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# Ruling Christian: Neagoe Basarab and the Beginning of Political Modernity in Sixteenth-Century Wallachia. A Case Study

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## **Preliminary Notes**

The Wallachian sixteenth century is a fascinating and important period for post-Byzantine history. For the Balkan Eastern Christianity and the Danubian Principalities, the collapse of the Byzantine Empire culminating in the fall of Constantinople in 1453 signified the disappearance of its cultural, spiritual and political guide. The Christian cultures of Southeast Europe had to find new ways of cohabitation with the Ottoman Empire. The search after a replacement for the shrinking territorial basis of the Orthodoxy, i. e. the Byzantine Empire, determined the reformed Orthodox Church in Constantinople to assume some political functions of the nowadays almost lost State. After the hesychastic debate between Gregorios Palamas (1296-1359) and Barlaam of Calabria (1290-1348) ended with the victory of the palamitic anti-Latin party, we observe the tendency of the hesychasts to get the key positions in the Church hierarchy and administration (Angelov, 2007: 373f, 416; Kapriev, 2011). The main policy of these new leaders was to reunify the Orthodox Commonwealth on a religious basis in order to compensate for the desintegration of territorial structures of the Empire. This policy consisted in an ecclesiastical centralisation in the Balkans through the cancelling of the local Bulgarian and Serb autocephalies; through the establishment of new Orthodox Metropolitan Seats under the jurisdiction of Ecumenical Patriarchate, like in Wallachia (1359) and Moldavia (1401); and through religious reformers and missionaries in the new Church territories (Arnakis, 1963: 126f; Makrides, 2005: 183ff). This was, as we will see, the case with the Principality of Wallachia in the first decade of the sixteenth century.

The Principality of Wallachia (together with the one of Moldavia) played a special role, since it was one of the very few orthodox autonomous political entities which had not been conquered by the Ottomans. The status of the Danubian Principalities was ambivalent: on the one hand, they paid tribute to the Ottomans, which led to their involvement in the political and dynastic problems of the Ottoman Empire, but, on the other hand, they tried in various ways to somehow provide a substitution for the disappeared Byzantine imperial idea. They became advocates and sponsors of the Orthodox Commonwealth (reaching from Bulgaria to Syria), bearing the standard of

the Byzantine tradition in political, cultural and spiritual life (Grigore, 2012: 88).

This role, which began after the fall of Constantinople and lasted until the middle of the seventeenth century, can be divided into two periods: first, the period of military resistance to the Ottoman expansion during the reign of important princes such as Vlad III the Impaler (1448, 1456-1462 and 1476) and Stephen the Great (1457-1504), and second, the period of the so-called “Romanian Baroque”. The concept belongs to the Romanian aestheticist Edgar Papu (1977a), and it means the cultural and spiritual affirmation of Christian-Orthodox identity, with emphasis on the prominent political role for all those Christian brothers in “Babylonian captivity” (Papu, 1977b: 20ff; Turdeanu, 1985: 115). In the first period, the Danubian Principalities were not only their own defenders, but also the standard-bearers of a *quasi* “*reconquista*” of territories under Ottoman dominion. They were led, as I have mentioned, by princes such as Stephen the Great or Iancu of Hunedoara (†1456), to whom the Pope had granted the honorary and very prestigious title of *athleta Christi*. The second period of the “Romanian Baroque” was characterized by the substitution of military confrontation thru its cultural, religious and diplomatic effervescence. It was a period of religious reform – for example, that of Prince Radu the Great (1495-1508) and Ecumenical Patriarch Niphon II (1486-1488; 1497-1498; 1502-1503) –, of cultural exchange consisting in intense printing activity, manuscript multiplication, literary production, and architectural masterpieces. In this period, there was a rise of humanist princes cultivating erudition, art, philanthropy and extensive contacts with the Greek and Latin world, leading to a particular form of “Wallachian modernity”, consisting in religious, cultural, and political emancipation. The courts of those Princes became refuges for Greek scholars and oases of Byzantine or Slavonic erudition. These unprecedented developments determined the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga to speak of a “Byzantium after Byzantium” (Iorga, 1971). One of the Princes who played a crucial role in this less considered process of Romanian Renaissance<sup>1</sup> is the Wallachian Voivode Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521), the main focus of this article.

