

## The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 4 (2007)

Vol 4, No (2007)



### Greek-Romanian Symbiotic Patterns in the Early Modern Period: History, Mentalities, Institutions - II

*Nikos Panou*

doi: [10.12681/hr.209](https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.209)

#### To cite this article:

Panou, N. (2008). Greek-Romanian Symbiotic Patterns in the Early Modern Period: History, Mentalities, Institutions - II. *The Historical Review/La Revue Historique*, 4, 59–104. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hr.209>

GREEK-ROMANIAN SYMBIOTIC PATTERNS  
IN THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD:  
HISTORY, MENTALITIES, INSTITUTIONS - II

*Nikos Panou*

---

ABSTRACT: This is the second part of a larger study seeking to contribute to a better understanding of the sustained process of religious, socio-political and cultural contact between Greek and Romanian ethnic groups in the early modern period. The two sections published here bring forward and discuss little-known and yet important evidence covering the first two post-Byzantine centuries and are intended to elaborate, supplement or contextualise the materials presented in the first part (which appeared in the previous volume of this journal). Not accidentally, this article ends with an unavoidable reference to the very text that ignited our exploration into the historical landscape of the pre-modern Balkans, a short but striking passage from Matthew of Myra's early seventeenth-century chronicle known as *History of Wallachia*. Indeed, Matthew's testimony stands out as one of the first conscious attempts to account for the uneasy, but also prolific, dynamic and multi-layered, relationship between the two peoples. It has been the aim of this paper to illustrate the basic patterns of that intricate, as much as intriguing, relationship as it was being shaped in the aftermath of the Byzantine Commonwealth's absorption into the challenging world of the Ottoman Turks.

---

III. *A New Beginning*

After the fall of the Byzantine capital to Mehmed the Conqueror and in the course of the ensuing decades, the patriarch of Constantinople emerged, perhaps against all odds, as an authority of allegedly ecumenical calibre and content, officially invested not only with religious but also administrative, judicial, legislative and even tax jurisdiction.<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that the Church's assigned task to supervise and control the Orthodox millet of the constantly expanding Ottoman Empire allowed its high-ranking members to enjoy, at least among their Christian flock, a striking combination of sacred and secular power that had been practically unknown to them even in the heyday of Byzantine theocracy. Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that under the new historical circumstances that the Turkish domination had

---

<sup>1</sup> For the Constantinopolitan patriarch's status as a *Millet-Bashi* – an “Ethnarch” – “officially called *αὐθέντης καὶ δεσπότης* (Lord and Despot)” and invested with “*κυριαρχίαν καὶ δικαιοδοσίαν* (sovereignty and jurisdiction) over all the Christians of the Ottoman Empire and over the boundless property of the Church”, see mainly Nikolaos I. Pantazopoulos, *Church and Law in the Balkan Peninsula During the Ottoman Rule*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1967, esp. pp. 19-28; quoted passages on p. 23.

engendered, the extended jurisdiction of the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate and its officials was in reality more of a subservient function, an arduous responsibility carried out by the Orthodox clergy on behalf of the real holders of power and indisputable regulators of Ottoman political, financial and military policy, namely the sultans, their ministers and the immense bureaucratic apparatus of the Sublime Porte. In the words of Steven Runciman, after the conquest of Constantinople:

the Patriarch had to become a lay ruler, but the ruler of a state that had no ultimate sanction of power, a state within a state, depending for its existence on the uncertain good will of an alien and infidel overlord. Many new and costly cares were imposed upon him. His court had to concern itself with fiscal and judicial problems that in the old days had been the business of the secular arm. It had no traditions of its own to help it in this work; it had to borrow what it could remember of the old imperial traditions. And all the while it was conscious of its exigent suzerain.<sup>2</sup>

This particular aspect of the intricate relations between the Ottoman authorities and the post-Byzantine Orthodox clergy must be taken into serious account if the historical role of the latter as an active agent in the socio-political and cultural life of the Ottoman Balkans is to be better understood and accounted for. In the context of the new political and military dynamics that had been seriously affecting the geopolitical layout in the East, the Balkans had become a region of vital importance, and perhaps more so than ever before. Consequently, the newly assumed duties of post-Byzantine ecclesiastics *vis-à-vis* their “alien and infidel overlord” could not result but in the Patriarchate’s increased interest in that unstable and idiosyncratic region, as well as in an urgent need for the Great Church to establish its presence and influence there in such a way that would make its work more efficient and effective. On the other hand, of course, the very precariousness of the situation and the uncertain status of the clergy in relation to the dominant Ottoman establishment, which Runciman acutely comments on, must have served as an additional, and surely not less important, factor for the attention and energy invested by the

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968, p. 206. Runciman has usefully, I think, commented on the problematic, fragile nature of patriarchal power and the restricted application of the privileges that were granted to the officeholders of the Great Church in the period under review; see esp. pp. 195-207.

patriarchal “court” in the larger area of the Balkans, which, as previously discussed, had been a crucial locus of the Patriarchate’s religious agenda and geopolitical aspirations long before the fall of Constantinople.<sup>3</sup> It must have been a fact of particular significance that especially in places like the Danubian principalities the spiritual and political authority of the Orthodox clergy could potentially be established on grounds relatively firmer than in other parts of the Ottoman world, that is to say, among predominantly Orthodox populations and under the accommodating protection and patronage of local, semi-independent and strongly Orthodox rulers.

The eventual integration, direct or indirect, of the Balkans under the supreme rule of a single political authority, the Sublime Porte, which had cleverly incorporated the Church’s new function into its administrative policies and procedures, facilitated considerably the spread and imposition of Constantinopolitan religious influence over an extensive and deeply fragmented area. And yet, the role that the Orthodox clergy was called to play did not remain uncontested nor was it automatically acknowledged, accepted and accommodated. On the contrary, it was being seriously undermined either by conflicting local interests or by overlapping and often ferociously antagonistic Catholic or Protestant aspirations. In fact, there was scarcely a moment throughout the long history of the Ottoman Empire when that liminal region had not been a theatre of unresolved claims and endless tensions between Eastern and Western religious and political powers. Under these daunting circumstances, the systematic cultivation of a legitimising ideology for the Patriarchate’s claimed authority over the entire Orthodox world became for post-Byzantine clergy an important albeit uneasy task.

In this section we will focus on the characteristic case of an ex-patriarch who in the very beginning of the sixteenth century became the first Greek-speaking prelate after the fall of Constantinople to have been appointed to the metropolitan throne of Wallachia, by common agreement between the local ruler, the Constantinopolitan Synod and the Sublime Porte. As indicated in the concluding lines of the first part of this study, the case of Niphon II and his short but crucial presence in the semi-independent principality represents an early instance of the controlling influence that the Great Church and its people could (and sought to) exert over the Ottoman Balkans, but also of the hostility and resistance it often had to overcome in its more or less programmatic

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nikos Panou, “Greek-Romanian Symbiotic Patterns in the Early Modern Period: History, Mentalities, Institutions – 1”, *The Historical Review / La Revue Historique* 3 (2006), esp. pp. 87-97.

attempts to do so.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, a series of texts and artefacts related to the specific prelate can offer significant insight into the ways the Church worked towards affirming and consolidating its prestige and authority in the region against opposing forces, destabilising factors or adverse occurrences.

