely, *Princesps Omni Laude Maior*, 468-469.

On a visual level, the link between Stephen and the saintly world is still visible in Moldavian churches. As a *ktetor*, Stephen had a large number of votive images painted in his church commissions. Some of them are particular however, as the painter (or the *ktetor* himself) seems to have highlighted a familiar and intimate relationship between the prince and the mediating saint. It has already been shown in this study that in two particular votive images, Stephen is guided towards Christ in a visibly friendly way by the mediators of the act of communion (Saint George, respectively Saint Elijah) who affectionately hold the prince by his shoulder and by his hand. This sympathetic relationship between the prince and the divine is also reflected on the battle field, although in a somewhat different way.

During certain military events, saints appear in order to aid the prince and his army: Saint Procopius appears riding his horse above the Battle of Râmnic (1481),<sup>437</sup> while Saint Demetrius also shows himself on a horse at the Battle of Codrii Cozminului (1497).<sup>438</sup> The two accounts of saints riding above the battle fields are dated seventeenth century, thus one may assume that collective memory worked in such a way that it “paired” Stephen with saints in these particular battles. A development of this “pairing” can be traced, highlighting how the collective memory of the sixteenth century transformed facts into myths. Contemporary chronicles date the Battles of Râmnic<sup>439</sup> and Codrii Cozminului,<sup>440</sup> revealing that the celebration of Saint Procopius coincided with the victory of the first battle, while the celebration of Saint Demetrius corresponded to the success of the latter. Thus the concurrence of the saints’ days and the military victories (which may or may not have been simple coincidences)<sup>441</sup> was materialised into the actual physical presence of the saints on the battle field, helping the prince gain victory.

Interestingly, both battles where saints physically appear were led against other Christians (in the Battle of Râmnic, the opposing army was led by the Wallachian Basarab the Young, while at Codrii Cozminului the Moldavians clashed with the Polish army). Relevant battles against the Ottomans (such as those of Vaslui or Războieni) remain silent as to whether Stephen was aided or not by saintly characters. Historians theorised that this plus of “sanctity” in the battles against other

<sup>437</sup> “...it is said that Saint Procopius showed himself to Prince Stephen, mounted above the war and armed as a brave man, being of help to Prince Stephen and offering to support to his army.” See: Ureche, *The Chronicle of Moldavia*, 50.

<sup>438</sup> “... some say that Saint Demetrius had shown himself to Prince Stephen in this war, riding and armed as a brave man, helping him and supporting his army.” See: Ibidem, 60.

<sup>439</sup> See: “The Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia,” 17; and “The Chronicle of Putna I,” 32.

<sup>440</sup> See: “The Chronicle of Putna no. II,” 37; “Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia,” 20.

<sup>441</sup> Although there is not enough evidence to fully support this theory, chronicles do hint to the fact that, when Stephen could, he paired his battles with saints’ celebrations. See the two battles of Râmnic and Codrii Cozminului, as well as the attack against Brăila in 1470 which took place on the Tuesday before the Easter days of fasting and the distribution of flags before the campaign in Wallachia which took place on the feast day of the Archangel Michael. See discussion in: Cristea, “Declanșarea războiului,” 123. See also: Gorovei, “Gesta Dei per Stephanum Voievodam,” 411-412.

Christians should be seen as a justification for the conflict – therefore, in these particular cases, Grigore Ureche, the author of the seventeenth-century chronicle describing these interventions, highlighted that the divine agreed with the violence against Christians.<sup>442</sup>

There was one instance however which attested a type of saintly apparition within Stephen's conflicts with the Ottoman Empire – although not in historical sources but in a legend preserved at Mount Athos. At a certain point of uncertainty in Stephen's struggle against the Ottomans, Saint George appeared to the prince in a dream and encouraged him to start the attack against his enemies. The second day, Stephen, aided by the presence of the saint, clashed with the Ottomans and gained victory.<sup>443</sup>

Therefore one can notice that Stephen had a collection of attributes which eventually led to his canonisation: he was a man of faith, who dedicated a considerable amount of his reign to the Church and projects of the Church (commissions, donations), he fasted, he dedicated his victories to the divine, he was thought to be aided by saints and he was even identified with Saint George. However, none of these accounts are as telling as Maciej Strykowski and Marcin Bielski's reports. Strykowski's exhaustive presentation of the ruler ends in a meaningful assertion: "... because of his unbelievable bravery, they consider him a saint."<sup>444</sup> Bielski's description of Stephen ends in an almost identical argument (Strykowski was probably inspired by Bielski's writings): "...and because of his unbelievable bravery, they call him saint."<sup>445</sup>

Stephen's saintly aura was thus present in the "afterlife" of the ruler ever since the beginning of the sixteenth century. Regardless of the fact that he was only canonised half a millennium after his death, the followers of Stephen and the collective memory they carried seem to have perceived Stephen in all his complexity: as a saintly hero.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 480-481.

<sup>443</sup> Cristea, "Declanșarea războiului," 124-125. See also: Matei Cazacu, *Minuni, vedenii și vise premonitorii în trecutul românesc* [Miracles, visions and premonition dreams in the Romanian past] (Bucharest: Sigma, 2003), 57; and Damian P. Bogdan, "Quelques témoignages des liens roumano-grecs sous le règne d'Etienne le Grand, prince de Moldavie," *Bulletin de l'Association Internationale d'Etudes du Sud-Est Européen* 5 (1967): 122.