Once the Byzantine Empire collapsed, the fundamental consequence for the post-Byzantine political entities in the Orthodox European Southeast was that religion, state and their relation to each other had to be reconsidered. The three forms of this adaptation process in Wallachia (and until the end of sixteenth century to a certain extent in Moldavia) – with its privileged status among other Orthodox traditions in Southeast Europe – constitute the subject of this article. I will try to describe the political modernization in the principality of Wallachia focusing on three aspects: the role of the Orthodox faith, the principle of symphony between the sacral and temporal sphere, and

the new reflection of politics and polity in the treatise of Neagoe Basarab, “The Teachings to His Son Theodosius” (ca. 1518-1520). The historical context of the sixteenth century, as well as the differences and similarities between the Byzantine and the Wallachian patterns of political ethos are also to be discussed. The Byzantine political philosophy was set up on three axiomatic “truths”: the Roman universal legacy, the status of the Orthodox faith, the quasi-priesthood of the ruler (as *episkopos ton ektós, isapóstolos*) (Eusebius Caesariensis, 1902: 28; Lehmeier/Gottlieb, 2007: 166; Bréhier, 1975: 86), and finally, the principle of symphony between sacral and temporal power, church and ruler, as formulated by Emperor Justinian I (†565) in his famous sixth *novella* (Schöll/Knoll 1954: 35f.; Meyendorff, 1982: 48). My inquiry will be structured as a parallel comparison between Byzantine issues and the Wallachian situation during the reign of Neagoe Basarab.

### **The First Case: The Orthodox and Roman Imperial Idea**

One of the main characteristics of the Byzantine polity was the close, almost eidetic symbiosis between the religious and political dimension. The political order of the state, the *oecuméne*, meant not just the juridical, economical, and political association of people, but also the common faith of all of the empire’s subjects. The Byzantine emperor was at the same time the political head of state and the guarantor of Orthodox preeminence. As *continuatio* of the emperor’s pagan priest status as *pontifex maximus*, the Christian East-Roman emperor had not only a temporal function, but also an ecclesiastical one, being part of the ceremonial, the symbolic discourses and practices of the Orthodox Church (Cameron, 1981: 208; Harkianakis, 1971; Cain/Lenski, 2009: 8ff.). Furthermore, the emperor aimed to be part of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, taking in fact control of the church. In this attempt, he succeeded without significant resistance, as long as he kept the Orthodox faith untouched (Cain/Lenski, 2009: 9f; Grigore, 2010: 148, 172). The “Orthodox faith” was a medium of political unity, with deviating heretical elements being persecuted, banished, and even “erased”. According to the civil law, enemies of the church were indeed culpable of high treason (Tatakes, 2003: 13). When Emperor Theodosius I (379-395) established Christianity in 380 as official state religion (through the edict *Cunctos populos*), the religious policy of emperor Constantine (306-337) was confirmed and the pagan Roman tradition of interference between religion and politics also continued to exist (Ritter, 1993: 165, 182; Hauke, 2008: 6f.; Lizzi/Testa, 2009).

The Byzantine state insisted on its mission as a vehicle of Christian theocracy and heir to the Roman Empire. The imperial ideology of the Christian Empire profited both from political Roman authority and the religious success and resources of Christianity. The basis of this discourse was laid out by the Christian apologist Melito of Sardes (second century), who interpreted the *Pax Augusta* as the earthly infrastructural preparation for Christ's coming (Dvorník, 1966: 584ff.). The state had – even before Christianization – taken on the character of a religious *oecumène*. The Roman Empire was seen as the place of redemption fulfilled by Jesus Christ (Podskalsky, 1972: 73; Klein, 1988: 608). In this way, the Roman political destiny was bound to the religious message of Jesus Christ and its earthly institution, the church. The Roman state was thus concomitantly regarded as an ecclesiastical and ecumenical environment of the Holy Ghost, as “pneumatological ecclesiastic body” (Grigore, 2010: 35ff). However, this meant otherwise that such ideological frames linked the future of the church, of the faith and of the “whole world” to the doom of Rome. When the Eternal City was devastated by Visigoths in 410, panic broke out, forcing Augustine to write his major book *De civitate Dei*, including a reconsideration of the relations between Christian religion and the Roman state.