Niphon is perhaps better known as a saint of the Orthodox Church, particularly revered in Romania, but he also figures, as Niphon II, among the ten first Ecumenical [= Constantinopolitan] patriarchs, including Gennadios II Scholarios, after the fall of the Byzantine capital. Indeed, he ascended the patriarchal throne on at least two different occasions within the span of a little more than ten years, but in both cases his term lasted for only brief periods of time – 1486-1488 and 1497-1498, respectively – which, however, was not a rare phenomenon in the history of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.<sup>5</sup> He was born in the Peloponnese around 1435-1440 to a native mother and a father of uncertain origin, possibly Serbian, a court official called Manuel who had found himself in Morea having barely escaped death by execution on charges of conspiracy against the despot of Serbia Đurađ Branković (*reg.* 1427-1456).<sup>6</sup> Not much is

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

<sup>5</sup> It is generally believed that a few years after his second deposition Niphon was offered again the patriarchal throne, but it is not equally clear whether he accepted or not. In the detailed list of Ecumenical patriarchs produced in Venance Grumel's *La chronologie*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958, Niphon's controversial third service at the Constantinopolitan Patriarchate is confirmed and dated in Spring 1502; cf. p. 437. See, however, the evidence presented more recently against such a possibility in Andronikos Falagkas, "Cu privire la datarea alegerilor lui Nifon II ca patriarh ecumenic" [Regarding the dating of Niphon II's elections as Ecumenical patriarch], *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie "A. D. Xenopol"* 30 (1993), pp. 502-506.

<sup>6</sup> The Serbian/Dalmatian origin of Manuel is attested in all the redactions of Niphon's *vita* that I have examined (on which see below, notes 16 and 17). Certain Greek sources, namely Theodosios Zygomalas' and Manuel Malaxos' chronicles, want him to be Albanian, while in his "Nifon II, patriarhul Constantinopolului" [Niphon II, patriarch of Constantinople], *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, ser. II, 36 (1914), pp. 762-763, Nicolae Popescu ventures to claim that Manuel could have been a Greek functionary in the service of the Serbian despot. Cf. also Andronikos Falagkas, "Νήφων Β: Πελοποννήσιος, οικουμενικός πατριάρχης και εθνικός άγιος των Ρουμάνων" [Niphon II: Peloponnesian, Ecumenical patriarch and national saint of the Romanians], *Βυζαντινά Μελέται* 5 (1993), p. 506 (note 4). It is certainly interesting that, according to the surviving redactions of Niphon's *vita*, it was Branković's wife, Eirini Kantakouzini, who arranged for Manuel's escape literally on the eve of his execution. In addition to that, she is mentioned as having referred him to her brother, the despot of Morea Thomas Kantakouzinus, who received him warmly and immediately employed him in the princely court as a high steward; cf., for example, Vasile Grecu (ed.), *Viața sfântului Nifon o*

known about Niphon's early years, but we are fortunate enough to have a relatively detailed knowledge of his development and activity as a prominent late fifteenth-century clergyman, a knowledge primarily derived from a series of biographical texts, all of which stem, directly or indirectly, from a now lost *vita* composed shortly after his death. In the course of his long clerical career, Niphon occupied strategic and influential posts in the highest hierarchic spheres of the Great Church. He had started as a monk at the monastery of the Virgin Mary in Ochrid and on Mount Athos, where he was ordained a deacon and then priest, and before serving as Ecumenical patriarch and, subsequently, archbishop of Wallachia, he had held the important diocese of Thessaloniki for several years.<sup>7</sup>

Niphon's second patriarchate ended abruptly in 1498, at which point he was replaced by Ioakim I (1498-1502). The deposed patriarch found himself in Adrianople, the second most important city in the Ottoman Empire, where he was confined in the monastery of St Stephen.<sup>8</sup> It was there that he had an

---

*redacțiune grecească inedită* [An unpublished Greek redaction of the *Life* of St Niphon], Bucharest 1944, p. 34 (lines 6-30); Petre Ș. Năsturel, "Recherches sur les redactions gréco-roumaines de la 'Vie de saint Niphon II, patriarche de Constantinople'", *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 5/1-2 (1967), p. 69; and Gheorge Mihăilă and Dan Zamfirescu (eds), *Literatura română veche (1402-1647)* [Old Romanian literature (1402-1647)], Vol. I, Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1969, p. 67.

<sup>7</sup> For detailed information about Niphon's life and career, see mainly N. Popescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 761-788 ("Partea a doua. Biografia lui Nifon al II-lea patriarhul Constantinopolului"), and, more briefly, P. Năsturel, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 41-44, with all the relevant bibliographical sources up to that point.

<sup>8</sup> According to Niphon's *vita*, the only person responsible for the patriarch's dethronement and exile to Adrianople was the "Turkish king" who had been quite angry at him since the day the two men had run across each other in the streets of Constantinople. At that point, the "arrogant" sultan had the distinct impression that the Constantinopolitan prelate did not show him the proper respect and, as a result, "ὑβρίσει τὸν ἄγιον, πῶς δὲν ἠξούρει νὰ τιμᾷ τοὺς βασιλεῖς καὶ νὰ τοὺς δίδῃ τὴν προσκύνησιν, καθὼς πρέπει, θέλοντας ἰσόθεον τιμᾶν"; cf. V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, p. 74 (lines 1-23). It should be noted, however, that the textual description of the eventful encounter is rather ambiguous when it comes to Niphon's actual behaviour, which makes it very difficult to tell whether the "ὑπερήφανος βασιλεύς" was right to complain, whether, that is, the Orthodox prelate had greeted him in a proper manner or not. What the text is more explicit about is the fact that the Ecumenical patriarch was not willing to indulge the passing autocrat by bestowing to him "ἰσόθεον τιμᾶν", the kind of honour and homage that should be reserved only for God. This motif is, to my mind, reminiscent of the refusal of the early Christians to sacrifice to the Roman emperor, a stance which, as time progressed, became increasingly disturbing to the Romans, who saw it as a potentially rebellious discrediting of the authority and sovereignty of their political leader.

interesting encounter a few years later with a powerful and prestigious figure of the political scene in the contemporary Balkans. As it happened, when Radu the Great, who had been voivode of Wallachia since 1495, travelled to Adrianople in 1504 (or a little earlier) to pay homage and the annual tribute to Sultan Bayazid II (*reg.* 1481-1512), he sought to meet the exiled prelate, having been attracted, or so we are told, by his excellent reputation as a person of profound spirituality and unblemished morality.<sup>9</sup> Although there is no specific information about what exactly went on in Adrianople between the two men, what we do know for sure is that Radu invited Niphon to his country as its new metropolitan, charged with the demanding task to reorganise the Wallachian Church.<sup>10</sup> The ex-patriarch accepted the voivode's invitation and both the Holy Synod and the Sublime Porte validated his requested appointment as archbishop of Wallachia.

Upon his arrival in the principality, Niphon effected a series of vital structural changes, including the establishment of two important bishoprics which must probably be identified with the still extant dioceses at Ramnicu Valcea and Buzau. Within a short time he had given a new life to the Wallachian Church, which was, thus, about to exit a relatively long period of confusion and mismanagement into which it had fallen soon after the conquest of Constantinople.<sup>11</sup> Despite all that, it was not very long after he had assumed his episcopal duties that he was involuntarily relieved from them: the energetic archbishop was deposed in 1505 by order of none other than Radu the Great, probably due to his persistent opposition to the voivode's intention to marry his sister to an already married but powerful Moldavian boyar who was residing at the Wallachian court, having abandoned his legal wife and children. More than that, shortly after his dethronement Niphon was permanently banished from the principality. He withdrew to the Dionysiou monastery on Mount

---

<sup>9</sup> In S. Runciman, *op. cit.*, pp. 195 and 198, it is indicated that Niphon's first election to the patriarchal throne, and possibly the second one too, had been strongly supported by the Wallachian princely family. This, of course, is a particularly interesting piece of information, especially since it implies that Niphon's relations with the Wallachian élite had been firmly established almost two decades before his meeting with Radu the Great in Adrianople. Nevertheless, Runciman does not reveal his sources, and my research did not yield any evidence that could verify this crucial detail.