<sup>444</sup> Maciej Strykowski, "Kronika Polska," in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 195.

<sup>445</sup> Marcin Bielski, "Kronika Polska," in *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Portret în cronică*, 206.

<sup>446</sup> Stephen the Great's sanctity must be understood in medieval terms. Although throughout Stephen's reign, there are no references to any saintly acts required by a man to gain canonisation, Stephen's sanctity should be understood within the sphere of medieval royal kingship. Although human by nature and actions, Stephen should be seen as saintly "because he represented and imitated the image of the living Christ" and he represented the mediation between heaven and earth. See: Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton, 1957), 87-88.

## VI Conclusions: The prince and the myth

Stephen's reign represented a turning point in the history of medieval Moldavia. He changed the way both the ruler and his enemy (most visibly, the Ottoman sultan) were perceived and he heightened the expectations of the subjects from their prince. The prince was now supposed to be able to fulfil at least two crucial ruling objectives: successfully defend the principality from any external threat and ensure stable and prosperous living conditions for his people. The historical developments of the sixteenth century did not allow the fulfilment of these objectives. The growing Ottoman pressure in the sixteenth-century Moldavia did not allow the "birth" of a new Stephen-like hero. Two decisive outcomes resulted from this situation: firstly, Stephen's time started to be perceived as a lost golden age resulting in his gradual entrance into the mythical realm; and secondly, Stephen became a model figure for his followers. Consequently, the patterns of Stephen's reign, together with his dynastic project were propelled into the sixteenth century and into the reigns of prolific rulers such as Peter Rareș. The positive factors which defined Stephen's reign (including his character, his actions, and the historical conditions of his time) transformed him into the ultimate type of Moldavian leader.

The complexity of Stephen's mythical genesis was not only given by the fact that he became an ultimate type of leader, but also by the fact that his image was comprised of so many various perceptions. Stephen was not solely perceived from one angle, but from a variety of angles which led to the birth of a many-fold ruler.<sup>447</sup> In the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, Stephen the Great was the prince of many:

- The prince of official documents. Visible throughout charters, letters, and chronicles, this prince represents the image that Stephen and the Royal Council wanted to present. He is the ultimate Christian warrior. He is imbibed with goodwill and mercy and he rewards both the living and the dead. He unites the

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<sup>447</sup> The following short presentation on Stephen's many-fold image is inspired by the analysis on Saint Louis done by Jacques Le Goff. See: Jacques Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, trans. Gareth Evan Gollrad (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), "Part II: The Production of Royal Memory: Did Saint Louis Exist?"

past with the present and the future, while he impersonates the attributes of an emperor. Altogether, the prince of official documents seems to be flawless, especially as events such as the fall of his horse at the battle of Șcheia<sup>448</sup> are concealed from documents springing from the court.

- The prince of foreigners. The prince of foreigners is visible in the chronicles, letters, and reports of any type of non-Moldavians, including Christians, Ottomans, but also Wallachians. Should one look at all these documents altogether, their prince has a balanced image: he is not the entirely positive ruler of the Moldavian official documents as his weaknesses, his harshness, and generally negative characteristics become visible. He is the prince of colliding extremes: he is both a saint and “the leader of the devils.” This is probably the most complex prince because his image is comprised of perspectives depending on Stephen’s (direct or indirect; positive or negative; satisfying or unsatisfying) interactions with foreigners describing him.
- The prince of his immediate followers. This prince is the model prince. He is the example of the heirs to his throne, each of whom tries to fit within their predecessor’s shoes (or throne) as much as possible. Although the circumstances of the sixteenth century did not always allow it, all direct heirs of the sixteenth century from Bogdan III to Alexander Lăpușneanul tried to continue the legacy of the dynastic project.<sup>449</sup>

There was also the “real” prince, however. The real historical prince is invisible, but he exists within all the other three princes. One could only assume who was Stephen, the man. He was surely the ambitious Christian warrior and political strategist visible within all the other Stephens, but he must have also been afraid at times, tired, lacking interest, embittered, and angry. He was first and foremost a man. What makes this man remarkable is that he transformed himself from the “real” prince into all the other princes and eventually, into the myth. Stephen the Great was metaphorically erected on a pedestal next to the most iconic medieval models, thus becoming himself one of those very models. Nevertheless, Stephen was not erected on this pedestal by his followers alone, but also by fellow rulers, diplomats, travellers through Moldavia, etc. Stephen was a man of complex personality and traits, an intriguing character who changed the face of Moldavia: although he was a usurper and often a wicked man, he was also the saviour, the church builder, the good Christian, the art reviver, the dynastic “architect,” the coloniser, the diplomat, the “champion of Christ,” the Last Emperor, the rebel, the fierce warrior, the crusader, the dreamer, the hero, the great. Stephen was the man bound to become myth, a myth which still continues to grow and create new faces of the ruler’s image even 500 years after his death.

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<sup>448</sup> See information on the Battle of Șcheia in: Gorovei and Székely, *Princeps Omni Laude Maior*, 235-238.

<sup>449</sup> See PhD dissertation: Teodora Artimon, “The Proto-Myth of Stephen the Great of Moldavia”

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