Byzantium preserved the universal legacy of “Romanness”. Even in Middle Byzantium (6<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century), when language and culture were predominantly Greek, the Byzantines considered themselves as “Romans” (Romaioi), their capital being the “New Rome” (Nea Róme) (Cameron, 2009). The Byzantine emperor (autocrátor) possessed the exclusive right to bear the title “eternal Augustus” (Augoustos aisebastós) (Rebenich, 2007: 231; Rösch, 1978: 34ff.). It was hence a blasphemous crime to call the basileus “emperor of the Greeks” (*imperator Graecorum*). Liutprand of Cremona reports the sharp answer of the Byzantine chancellery, when the Pope ignored this tradition in the presence of emperor Nikephoros II:

“The silly stupid Pope does not know that the holy Constantine brought [to Constantinople, MDG] the imperial sceptre, the whole Senate, the whole Roman knighthood and left in Rome common servants, namely fishers, snacks merchandisers, bird catchers, offspring of whores, plebeians, and slaves.”<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to observe that in the middle and Late Byzantium Rome remained nothing but a myth, an idea, and a symbol. No historian was actually interested in the Italian city of Rome. No one had concrete information about its history or culture, as they once had, for instance, in the sixth century (Dölger, 1937: 5; Cameron, 2009: 19f.). The image of Romanness remained an ideal one, a most powerful and constitutive issue of both political and religious Byzantine identity. This

situation changed after the Great Schism of 1054 and especially after the conquest of Constantinople by the Latins during the fourth crusade in 1204. These major events opened an insurmountable abyss between the Orthodox world and the West. The reciprocal suspicion, accusations, and hostility persisted until the end of the Empire and caused the Byzantines to distance themselves gradually from their Roman imperial roots. Orthodoxy cut off its political Roman ties and maintained only the legacy of the Church Fathers (Dieter, 1979: 34), reinterpreted in the hesychastic synthesis of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Originally a psychosomatic mystical method practiced in monastic milieu in order to achieve transfiguration and enlightenment, after the fourteenth century hesychasm also adopted political valences. After the “Roman” emperor and the political infrastructure of the state had disappeared, the only remaining authority of the Orthodox world was the theological, canonical and spiritual tradition of the church, administrated by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Orthodoxy lost its earthly political fundament and became a spiritual existential dimension. This does not mean that the Orthodox Church was indifferent to the earthly situation of its flock, now Ottoman subjects. Under Ottoman rule the Byzantine idea survived in form of intransigent Orthodoxy represented by Patriarchs of the hesychastic party, embedded in the Greek national consciousness and emptied of any Roman heritage (Guran, 2001: 109, 121; Mureşan/Năsturel, 2011: 260 and 262; Payne, 2011: 81).

After the fall of Constantinople, this tradition passed into the new political cultures of Southeast Europe. The Danubian Principalities Wallachia and Moldavia, which had never been part of the Byzantine Empire, did not assume automatically the whole political ideology of Byzantium. Their rulers, the voivodes, did not claim to unify in their person both the temporal and the sacral sphere according to the Byzantine theocentric model (Henry, 1967: 308; Rebenich, 2007: 230; Anca, 2010: 36ff). Although they assumed to have a privileged status before God and among other mortals (on earth), the Wallachian princes did not demand any ecclesiastical honours and dignities, as, for example, emperor Constantine had done.

In the context of the modernization process, Wallachian proto-modernity assumed a different character compared to Western cultural traditions. Instead of a secular revision of the religious and theocentric view, the secularization being, in this sense, one of the features of Western modernization, the Wallachian Early Modern Period accounted for the increase of piety, religious philanthropy, reformatory tendencies of public morality, as well as a growing number of monasteries and churches (Băbuş u. a., 2007). The political life was characterized by spiritual and

religious effervescence. The Holy Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers were authorities regulating not only the private, but also the public sphere, as well as the political cohabitation. The discovery of letterpress printing played an important role in this spiritual renaissance, which culturally substituted the decrease of military strength against Ottoman aggressors (Radojicic, 1960; Demény/Demény, 1986; Rother, 2002: 21ff).

For these developments it is enough to mention the reigns of the Wallachian princes Radu the Great and Neagoe Basarab at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Under prince Radu began, on the one hand, the printing culture in the Wallachian principalities and the sustained supportive activity of Wallachian rulers among the subdued Orthodox countries of the Balkans. The reign of Neagoe Basarab was, on the other hand, regarded by a contemporary hagiographer, Gabriel, the Protos of Mount Athos, and the author of the *Niphon's II Vita* (ca. 1519), as a blessing for the Orthodox world from Wallachia to Mount Athos and further to Jerusalem and Mount Sinai.