<sup>10</sup> The exact date of the meeting between the two men and Radu's invitation is not attested, but Niphon's most prominent biographer, Nicolae Popescu, has dated it to 1504; cf. *op. cit.*, p. 782. The possibility of a slightly earlier date, however, must also be seriously considered.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. N. Panou, *op. cit.*, note 75, with selective bibliographic information.

Athos, with which he had strong bonds since his early monastic days, and remained there until his attested death on 12 August 1508.<sup>12</sup>

Although Niphon's stay in Wallachia was surely much shorter than what he must have expected, the importance of his contribution to the reorganisation of the country's Church remains fundamental. Indeed, it has been confirmed by contemporary observers and modern historians alike. Nevertheless, the historical assessment of the factual results of his reformatory programme has not yet been supplemented, to my knowledge, by a critical analysis of the symbolic dimensions and ideological background of his Wallachian "mission". To be sure, the Constantinopolitan prelate was operating within the parameters of the peculiar religious, social and political circumstances in Wallachia at the beginning of the sixteenth century, as well as in the perimeter of a strong ideological tradition that had for a long time been legitimising local rulers in assuming for themselves the role of protectors and promoters of the Orthodox faith, both within and without their domains. It must also be taken into serious account that, at the same time, Niphon was playing a crucial role in the service of a religious policy that was particularly urgent at that point, a policy which dictated that the bonds connecting the Great Church with the people and especially the ruling élites of the prosperous principalities were cemented on a solid spiritual and material basis founded, in its turn, upon the prerequisite of uncontested submission to its supreme authority.<sup>13</sup> Naturally, the precise extent

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf., for instance, V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-98; see also the dramatic description of these events in Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

<sup>13</sup> Nicolae Iorga was among the first to have pointed out and discussed, in a number of studies, and especially in his *Byzance après Byzance* (Bucharest 1935), how critical a role this particular dynamic, which often took the form of programmatic patronage on behalf of the autochthonous aristocracy, played in the process of political emancipation and ideological self-definition of the Romanian rulers from very early on in the history of the principalities. The focused religious policies of Alexandru Nicolae and Vladislav I, which had resulted in the establishment of a complex and highly invested network of relations with the Athonite monastery of Koutlounousiou, briefly examined in the first part of this study, strongly allude to this crucial phenomenon, providing thus a very early and equally suggestive point of reference; cf. N. Panou, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-107. That being said, I would also like to mention, though quite digressively, that the English translation which appears in note 59 (p. 102) in that particular section of my paper does not reflect my own understanding of the Greek phrase from Chariton's testament quoted in the main body of the text. In fact, the translation is not mine but was subsequently added in the footnote during the editing process of my paper in remedy of my negligence to provide a translation for that brief but telling quote. I am, of course, grateful for that editorial alertness and diligence, but I should nonetheless make clear that a more accurate rendition of the Athonite abbot's charged statement would



to which Niphon's behaviour was filtered through this particular angle of perception could never be indisputably proven, but it seems rather unlikely that the former patriarch had not been highly aware of the strategic opportunities that his appointment to the steering wheel of an important and relatively young Orthodox Church could offer. I argue that any attempt toward a substantial evaluation of Niphon's revisionary work in Wallachia that would exclude or overlook this central aspect of his presence and activity there can only lead – and, indeed, has led – to conclusions of unprofitable partiality.<sup>14</sup>

In this respect, the surviving versions of Niphon's hagiography can prove to be indicative textual sources as much as genuinely intriguing literary

---

read as follows: “having spent their lives in the mountains and being completely unaccustomed to the monastic ways of abstinence and self-control”. The important question here is whether the predicate “ὄρφοιτοι” carries, besides its literal meaning, implicit nuances or negative connotations that would give it a rather dismissive overtone similar to that of a modern term like “hillbilly”, commonly used today to denote a culturally backward person originating from a remote and/or underdeveloped area. If this is the case, as I suspect it is, then Chariton's choice and use of the specific word is indeed revealing in terms of the way the Wallachian newcomers were perceived by their Athonite brethren. In this sense, Chariton's phrasing could be interpreted as betraying his deep conviction not only about the doctrinal validity of coenobitic monasticism, which he and his community were being forced to abandon in favour of a less severe monastic regime, but also about the moral and spiritual inadequacy and, in essence, the developmental inferiority of the Danubian “intruders”.

<sup>14</sup> Consequently, historiographic affirmations regarding, for instance, “l'esprit idéaliste des érudits et prélats grecs installés dans les Pays Roumains” (C. Tsourkas, *Les débuts de l'enseignement philosophique et de la libre pensée dans le Balkans. La vie et l'œuvre de Théophile Corydalée (1570-1646)*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1967, p. 125) seem to me to stem from an uncritical, if not biased, approach to the historical material itself, and can hardly be claimed as an adequate contribution towards a substantial apprehension of mentalities and motivating forces in the period under consideration. Tsourkas' concluding remark is also worth reproducing here: “En ce sens, les intellectuels grecs ont servi au peuple roumain de guides vers sa renaissance, et l'ont servi avec attachement et sans arrière-pensée de l'assujétir spirituellement.” Both quotes are taken from a chapter in which the long and unprofitable domination of Slavic influence, which “opprimait l'esprit du peuple, comme un lourde fardeau, sans aucune utilité”, is juxtaposed to the hugely beneficial effects of the Romanians' contacts with Greek culture. It is precisely this type of uncritical approach to complicated socio-cultural phenomena such as those under consideration here that one should be highly cautious of if the danger of a redundant, generalising or misleading analysis is to be avoided. For an informative and clear-sighted overview of Slavic influences in medieval and early modern Romanian culture, see Émile Turdeanu, “Les Principautés roumaines et les Slaves du Sud. Rapports littéraires et religieux”, in *id.*, *Études de littérature roumaine et d'écrits slaves et grecs des Principautés roumaines*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985, pp. 1-14.

documents. The original *vita* was composed in Greek probably within two decades after his death in 1508.<sup>15</sup> The author was a certain Gabriel, an Athonite *protos*. His text was subsequently followed by a Romanian paraphrase, perhaps through a Slavonic intermediary, and also by a number of Greek redactions which circulated in manuscript form throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and at least up until 1803 when one such text appeared in a printed compilation of similar materials.<sup>16</sup> The Greek prototype is generally considered to be lost, perhaps irretrievably so. Nevertheless, the published Romanian and Greek redactions not only provide a fairly good sense of what might have been Gabriel's original take on Niphon's life and accomplishments, but in themselves comprise a body of textual evidence that is particularly useful in defining, insofar it is possible to do so, the extent of the Great Church's influence on the religious and socio-political life in Wallachia, but also the discursive mechanisms and ideological premises upon which its influential presence in the country had been grounded.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The language of Gabriel's lost text, as well as the author's ethnic origin, have become the object of an as yet unresolved controversy among philologists and literary historians, especially in Romania, with Greek and Slavonic being the two prominent candidates. I follow here the convincingly argued conclusion reached by P. Năsturel, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-47, according to whom the *protos* Gabriel was a Greek-speaking monk who wrote his text, Niphon's original *vita*, in Greek.

<sup>16</sup> To the best of my knowledge, the first version of the *vita* to have appeared in print is the text titled "Βίος και πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου καὶ θεοφόρου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Νήφωνος, ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ἀσκήσαντος ἐν τῇ ἱερᾷ μονῇ τοῦ Διονυσίου, τῇ κατὰ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος τοῦ Ἁθῶ κειμένη κατὰ τὸ 1460 ἔτος ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ" [Life and deeds of our venerable and blessed father Niphon, archbishop of Constantinople, who had been a monk at the sacred monastery of Dionysiu on the holy Mount Athos in the year of our Lord 1460], published in *Νέον ἐκλόγιον περιέχον βίους ἀξιολόγους διαφόρων ἁγίων καὶ ἄλλα τινὰ ψυχωφελῆ διηγήματα* [A new anthology containing noteworthy biographies of various saints and other soul-beneficial narratives], Venice 1803, pp. 373-388.