Neagoe Basarab spent enormous amounts of money to build churches, to donate precious reliquaries, liturgical vessels, benefits for monasteries etc. His best known foundation is the architectural jewel, the monastery church of Curtea de Argeş in Wallachia, which was regarded by Protos as being not as large as the Hagia Sophia, but much more beautiful. This church is considered in art history to be the quintessence of the mentioned "Romanian Baroque" of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The same Gabriel Protos who gives an accurate account of all the benefactions of Neagoe Basarab concludes:

"It makes no sense to show every artifact he donated or to count every single monastery he sponsored. Let us put it straight: *All of them* [MDG], in Evrota, in Thracia, in Hellas, in Achaia, in Illyricum, [...] in Hellespont, in Moesia, in Macedonia, [...] in Sirmium, [...] in Dalmatia, and everywhere from East to West and from South to North, all those holy churches he has supported and granted with many gifts. And he especially took care of and sustained without any scantiness those who left the world and retreated into caves, into deserts, into solitary life. And he was good not only to Christians but also to pagans, he was for every one of them a merciful father, exactly like the heavenly Lord, who lets the rain fall upon the good as well as the bad, as it is written in the Gospel." (Gavriil Protul, 1944: 160)

The Wallachian Orthodoxy abandoned Roman political valences and took on the character of pure religiosity and performative piety detached from any other goals than religious ones. Although Romance in language and tradition, the Wallachian culture faded out, its Roman legacy being fixed on their orthodox heritage. The chancellery and literary language was for a long time not Romanian, but Slavonic. At the same time, the stressing of religious identity was a political profession against

the danger of being conquered or – worse – assimilated by the Ottoman Islam. The Wallachian modernity showed thus only anemic tendencies to secularization. On the contrary, the efflorescence of religious Christian life was concomitantly a sign of political autonomy and distance from the feared Ottomans, as well as a sign of cultural identity. In this connection, the printing activity played no “enlightening” or “protestant” function, as it did in sixteenth century Germany, for instance; it simply enhanced the access to literature of spiritual edification by ecclesiastic authors or to liturgical books (like the *Liturghier*, the “Massbook” of Makarius from 1508). We should mention here an important cultural center in Wallachia, the monastery of Bistrița – the foundation of the wealthy Craiovescu family, whose offspring Neogoe Basarab was. This monastery was a pool of Slavonic culture, of hesychasm, and of manuscript multiplication. Despite the broad literary activities, we do not have any clue of lay literature, only of religious one (Slavonic translations from Church Fathers or works of Bulgarians theologians of the Middle Ages, for example, Euthymius of Trnovo [ca. 1325-1393]).

### **The Second Case: The Principle of Symphony between Church and State**

It makes no sense to repeat at this point the vast literature concerning the Byzantine symphony of Church and State. From my perspective, it is important to refer here to the Wallachian case of prince Radu the Great (1495-1508) and his attempt at reform at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The most useful information regarding this is delivered by the “Vita of Niphon, the Patriarch of Constantinople”, written around 1519 by Gabriel Protos, prior of the monastic community of Mount Athos (Gavriil Protos, 1994; Grecu, 1944: 6). Gabriel reports that the Wallachian prince Radu, being impressed by the organisational, moral and pious qualities of Niphon II (Gavriil Protos, 1944: 76), the ex-Patriarch of Constantinople (Năsturel, 1967; Falagkas, 1993), met the holy man in 1504 in Adrianople (today Edirne). Radu asked him if he would agree to come to Wallachia to organize the moral reform. The church of the country needed this urgently, since it was disorganised and the believers were “*deserted of any spiritual teachings and of any shepherd*” (Gavriil Protos, 1944: 78). The very important assertion of the Wallachian voivode was: “*I should rule upon external matters, and Your Holiness should take care of the internal matters of the church*” (Gavriil Protos, 1944: 80).

This desideratum has precedents in both Byzantine and Western political tradition. The



Byzantine Emperor John Tzimiskes (969-976) defines clearly the responsibilities of the imperial and ecclesiastic institutions:

“In this life and on this earth I do know only of two offices: the priesthood [hierosýne] and the service of the emperor [basileía]. The Creator committed to the first of them the care of the soul, and to the other the leadership upon material bodies, so that none of those both parts should be neglected but well-kept.” (Diaconus, 1961: 96)

In the same way Charles the Great (768-814) imagined the cohabitation of sacral and temporal power in the political organism of the state. He wrote in a letter to Pope Leo III (795-816):

“Our duty is: [...] to protect in exterior the Holy Church from all sides against the assault of pagans and from devastation through the weapons of infidels, and to stabilise it in the interior through the knowledge of catholic faith.”<sup>3</sup>

It is, of course, possible that the mentioned stipulation of Radu the Great of Wallachia was, in fact, Gabriel Protos's projection, an erudite and literate churchman, not Radu's own intellectual property. However, it is also possible that Radu the Great may have enjoyed a humanist education as well, so he could be aware of the symphonic tradition in the Orthodox Byzantine history. He was responsible for bringing the first printing workshop to Wallachia in 1508, as I mentioned, so one can not deny him any intellectual and cultural interests. It is obvious that the old Byzantine symphonic view persisted after the fall of Constantinople not only in the Western imperial ideology (Grigore, 2009: 252ff., 287ff.), but also in post-Byzantine Wallachia. However, the reform activity of Niphon in Wallachia was prodigious and consisted in the organisation of two new bishoprics, into some councils for the reform of the poor morality of the people, and so on (Panou, 2007: 64f).

But, the reformatory collaboration between the prince and the monk did not work. Due to a matrimonial divergence, the moral renewal of the Wallachian people failed, at least in the eyes of the hagiographer Gabriel Protos, who blamed Radu for this. Prince Radu married his sister to an already married Moldavian boyar, Bogdan, a refugee at the Wallachian court, and an intimate of the prince. This polygamist act triggered the reaction of Niphon, who consequently reproached Prince Radu, who, in turn, exiled the ex-Patriarch. After a few months of residence in one of the Wallachian monasteries, where he met and mentored the young Neagoe Basarab, the future ruler, Niphon went to Mount Athos, where he died few years later (Gavriil Protos, 1944: 87ff.; Panou, 2007: 64f.). In fact it is merely possible that the Prince Radu could have been bothered by the very incisive manner of Niphon. The latter was an hesychastic Ex-Patriarch, and of course used to receive, like his predecessors, unconditioned obedience from the secular magnates, both in religious

and secular matters (Panou, 2007: 61ff). As I have said, the Late Byzantium experienced a growth of ecclesiastical power and of the political influence of the Patriarchs, who inverted the classical roles: the Emperor was no longer the head of the Church, while the Patriarch assumed the role of a guarant of the secular power of Basileus (see above) (Guran, 2002; Guran, 2007: 409f, 415). Prince Radu seemed not to be prepared to make such a compromise, and that could be the real reason of the mentioned break up between the prince and the man of the Church.

The symphonic harmony of church and state, harmed by this dispute, was, nevertheless, restored due to a symbolic gesture by Neagoe Basarab, the new ruler of Wallachia after 1512. Having ascended to the throne he performed a symbolic reconciliation between the already dead opponents, Patriarch Niphon and Prince Radu. In a great procession, Basarab orchestrated the transfer of the skeletal remains of Niphon to Wallachia, where the coffin was laid down upon the tomb stone of Radu the Great in the necropolis church of Dealu, near the capital city of Târgoviște. This gesture led Gabriel Protos to associate the faithful Neagoe with the Byzantine Emperor Theodosios II (†450), who also brought the remains of John Chrysostomos, the ex-Patriarch who died in exile, back to Constantinople: “*The same Neagoe has done the same with the relics of the new Chrysostomos [i.e. Niphon]*” (Gavriil Protos, 1944: 143).

This episode indicates, on the one hand, the preoccupation of the Wallachian rulers of the sixteenth century with Christian morality and standards, and, on the other hand, with the principle of symphony. A harmonious cohabitation of political and ecclesiastical power brought with it social peace within the borders and monolithic strength against potential aggressors. But the princes were also determined to keep the political decision in their own hands, not admitting any intrusions even of a high church personality like Niphon. The symbolic reconciliation between Niphon and Radu the Great shows the persistence of connections within the Orthodox world after the collapse of Byzantium. These ties attested to a great mobility and cultural exchange (Panou, 2006 and 2007). The Wallachian modernization followed Byzantine patterns.

Under the previous voivodes before 1453, a tendency of distancing from Byzantium can be observed, for example the Moldavian Prince Alexandru the Good (1400-1432) fought and succeeded in obtaining for its country Wallachian Metropolitans and not Greek ones, unlike Wallachia, whose Church was from the very beginnings in the fourteenth century in the hands of Greek bishops. The same reserved policy can be observed in the case of the prince Mircea the Older (1386-1418) who preferred close diplomatic relations with Western powers than to the dying

Byzantium, thereby encouraging the presence of the Catholic Church at his court and in the country. After 1453, however, the political elites of Wallachia, confronted with the Ottoman challenge, were forced to reconsider their previous attitude (Elian, 1967). In fact, we see the revival of the link to a mythical idealized Byzantium, although it did not exist as state anymore, but only as religious Orthodox commonwealth transcending boundaries and unifying Southeast European Christians.