<sup>17</sup> For a careful and detailed overview of intricate problems of language, composition, chronology and authorship related to the Greek and Romanian versions of Niphon's *vita*, see P. Năsturel, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 45-68. I have been able to examine the Greek redaction included in the Venetian edition of *Νέον ἐκλόγιον* mentioned in the previous note; the critically edited Greek text published by V. Grecu (see note 6) in 1944, titled "Βίος και πολιτεία τοῦ ὁσίου καὶ θεοφόρου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Νήφωνος, ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ἀσκήσαντος κατὰ τὸ ἁγιώνυμον ὄρος τοῦ Ἁθῶ ἐν τῇ μονῇ τῇ καλουμένη τοῦ ἁγίου Διονυσίου" [Life and deeds of our venerable and blessed father Niphon, archbishop of Constantinople, who was a monk at the holy-named Mount Athos in the monastery known as St Dionysiu]; and the fragments from the Meteora manuscript first presented by P. Năsturel in his aforementioned 1967 article on the Greek and Romanian redactions of the *vita*. The text preserved in the

Characteristically, Radu's meeting with Niphon in Adrianople, his profound admiration for the saintly patriarch, the urgent invitation he extended to him, and his arrangements with the Ottoman authorities are decisively present in all the known versions of the text. In the Meteora redaction, for example, Radu is presented as acting under the absolute certainty that, while in Wallachia, Niphon "θέλει γέννη νέος απόστολος και ἐλευθέρωση πολλοὺς ἀπὸ τὰς χεῖρας τοῦ διαβόλου".<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it is emphatically mentioned that upon his arrival in the country, Niphon found the Church "εἰς μεγάλην ἀκαταστασίαν, διότι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὅλοι ἦσαν δοσμένοι και ἐπίσης ἱερεῖς και κοσμικοὶ εἰς τὸ μεθύσι και φαγοπότια και ἀκολούθους αἰσχρουργίας".<sup>19</sup> But it is also stated that his first and main concern was to summon the demoralised Wallachian priests and nobles to a kind of local synod, and that, in doing so, "ἔβαλε τάξιν εἰς αὐτούς, και ἐπρόσταξε νὰ φυλάττουν τοὺς νόμους και νὰ προσέχουν νὰ μὴν ἀφίνουν τὸν λαὸν νὰ βλάπτωνται εἰς τὴν ἀθανασίαν τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ ἄνομαις φιληδονίαις και ἀπὸ ὑπερβολαῖς τῆς γαστριμαργίας".<sup>20</sup>

oldest manuscript (1682) of the Romanian version has been published several times since B. Petriceicu-Hajdeu's edition in *Archiva Istorică a României* in 1865 (pp. 130-150). Unfortunately, Tit Simeadrea's fundamental 1937 edition of the work, published in Bucharest as *Viața și traiul sfintului Nifon patriarhul Constantinopolului. Introducere și text* [Life and deeds of St Niphon, patriarch of Constantinople: introduction and text], has not been available to me. Nevertheless, Simeadrea's text is reproduced in its entirety in the already mentioned collection edited by G. Mihăilă and D. Zamfirescu, *Literatura română veche (1402-1647)*, pp. 66-99, under the title "Viața și traiul sfinției sale părintelui nostru Nifon, patriarhul Țarigradului, care au strălucit între multe patemi și ispite în Țarigrad și în Țara Muntenescă, scrisă de Chir Gavriil Protul adecă mai marele Sfetagoriei" [Life and deeds of our holy father Niphon, patriarch of Constantinople, who shined through many sufferings and trials in Constantinople and in Wallachia, written by Lord Gabriel the *protos*, that is, the highest in rank among the abbots of Mount Athos]. All references in this article to the specific redaction will be from that edition. Finally, it should be added that in the interest of space I have not referred to the other two known Romanian redactions, which, however, are not significantly different from the textual materials discussed here. These two versions were incorporated in the "Chronicle of the Cantacuzino" (second half of the seventeenth century) and the "Chronicle of Radu Popescu" (circa 1720), and edited by Mihai Gregorian in the first volume of his *Cronicari Munteni* [Wallachian chroniclers], Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură, 1961, pp. 86-103 and 255-266, respectively.

<sup>18</sup> P. Năsturel, *op. cit.*, p. 71: "...will become a new apostle, destined to save many a soul from the claws of the Devil". (Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.)

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*: "...in a great mess, since everyone, the clergy and the laity alike, was given to uncontrollable drinking and eating and all the related indecencies".

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*: "...he put them back to order and instructed them to observe the laws and be careful not to allow people to jeopardise the immortality of their souls by submitting to impious voluptuousness and the excesses of gluttony".

Along the same lines, the Grecu redaction offers a detailed description of the encounter between Radu and Niphon in Adrianople, in which the perplexed voivode is presented as openly admitting to the wise hierarch the desolate state of the Wallachian Church and the complete lack of people who could firmly direct the spiritually deprived country and its inhabitants towards a new beginning.<sup>21</sup> The unknown author indicates, among other things, that everyone welcomed Niphon “ὡς ἀπὸ Θεοῦ πεμπόμενον”.<sup>22</sup> The “wonderful” [θαυμάσιος] prelate at once gave himself to instructing the ruler and the nobility on issues of governance and political conduct, but he also took special care to admonish the hitherto unguided people mainly with regard to moral behaviour and practical ethics. Indeed, we are told that he spared no effort:

...να τὸς εὐγάλη ἀπὸ τὴν κακὴν παρακίνησιν τῆς μέθης, ὅτι ἦτον εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ πάθος μὲ ὑπερβολὴν ὅλοι πεσμένοι, νέοι καὶ γέροντες καὶ ἄρχοντες καὶ πλούσιοι, ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖον πάθος γεννῶνται ἕλα τὰ πάθη καὶ τὰ θανάσιμα ἁμαρτήματα, ἐξόχως δὲ ἡ βδελυρὰ καὶ ἀκάθαρτος πορνεία καὶ ἡ δαιμονικὴ παιδοφθορία, τουτέστιν ἡ ἄθεσμος ἀρσενικιτία εἰς τὴν ὁποῖαν οἱ περισσότεροι ἦτον πεσμένοι.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, p. 78 (esp. lines 12-19).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* (lines 21-22): “...as having been sent by God”.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84 (lines 11-19): “...to detach them from the evil drive of drunkenness, as they had all – young and old, nobles and magnates – succumbed to that vice which gives birth to all other vices and deadly sins, especially the abominable and foul lust and the demonic pederasty, that is, the lawless practice of homosexual intercourse to which most people were committed”. See, in general, *ibid.*, pp. 80-84, and cf. also the equivalent section in Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-76. The terms in which the Wallachian archbishop’s mission is described in the 1359 decree of Hyakinthos Kritopoulos’ appointment set an interesting point of comparison, I believe: “[...] μέλλει δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς τοιαύτης ἀρχιερατικῆς ἐπιστασίας καὶ ποιμανσίας ὁ ἐν τῇ εἰρημένῃ ἀρχῇ καὶ ἐπικρατείᾳ πάσης τῆς εἰρημένῃς Οὐγγροβλαχίας εὐρισκόμενος χριστῶνυμος τοῦ κυρίου λαός ὁδηγεῖσθαι εἰς ἐκπλήρωσιν τῶν σωτηρίων τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐντολῶν μέλλει εἰσηγουμένου τοῦ ἀρχιερέως καὶ ἐκδιδάσκοντος αὐτοὺς τὴν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ὁδὸν καὶ ἀπιστῶντος καὶ κωλύοντος ἀπὸ τῶν ἀπηγορευμένων ἔργων τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ παντὸς ἐκφύλου καὶ ἀλλοτρίου δόγματος τῆς ἐκκλησίας Χριστοῦ, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τῆς ἡμῶν μετριότητος διὰ σπουδῆς τοῦτο μελλούσης αἰεὶ ποιεῖν καὶ γράφειν καὶ νουθετεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τήρησιν τῆς ἀσφαλοῦς ἡμῶν πίστεως, ὑπερ ἀφορᾷ εἰς πολλὴν ψυχικὴν ὠφέλειαν αὐτῶν, ὑπὲρ οὗ θείου πράγματος οὐχ ἱκανὸς ὅλος ὁ κόσμος, ὡς ἀποδέδεικται” (Franz Miklosich and Joseph Müller (eds), *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi Sacra et Profana*, Vol. I: *Acta Patriarchatus Constantinopolitani, MCCCXV-MCCCCII, e Codicibus Manuscriptis Bibliothecae Palatinae Vindobonensis*, Vienna: Carolus Gerold, 1860, p. 384). Significantly, in all the versions of the *vita* Niphon is presented as having vehemently fought against the moral decay that had spread among the indigenous population – both the clergy and the laity – but there is no reference