### **A Third Case: A “Mirror for the Prince” (Speculum Principis)**

Neagoe Basarab is the author of a unique mirror for princes, a lengthy moral and political treatise entitled “Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Teodosie” (The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosius), written around 1519, a work of great theological, political, military, and diplomatic erudition. The opus includes two parts: the first part is a theological and theoretical argumentation on the political order in the cosmos, the likeness of the prince to God, and the illumination of the ruler in a hesychastic manner. The second part is the practical one, and deals with the selection of counselors, diplomatic affairs, military strategy, social philanthropy, and the protocol at official receptions (Basarab, 1984). The history of this mirror for princes is full of gaps in the historical data: we still do not know for sure what the original language was and if Neagoe Basarab possessed a such broad patristic and philosophical education to write a work like this, which excels in size and information the similar literary productions of Erasmus, Luther or Machiavelli. Although most researchers incline to believe that the “Teachings...” are indeed the work of the Wallachian voivode, there still are other voices arguing that the treatise is a pseudo-epigraphical writing (Zamfirescu, 1973: 16ff; Mihăilă, 1996: CXLVIII).

The apparently original Slavonic manuscript of the “Teachings” has 111 leaves (15 x 8,5cm) and is registered under No. 313 in the National Library “Cyril and Methodius” in Sofia. The Italian paper, the fonts, the filigrees, the ink, and some characters in gold led the specialists to date this luxurious manuscript to the period between 1519-1535. This fact supports the hypothesis that it could have been the official copy for the *Dauphin* Theodosius. The 111 pages represent only a third of the whole work, as it results from the comparison with the complete versions preserved by the Old Romanian translations of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. We have 9 such Old Romanian manuscripts, only three of them are complete. The oldest and most important of them is today registered under No. 109 in the Library of Romanian Academy’s subsidiary in Cluj (“Biblioteca

Academiei Române, filiala Cluj”). This manuscript belonged to the Phanariote Prince of Wallachia Ștefan Cantacuzino (1714-1716). As we know, the Phanariotes were ardent bibliophiles, and enthusiastic readers of advice literature: another manuscript of the “Teachings” was copied for the Phanariote Nikolaos Mavrokordatos in 1727 (today BAR ms. 1062). To return to our important ms. 109, this contains not only the translation of the “Teachings” but also of the “Vita Niphonis” by Gabriel Protos. Due to the terminology and a marginal note made by the copyist, the specialists could date the first Old Romanian translation to around 1635. Another important manuscript is No. 221 of the Dionysiou monastery on Mount Athos with the Greek variant of the “Teachings”. It was indexed already in 1895 by Spiridonos Lampros and first published in 1942 by Vasile Grecu in Bucharest in a bilingual Greek-Romanian edition (Lampros, 1895: 367; Grecu, 1942). Based on an analysis offered by Leandros Vranoussis at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Balkan and Southeastern European Studies in Athens, 1970, we know that this manuscript – which contains only the second part of the “Teachings” – is contemporaneous to the Slavic one, mentioned below, and also that it is an autograph writing by the hand of Manuel of Corinth, the rhetor of the Hagia Sophia until 1530 (Mihăilă, 1996: CLXXII).

As the only text of its kind in sixteenth-century Eastern Europe, “The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to His Son Theodosius” are an important sample of political thinking in the post-Byzantine Orthodox tradition. The writing can be partially compared with the *Advice* of Vladimir Monomachos (1113-1125) to his son and with the political parenetic correspondence between Ivan Grozny (1547-1584) and Knyaz Kurbski (Zamfirescu, 1996: 27). Despite its uniqueness, or maybe because of it, Western scholars – unlike their Romanian, Russian, Bulgarian, and Greek colleagues – have regrettably mostly ignored this work. With the exception of a few articles (Năsturel, 1976; Mureșan, 2003), there has not been any publications on this work in any major Western research language since the doctoral thesis of Stojan Romanski (“Mahnreden des walachischen Wojwodan Nēgoe Basarab an seinen Sohn Theodosios”, Leipzig 1908).

The importance of Basarab’s work lies primarily in the *continuatio* of the Byzantine political thought that it fulfills. It is part of that Byzantine tradition of political discourse including Deacon Agapetos, Constantine Porphyrogenitos, Theophylaktos of Ochrid, or Manuel II Paleologos (Zamfirescu, 1996: 27). In the same way as his predecessors, Neagoe Basarab incorporates in his writing high theological lines of argument inspired by the Church Fathers or based on the author’s own reflections. We can, among other things, trace the imperial ideology of Eusebius of Caesarea, the influence of Chrysostomic Platonism, and elements of Hesychast piety, both lay and monastic.

The latter leads to a topic very similar to the so-called “*illuminatio-dispute*” in the Western tradition of the Middle Ages or in the Byzantine Platonism of Michael Psellos: the enlightenment of man and – specifically – of the ruler (Joannou, 1956).

The importance of Neagoe Basarab’s “*mirror of the prince*” is given by the historical context it was written in, namely the period after the Fall of Constantinople. One may say that this book seems to be only a compilation of old Byzantine topics. But this is only partially true, because Neagoe Basarab conceives of the Christian sovereigns not in the political filiation to the Roman Empire, as the Byzantine authors did. The Byzantine emperors were, in the same way as the Roman ones, proclaimed by troops and confirmed in a liturgical ceremony by the Patriarch of Constantinople (Grigore, 2010: S. 151f). The *gratia Dei* was for both Basarab and Byzantine political thought the ultimate criterion for a successful and long governance. But there is a difference in the description of the status of the ruler. For Basarab, the ruler is neither a representative of God on Earth nor his substitute. The ruler is not even a “*imitation of God*”, as Deacon Agapetos (1981: 59, 70) thought. For Basarab, the relation of the Christian emperor/ruler to God was one of likeness (*homoíosis*): “*You are [...] [as ruler, MDG] exactly like Him [Christ]*”<sup>4</sup>. This likeness to God manifests itself as philanthropic presence of the ruler among his subjects, and in his function as the centralizing core of the doxological community. For Basarab – fairly similar to Martin Luther – the ruler does not depend on any meritorious social activities. His leadership is the exclusive favour of God. As a receptor of God’s grace, the sovereign is not a representative of God, but a friend of him; furthermore, he is a *co-regent* of God, not only on Earth but also in the Kingdom of Heaven (Basarab, 1984: *passim*). In the Basarabian anthropological view on the human being, men were created to praise God, they were established in the Logos of God as *doxological* beings. So, they are participating in the greatness, honour and glory of the Creator (*metoúsia* Theou) as equals, being served and assisted by angels (Basarab, 1984: 13; Balás, 1966). He thus advises his son Theodosius:

“That is why you shall praise Him who rose you from the ground and made you to His son, He made you emperor of heaven and of peoples, He made you vanquisher and great commander of men, He instituted you *dominus* on earth...”<sup>5</sup>

Obviously, Neagoe Basarab was especially concerned to create a theoretical and even theological frame for the ruler’s autonomy from any form of human institutions. The ruler’s dignity and institution is immediately connected to God. Not even the church is needed: Neagoe does not speak at all about any intercessive power of clergy, whose only function is to officiate liturgical services.

The sovereign is responsible only in front of God, because only God makes rulers on earth. This is both an allusion to the Byzantine ceremonial (the emperor being proclaimed by the legions and *only* confirmed by the Patriarch) and a tacit protest against the subjection of Wallachian princes to the authority of the Ottoman sultans. In fact, Basarab himself had needed the recognition and the confirmation as a ruler of Wallachia by the sultan. At the same time, although very pious, Neagoe Basarab was not ready to make any concessions to the Church regarding political prerogatives. This is a clue for the realistic modern conception in the practice of power. “The Teachings to Theodosius” represent thus a personal reflection on political topics in a new historical context. As long as Byzantium existed, nobody needed to develop a new political discourse. The process of modernisation in Early Modern Wallachia presumed a theoretical actualisation of political culture, as well as an adaptation to new historical conditions. This process is relatively similar to Machiavelli’s writing of the “Prince”, which was a pragmatic reaction to the political convulsions in Renaissance Italy.

## **Conclusions**

When dealing with political traditions in Orthodox Southeast Europe and specifically with Neagoe Basarab, it is important to reassess the often essentialist view on Western modernity and its supposed Western exclusivity. The general tendency is to put the birth of “political modernity” in relation with Machiavelli or Hobbes or some other author, forgetting that “political modernity” is no thing *in se*, but an emergence of complex networks and phenomena of specific historical contexts. In fact, the regional “modernity” of sixteenth century Wallachia displays both similarities and differences to Byzantium and the Latin West. In this respect, such a historical approach can contribute to the refinement of the concept of modernity, showing that concepts and semantics depend on specific historical flows and cultural transformations. This is exactly what can be observed in Wallachia where the permanent confrontation with the Ottoman Empire determined a modification of attitudes, a reconsideration of values, and, of course, a reactivation of traditions which lay dormant before the rise of the Ottoman threat.