Besides this insistence on the lethal degeneration of the Wallachian people which was now being reversed under the new archbishop's inspired guidance, it is also characteristic that in all the versions of the *vita* Niphon is shown to have developed a very special kind of bond with none other than Neagoe Basarab, one of Wallachia's most prominent political figures in the early modern period. In fact, according to the texts, their relationship flourished right at the point where Niphon had found himself in the unexpected predicament of being disobeyed and even deposed by Radu, the very person who had invited him to Wallachia and granted him unlimited authority especially in religious and moral matters. The historical accuracy of the specific detail cannot be easily confirmed, and yet it is certainly indicative that this important aspect of Niphon's textual portrayal proves to be closely related to Neagoe's own religious policy and political agenda as they developed in the course of his important reign.

Neagoe was a mere ἀρχοντόπουλο, a young noble, when he first met Niphon, but by the time Gabriel's text was being composed he had already found his way to the top of the political hierarchy in Wallachia. He ascended the throne in 1512 and reigned for nine years, until 1521, during which time he became known, among other things, for his ample contributions to Orthodox ecclesiastical and monastic establishments throughout the Ottoman East.<sup>24</sup> It is particularly interesting, I believe, that in the *vita* Neagoe is repeatedly claimed to be the Constantinopolitan archbishop's "spiritual child".<sup>25</sup> There can hardly be any doubt that the concept of spiritual parentage has been one of the most

---

whatsoever to heretical dissensions or non-Orthodox propaganda that the new archbishop had to work towards eradicating.

<sup>24</sup> Cf., in this respect, the extensive catalogue of monasteries and churches in Mount Athos, Istanbul, Sinai, Palestine, Greece and the greater area of the Balkans included in the Romanian redaction, Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-95. For a focused discussion on Neagoe Basarab's familial background and rise to the throne, as well as on the most important aspects of his relatively short but in many ways crucial reign, see Radu-Ștefan Ciobanu, *Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521)*, Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1986.

<sup>25</sup> Cf., for example, V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, p. 92 (lines 14-15): "πνευματικὸν τέκνον τοῦ ἁγίου ὑπᾶρχον [sic]"; p. 96 (line 20): "τὸν πνευματικὸν τοῦ υἱὸν Νεάγγον"; p. 98 (lines 3-4): "τοῦ πνευματικοῦ σου πατρὸς"; etc; cf. also *Νέον ἐκλόγιον*, pp. 382 and 386; and P. Năsturel, *op. cit.*, p. 71. Interestingly, in the Romanian redaction published by T. Simedrea it is Radu the Great who recognises in Niphon a "father and shepherd" for himself and his people, as well as a mediator between human law and the divine word: "Și trimise de grabă de aduse sfîntul în țara sa și-i deade toate pre mîna, zicîndu-i: 'eu sã dormnesc, iarã tu sã ne îndereptezi și sã ne înveți legea lui Dumnezeu și sã fii tatã și păstoriu mie și tuturor oamenilor și solitoriu la Dumnezeu.'" Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, p. 74; my emphasis.

common notions in the protocols of Christian ontology employed to designate the symbolic status of the clergy in relation to the laity. In fact, the notion has successfully transcended geographical, cultural and chronological boundaries, and it should only be expected in the context of a hagiographic text. It is of certain interest for us, however, insofar as it indicates the way that the texts suggestively outline the special nature of the bond that was developed between the two men. Indeed, that bond is described in terms of a relationship of moral surveillance and spiritual guidance generously offered by the luminous mentor, to which the young disciple responds with a strong sense of gratitude that inevitably brings him into a state of psychological dependence and intense devotion.<sup>26</sup> It has been accurately observed that by emphasising Neagoe's unflinching attachment to Niphon, the *vita* – which was probably commissioned to Gabriel by Basarab himself – was brilliantly contributing to the prince's own agenda for monarchical emancipation.<sup>27</sup> In doing so, however, it was also retrospectively granting to Neagoe's sanctified patron from Tarigrad a power and authority over the country and its people much greater than what the Byzantine authors of Hyakinthos Kritopoulos' appointment decree back in 1359 could have possibly expected.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the rhetorically and emotionally charged descriptions of their relationship as it had developed during Niphon's persecution, and of Neagoe's reaction to the latter's departure from Wallachia, in V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, pp. 92 (lines 9-22) and 96-98; cf. also Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77, where, however, the relevant passage is briefer and the phrasing not as intense as in the Grecu redaction.

<sup>27</sup> Cf., in this respect, the brief but insightful analysis of the *vita* offered in Radu G. Păun, "La couronne est à Dieu'. Neagoe Basarab (1512-1521) et l'image du pouvoir penitent", in Petre Guran (ed.), *L'empereur hagiographe. Culte des saints et monarchie byzantine et post-byzantine*, Bucharest: New Europe College, 2001, esp. pp. 194-199. It is also of special interest that in a recent article on the ideological background of works produced from within the courtly environment of Neagoe Basarab, Fabio Martelli has seen the *vita* as operating on two interrelated levels of meaning and with two equally important objectives which define the double discursive nature of the text, namely, "l'agiografia de Niphon e il pamphlet su Neagoe". Characteristically, for the Italian historian Gabriel's work is "un testo di grande rilevanza politica dal momento che, attraverso il pretesto di ricostruire la vita di Niphon e quindi di proporre una agiografia, Gavril, di fatto, elabora un complesso schema che fa della santità del Monaco atonita la massima dimostrazione metastorica della unzione divina di Neagoe, 'creato monarca' sin da quando, ancor giovinetto, incontrò il Patriarca". See his "Archetipo costantiniano e retaggio bizantino negli scritti del voevoda Neagoe Basarab", *Bizantinistica: Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi* 3 (2001), pp. 385-401; quoted passage on p. 390.

<sup>28</sup> Cf., in this respect, the discussion in N. Panou, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-97.