We should remind for example the activation during the reign of Neagoe Basarab of modern political mechanisms like legal and symbolic procedures (Germ. *Verfahren*) in order to legitimate the usurpation, which Basarab was guilty of: Neagoe Basarab ascended to the throne of the

Principality of Wallachia in 1512. He is the first Prince not to have descended from the old lineage of the Basarab dynasty, which had ruled Wallachia since the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Neagoe was the offspring of the powerful Craiovescu family, a boyar family from the Wallachian high nobility. Neagoe's last name "Basarab" was in fact only a nickname he assumed after he usurped power, to legitimate his authority (Neagoe, 1971: 14ff). I should mention here that in Wallachia dynastic continuity and affiliation were much more important than in the Byzantine Empire for instance – where some authors have seen the imperial dignity as "open" for all those who deserved it (Angelov, 2007: 125ff; Vergatti, 2009: 36). In order to justify his power, Neagoe Basarab resorted to the *electio* procedure due to the boyards, being at the same time acclamated by the gathered masses. The legal procedure which needed to be fulfilled in order to become Prince of Wallachia stipulated also the necessity of recognition by Ottoman authorities. Neagoe Basarab got this recognition, too. And finally, he tried during his whole reign to fulfill the symbolic criteria of the legitim rulership as well, displaying himself as the embodiment of the good virtuous ruler *Dei gratia*. Neagoe Basarab was the first Wallachian ruler to obtain legitimacy by legal or symbolic procedures, by "deserving" the rulership, which was not a blood heritage above any personal qualities, virtues, and merits anymore. Rulership was now a proto-modern political function under the observance and supervision of political instances of the country and of the international arena (Ottoman sultans, Wallachian boyars, and, of course, Wallachian *populus*) (Grigore, 2012).

To resume, Wallachian modernity cannot be defined in traditional, essentialist terms, for it was a continuous ongoing process and does not fit into rigid notions of modernity. Modernity is just a process in specific historical contexts and can be different from case to case. In the case of Wallachia we call "political modernity" all those phenomena determined by the loss of political independence, by the interruption of dynastic continuity, and by pragmatical attempts to remediate all this. Traditions were not canceled and abandoned, but reinterpreted and adapted in a broad dynamic of change. This specific sixteenth century modernity emerged, in conclusion, as a reaction to the Ottoman threat and aimed at preserving the Orthodox Christian religion and the political autonomy of the Danubian Principalities. All these considerations state that modernity is primarily connected with political transformations and historical adaptations. Other main characteristics of Western modernity, such as individualization, secularization or development of scientific spirit (Degele, 2005; Boeckh, 2007), are present in the Wallachian case at most *in nuce*. If one uses a Western, Eurocentric narrative of modernity, one might neglect the particular case. But from the perspective of area studies, we can, on the contrary, argue that there is no "single modernity"

anywhere, but solely many regional “modernities”.

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<sup>1</sup> “Renaissance“ means the revival of Romanian pride and its role as a regional geopolitical factor, even after the Wallachian principalities lost their military strenght, and were forced to became tributary vassal states under Ottoman preeminence. Like the Western “Renaissance”, the Romanian one meant also a intensification of arts, literature, economy, mobility of elites. The main source for cultural borrowings and inspiration was not the Greek-Roman Antiquity, but the Byzantine Orthodox tradition.

<sup>2</sup> “sed papa fatuus, insulsus ignorat Constantinum sanctum imperialia scepra huc transvexisse, senatum omnem cunctamque Romanam militiam, Romae vero vilia mancipia, piscatores scilicet, cupedinarios, aucupes, nothos, plebeios, servos tantummodo dimisisse”(Liutprand von Cremona, 1971: 571).

<sup>3</sup> “Nostrum est: [...] sanctam undique Christi ecclesiam ab incursu paganorum et ab infidelium devastatione armis defendere foris, et intus catholicae fidei agnitione munire” (Szabó-Bechstein, 1985: 59).

<sup>4</sup> “Ești [...] întocmai cu dânsul” (Basarab, 2001: 29).

<sup>5</sup> “Pentru aceia dă slavă celui ce te-au rădicat din pământu și te-au făcut lui fiu și cerurilor împărat, șii noroadelor și oamenilor biruitor mai mare și poruncitoriu” (Basarab, 1984: 9; my translation after the Old Romanian text).

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