In addition to the textual descriptions of the *vita*, a series of actual events that marked Neagoe's reign long after Niphon's death can also give us a good sense of the way the Wallachian prince perceived (or strived to present) himself as a moral and political entity in close relation to the deceased ecclesiarch. Characteristically, in 1515 Neagoe officially asked for the exhumation of Niphon's earthly remains and arranged for their translation from the Dionysiou monastery on Mount Athos, where they had in the meantime been possessively kept and venerated, to Wallachia, in a sort of expiatory ceremony on behalf of his deceased predecessor, Radu the Great, who had ordered the archbishop's dethronement and deportation.<sup>29</sup> The ceremony took place at the Dealu monastery, founded by Radu himself, who was also buried there. Niphon was canonised and the holy relics were returned to their host monastery in a valuable reliquary in the shape of a church that Neagoe had commissioned especially for the occasion.<sup>30</sup> Two years later, Niphon's canonisation was ratified by the Constantinopolitan Church, and it took a spectacular event to provide the suitable context for that final act in a carefully planned and executed drama of penitence and glorification, namely the consecration of the superb cathedral at Curtea de Argeş, Neagoe's famous foundation.<sup>31</sup> The ceremony took place on 15 August 1517, day of the feast of the Virgin Mary's dormition, which the

<sup>29</sup> For an excellent discussion on the religious but also political and institutional importance of the translation of relics in the late medieval "Byzantino-slavic" world, see Petre Guran, "Invention et translation des reliques – un cérémonial monarchique?", *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 36/1-4 (1988), esp. the sections "Le saint et la fondation ecclésiastique et politique de l'état" and "Personnes, gestes et attitudes face aux reliques", pp. 212-227. The agenda behind the translation of Niphon's relics is better understood, I think, in the light of the materials presented and discussed by Guran. There are, indeed, crucial similarities, but also telling differences.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Gabriel Millet, Jules Pargoire and Louis Petit (eds), *Recueil des inscriptions chrétiennes de l'Athos. Première partie*, Paris: A. Fontemoing, 1904, pp. 161-162 (no. 465); see also A. Falagkas, *op. cit.*, pp. 516-517, where it is additionally mentioned that Niphon's relics are still preserved at the Dionysiou monastery and still in Neagoe's church-shaped case. It should also be noted that upon their return to Mount Athos the relics were lacking the skull and one of the saint's hands which Basarab retained and fervently venerated throughout his life. In exchange, he sent to Dionysiou, also in a valuable golden case, the skull of St John the Baptist which had hitherto been in his possession; cf. Millet, Pargoire and Petit, *op. cit.*, p. 162 (no. 466).

<sup>31</sup> It should be mentioned here that Răzvan Theodorescu has recognised in the cathedral at Curtea de Argeş – as well as in the slightly earlier one at Dealu monastery, where Niphon's relics had been received and the first ceremony of his canonisation took place in 1515 – the first Orthodox monuments "d'une certaine envergure" to appear in the Balkans after the conquests of Mehmed II, and he has discussed them as representative specimens of the

princely foundation was dedicated to and named after. Quite significantly, the Wallachian ruler had formally invited a number of high-ranking representatives of the Orthodox ecclesiastic and monastic establishment at the time. Indeed, the Ecumenical patriarch himself, Theoliptos I (1513-1522), presided at the consecration ceremony, which was also graced by the presence of four important metropolitans and the archimandrites and abbots of all the Athonite monasteries.<sup>32</sup>

All these events are not merely incorporated in the *vita* and narrated in a vivid and imposing tone, but, as one would expect, they are actually given a prominent place in the Romanian and the Greek versions. At this point, it would be worth focusing, even only in passing, on a characteristic instance of an almost imperceptible but nonetheless quite meaningful narrative emendation of at least one important detail pertaining to these events, which, to my mind, suggests an attempt to reconstruct Niphon's canonisation process

---

stylistic syncretism and visual tolerance that have left distinctive marks especially on the religious art and architecture of the Danubian principalities, and the Ottoman Balkans in general, in the early modern period; cf. the brief but dense article "Tolérance et art sacré dans le Balkans. Le cas valaque autour de 1500", reprinted in his *Roumains et balkaniques dans la civilisation Sud-Est européenne*, Bucharest 1999, pp. 267-275; for Neagoe's foundation, see esp. pp. 271-274, with bibliography.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. P. Năsturel, *op. cit.*, p. 44. Both N. Popescu, *op. cit.*, p. 749, and A. Falagkas, *op. cit.*, p. 504, accept that Gabriel, the author of the *vita*, was one of the prelates who had been invited to the consecration ceremony, in which he participated as a prominent member of the Athonite delegation. A trip to Curtea de Argeș certainly provides a likely context for the possible origins of Gabriel's acquaintance with the Wallachian ruler: although there is no solid information about a relationship between the two men, it is reasonable to imagine or assume that Gabriel had met Basarab at least once before he composed the original text of Niphon's biography / Neagoe's encomium. At any rate, it is quite likely that Gabriel had indeed travelled to Wallachia in response to Neagoe's invitation, especially since he was the *protos* of Mount Athos, that is, first in order among all the Athonite abbots. In fact, according to Jean Darrouzès, Gabriel became a *protos* in 1516, one year before the consecration of Neagoe's foundation; cf. his "Liste des prôtes de l'Athos", in *Le millénaire du Mont Athos, 963-1963. Études et mélanges*, Vol. 1, Wetteren: Éditions de Chevetogne, 1963, p. 439. The Romanian version of the *vita* is the only one of the extant redactions where a detailed description of the ceremony is included: in this passage Gabriel is not only unambiguously confirmed as having been present at Curtea de Argeș in his capacity as "protul", but is also mentioned as the person who first received the Wallachian voivode's official invitation to the ceremony, eagerly proceeding to spread the news to the abbots of all the other Athonite monasteries, a list of which is also produced in the text; cf. Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, p. 95.



in a way that would emphasise its significance and render its meaning even clearer than what it must have already been. Interestingly, in the relative sections of the respective texts the reliquary that Neagoe had especially made for Niphon's relics is not exactly described as what we know it was, that is a church-shaped container, but, rather, as a precious case with an engraved lid on which the powerful Wallachian ruler was represented as kneeling in front of Niphon in a posture of penitence and devotion:

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἐπρόσταξεν ὁ θεοσεβῆς Νεάγκος καὶ ἔκαμαν ἓνα χρυσοῦν κουβούκλιον, πολυέξοδον, μὲ πέτρας πολυτίμους καὶ σμάλτον περιεκοσμημένον ὠραιότατον, καὶ εἰς τὸ σκέπασμά του ἄνωθεν ἱστόρησε τὸν Ἅγιον, καὶ ἔμπροσθέν του ἱστόρησε τὸν ἑαυτὸν του γονατιστὸν, καὶ μέσα εἰς αὐτὸ ἔβαλε τοῦ Ἁγίου τὰ Λείψανα.<sup>33</sup>

To my knowledge, there is no extratextual evidence that could confirm the existence of such a valuable artefact with the most eloquent engraving on the top, and it is highly questionable whether it had ever existed in reality. This is precisely what makes this brief but explicit description of Neagoe's allegedly depicted deesis rather revealing in terms of the dynamics it is designed to create between the prince and the prelate. In that sense, it can be safely identified as part of an iconographic tradition that had produced at least two other visual statements testifying to the kind of relation that the Wallachian ruler was interested in establishing *vis-à-vis* the person whom he eagerly sought to adopt as his spiritual father and patron saint: on the one hand, the early sixteenth-century icon representing Niphon and a supplicant Neagoe, still preserved at Dionysiou monastery on Mount Athos;<sup>34</sup> and on the other, the (now lost) icon that used to adorn the church in Tirgoviste, which the prince had founded and

<sup>33</sup> Νέον ἐκλόγιον, p. 387: "After these events, the pious prince ordered for a golden reliquary to be made, priceless and exquisite and adorned with precious stones and enamel, on the cover of which Niphon was depicted with Neagoe himself kneeling in front of him. And the prince deposited the saint's relics in it." Cf. also V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-156, and Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>34</sup> Although there is no conclusive evidence, it is quite possible, I believe, that the icon was commissioned by Neagoe himself and offered to Dionysiou in the context of the extensive relations of support and patronage that were developed between the Wallachian prince and the Athonite monastery as a result of the programmatically promoted cult of St Niphon. Among other things, Neagoe had generously funded the construction of the monastery's protective tower as well as of the aqueduct, in recognition of which he was granted the honorary title of a κτήτωρ, a founder; cf. Sotiris Kadas, *Τα σημειώματα των χειρογράφων της μονής Διονυσίου Αγίου Όρους* [The notes of the manuscripts at Dionysiou monastery on Mount Athos], Mount Athos 1996, p. 213.



St Niphon and Neagoe Basarab.

Dionysiou monastery, Mount Athos, first quarter of the 16th century.

Source: *Θησαυροί του Αγίου Όρους/Treasures of Mount Athos*,  
Thessaloniki 1997, p. 107 (fig. 2.38).

dedicated to St Niphon.<sup>35</sup> In essence, these are specimens of a non-verbal production which, together with the textual materials under discussion here, were designed to supplement and finalise a highly invested project ultimately aiming at the ritual relief and recuperation of the wounded legitimacy of Basarab's monarchical power, which had been achieved in rather shady circumstances involving usurpation and bloodshed.<sup>36</sup> The Christian prince's personal and political identities were fully reconfigured by being filtered through his strongly accentuated, almost familial relationship with the sanctified prelate, who had been persecuted by a prominent member of the clan from which Neagoe had usurped the right to power.<sup>37</sup> In the right light, even

<sup>35</sup> See R. Păun, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

<sup>36</sup> Neagoe was propelled to the Wallachian throne by his powerful family, the Craiovesti boyars, members of which had organised the murder of the legitimate ruler, Vlad the Young, Radu the Great's eighteen-year old brother, who had ruled for less than two years between 1510 and 1512.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. R. Păun, *op. cit.*, p. 198: "La rhétorique de l'usurpation insiste toujours sur l'anormalité du règne du prédécesseur écarté qui est couvert de tous les maux du monde, en commençant par le plus grave, l'insolence à l'égard des hommes de Dieu et donc à l'égard de Dieu même. Par contre, l'usurpateur détient toutes les vertus qui faisaient défaut à son rival,

usurpation can turn out to be not a highly irregular and illegitimate act of force, a violent and reproachable *coup d'état*, but a justifiable and necessary intervention aimed at the restitution of sovereignty to more fitted hands and at the preventive treatment of an impaired and potentially dangerous situation.

To return to the *vita*, it is equally interesting, I think, that, at crucial points in the narrative sequence, the events pertaining to Niphon's expulsion from and *post mortem* return to Wallachia are discussed in conjunction with a similar event that had famously marked the early years of Byzantium's religious and political history. Indeed, the texts specifically allude to the events that had taken place in AD 437, when the Byzantine Emperor Theodosius II (*reg.* 408-450) arranged for the relics of St John Chrysostom, who had died exiled in Cucusus, to be brought back to Constantinople, in order to atone for his dead mother's sins. It was she, the Empress Eudoxia, who had managed, through relentless plotting and a series of false accusations, to induce the popular archbishop's banishment in 403 and again in 404 as a means of silencing the bitter criticism of moral and other issues he had publicly launched against her. As it happened, however, very soon after Chrysostom's second banishment and subsequent death, Eudoxia suffered a fatal miscarriage which was commonly interpreted at the period as a sign of divine punishment for her opposition and hostility to the righteous prelate. Thus, the equivalences are laid out pretty clearly: with Radu as the insubordinate Eudoxia who exposed the state and its people to grave risk and paid with her life for her impious behaviour, and Neagoe as the pious and penitent Byzantine emperor, Niphon is left with no less than the role of St John Chrysostom himself.<sup>38</sup>

---

et surtout la capacité de pardonner et d'implorer l'aide divine pour le salut de l'âme de son persécuteur..." It is an important observation, closely relevant to our discussion of the *vita* in the following pages.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, p. 142 (lines 3-10): "Καὶ οὕτως ἐγένετο [ὁ Νεάγγρος] δευτέρως Θεοδόσιος, διότι καθὼς ἐκεῖνος διὰ τὴν μητέρα του τὴν Εὐδοξίαν ἔφερεν ἀπὸ τὴν Κουκουσὸν τὸ ἱερὸν λείψανον τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου μετὰ τιμῆς, ἔτ' ἐξὶ καὶ ὁ αἰοίδιμος Νεάγγρος ἔκαμιν εἰς τὸν νέον Χρυσόστομον καὶ θεῖον Νήφωνα, διότι ἔπεμψε δύο ἐπισήμους ἄρχοντας καὶ δύο ἡγουμένους τῶν μοναστηρίων εἰς τὸ "Ἁγίον" Ὄρος εἰς τὸ ἱερὸν μοναστήριον τοῦ Διονυσίου μὲ ἐπιστολάς καὶ δωρεὰς καὶ χάρισματα." It should also be noted that Niphon is at an earlier point in the text characterised again as the "new Chrysostom" in recognition of his inspired preaching (cf. *ibid.*, p. 84, lines 6-7). On the other hand, Radu the Great is proleptically compared to Eudoxia in the section where the circumstances of his death are narrated: indeed, it is said that right after his burial the princely grave was trembling for three days, "καθὼς καὶ εἰς βασιλίδα Εὐδοξίαν εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου ἠκολούθησε", *ibid.*, p. 122 (lines 7-12); see also *Νέον ἐκλόγιον*, pp. 385 and 386; and Mihăilă and

Within these parameters, the narration assumes a distinctly dramatic character, and the return of Niphon's relics to Wallachia is invested with striking metaphysical dimensions. Here I shall only refer to a couple of brief extracts from the Grecu redaction. It cannot be overlooked that the nature, general attitude and scope of the narration are discernibly influenced by a programmatic resort to a series of highly formalised thematic stereotypes drawn from the rich reservoir of narrative tropes and conventions of the hagiographic genre. Nevertheless, the hermeneutic restrictions that this fact seems to impose on modern readers can hardly affect the conceptual validity, purport and resonance that such texts can be claimed to have had in the period under review. In this sense, both passages are quite revealing, especially in their diligent care to suggest Niphon's indispensable role in the well-being of his host country by means of elaborating forcefully on the devastating consequences of his involuntary absence from it.

More specifically, the first passage is characteristic in its loaded description of the cataclysmic misfortunes that befell Radu and Wallachia very soon after the persecution and banishment of the country's spiritual leader; or, in other words, in its emphatic insistence on the dreadful tokens of divine disapproval that the unruly voivode's discrediting of Niphon's authority had resulted in unleashing:

---

Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, p. 86. For John Chrysostom's consecutive banishments and Eudoxia's death, see Chrysostom's standard biography by Chrysostomus Baur, *Der heilige Johannes Chrysostomus und seine Zeit*, Vol. II: *Konstantinopel*, Munich: Max Hueber Verlag, 1930, pp. 223-305; and Émilienne Demougeot, *De l'unité à la division de l'Empire romain, 395-410. Essai sur le gouvernement impérial*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1951, pp. 296-337. For a more recent and briefer account of the conflict between John and Eudoxia – “a collision of such proportions that it shattered for a time the crucial bond between the people of Constantinople and the Theodosian house” – see Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982, esp. pp. 69-78. It should be added, however, that Wolfgang Liebeschuetz has offered a careful reassessment of the complex reasons and forces behind Chrysostom's deposition and exile, critically discussing the role that a number of powerful figures of the “new Eastern aristocracy” had played in these events, in his “Friends and Enemies of John Chrysostom”, published in Ann Moffatt (ed.), *Maistor: Classical, Byzantine and Renaissance Studies for Robert Browning*, Canberra: The Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1984, pp. 85-111; see also the extensive section on John Chrysostom in his *Barbarians and Bishops: Army, Church, and State in the Age of Arcadius and Chrysostom*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, pp. 157-227. For the ceremony organised by Theodosius II for the return of the saint's relics to Constantinople, see C. Baur, *op. cit.*, ch. 41 (pp. 383-390), characteristically titled “Des Siegers Heimkehr”!

Μετὰ δὲ τὴν κοίμησιν τοῦ ἁγίου ἔπεσεν εἰς δεινὴν καὶ ἀνιάτρευτον ἀσθένειαν ὁ τῆς Βλαχίας ἡγεμὼν Ῥάδουλας, διότι ὅλον τοῦ τὸ κορμὶ ἐτρώπησε καὶ εὐγαινεν ἀπὸ αὐτὸ μεγάλη δυσωδία καὶ ἀνυπόφορος, ὅπου σχεδὸν τινὰς δὲν ἐδύνατο νὰ τοῦ πλησιάσῃ. Πρὸς τούτοις δὲ ἐγέροθησαν καὶ μεγάλα σκάνδαλα ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄρχοντάς του· καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν τῆς Βλαχίας σύγχυσις καὶ ταραχὴ ἠκολούθησαν ἀπὸ τὸν καιρὸν, ὅπου ἐδιώχθη ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ ὁ μακάριος Νήφων. Διὰ τοῦτο πανταχοῦ ἔστειλεν ὁ ἡγεμὼν καὶ ἐρεύνα περὶ τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ζῶντος αὐτοῦ ἀκόμι, διότι ἦλθεν εἰς τὴν Βλαχίαν μεγάλη πείνα, ἀνομβρίες καὶ ταραχὴ καὶ βία ἀνέμων· καὶ ἐγνώρισαν ἅπαντε, ὅτι, διὰ νὰ διωχθῇ ὁ ἅγιος ἦλθον αἱ ἀπειλαὶ αὐταὶ καὶ μάστιγες παρὰ Θεοῦ. [...] Ὁ δὲ Ῥάδουλας ὁ αὐθέντης μὲ πολλὰς ὀδύνας ἐτελεύτησε [...] Φόβος δὲ καὶ τρόμος κατέλαβε πάντας καὶ ἐνθυμοῦντο τὸν ἅγιον.<sup>39</sup>

The second passage is equally interesting, I believe, in its almost theatrical depiction of the miraculous restoration of harmony and order due to Neagoe's sense of duty and unshakeable loyalty to his long-dead spiritual father, a loyalty effectively channelled into a pious determination to correct the previous ruler's wrongdoings and, thus, save the country from certain doom. The prince has just succeeded after sustained efforts to have Niphon's relics translated from Athos to Wallachia. He attends a vigil in the saint's honour and, falling into a state of ecstatic slumber, he experiences a revelation:

[...] ἐν τῷ μεσονυκτίῳ, ὅπου ἄγρυπνοῦσαν, ἀπεκοιμήθη ὁ ἡγεμὼν Νεάργος πλησίον τῆς λάρνακος τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ ἐν ἐκτάσει γεγωνῶς βλέπει ὡσὰν ὅτι ἀνοίχθη ὁ τάφος τοῦ Ῥάδουλα καὶ ἐφάνη τὸ κορμὶ του κατὰμαυρον, τὸ ὁποῖον δυσωδίαν πολλὴν ἀνέπεμπε καὶ ἔτρεχε σχεδὸν ἀπὸ ὅλα του τὰ μέλη ὄμπιον καὶ βρῶμα ἀνείκαστον. Μὴ δυνάμενος λοιπὸν ὁ θεφιλῆς ἡγεμὼν νὰ ὑποφέρῃ ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἐλσεινὸν θέαμα, ἐδέετο τοῦ ἁγίου νὰ κάμῃ ἔλεος εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν ταλαίπωρον Ῥάδουλαν. Καὶ παρευθὺς βλέπει ὡσὰν μίαν βρῦσιν ἢ κολυμβήθραν, ὅπου εὐγαινεν ἐκ

<sup>39</sup> V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, pp. 120-122: "After the saint's assumption, Radu, the Wallacian voivode, came down with a dreadful and incurable disease: his entire body was covered in holes emitting an unbearable stench, to the extent that one could hardly come close to him. In addition, grave scandals broke out among his courtiers; and ever since blessed Niphon was expelled from Wallachia, the Church shook with confusion and disorder. Great famine, droughts, disasters and hurricanes befell the country, and for that reason the ruler had repeatedly searched everywhere trying to find the saint, even when the latter was still alive. For it was commonly known that all these threats and God-sent calamities had set in because the saint had been banished...As for Prince Radu, he died in great pain and distress...And everyone was terrified and brought the saint to mind." Cf. also Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

τῆς λάρνακος τῶν λειψάνων τοῦ ἁγίου. Ἐβλεπε δὲ καὶ τὸν ἄγιον, ὅπου ἔπλυε τὸ κορμὶ ἕλον τοῦ Ῥάδουλα, τὸ δυσῶδες καὶ ἄσχημον καὶ μὲ τὸ πλύσιμον ἔγινεν ὠραιότατον καὶ λαμπρότατον.<sup>40</sup>

The remnants of Radu's body bear the indisputable signs of damnation, while, by extension, the body politic – the country and its people – has entered into a state of absolute chaos where there is no divine grace and, therefore, no hope. The previously quoted description of the horrendous death Radu had met is redoubled within a few pages of text as it is graphically recapitulated in Neagoe's vision, in the context of which it is finally neutralised by means of the pious ruler's supplication, which provokes the saint's pity and miraculous intervention. In order to make the meaning of these scenes as clear as possible, the text wants the cathartic symbolism of the oneiric encounter to extend almost instantly over reality itself. The very next morning, a large crowd had gathered outside the church at the Dealu monastery, Radu's foundation and resting place, where both the vigil / Neagoe's vision and a liturgy in honour of the saint had taken place. The hordes of diseased, afflicted and suffering worshippers who had travelled there from across Wallachia – a horrid reflection of the dismal state the country had fallen into – are presented as gratefully receiving the therapeutic blessing of the vindicated saint:

Καὶ τὸ πρῶτὸ γενομένης τῆς θείας λειτουργίας ἐσυνάχθησαν καὶ ἀπὸ τὰς ἕξω πόλεις τῆς Βλαχίας ἄνδρες τε καὶ γυναῖκες ἔχοντες μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἀναριθμήτους ἀσθενεῖς, οἵτινες μετὰ τὴν θείαν λειτουργίαν λαβόντες ἄδειαν παρὰ τοῦ ἀυθέντου ἠσπάζοντος τὸν ἄγιον μετὰ δακρύων καὶ πίστεως καὶ καθέννας ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐλάμβανε τὴν ποθομένην ὑγίειαν του· χωλοὶ ἀνωρθοῦντο, οἱ ὑπὸ πυρετοῦ ὀδυνώμενοι ἔβλεπον τὴν θεραπείαν τους καὶ σχεδὸν πᾶσα νόσος ἐδιώκετο ἀπὸ τοὺς μετὰ πίστεως προσερχομένους.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-152: "Late at night, while they were keeping vigil over the saint's relics, Prince Neagoe fell asleep by the shrine. In a state of rapture, he saw that Radu's grave broke open exposing his pitch-black corpse, horrendously polluted, emitting a strong stink and discharging pus from all over. Neagoe, the pious ruler, could not bear that despicable sight and begged the saint to show mercy to that wretched Radu. At once, he saw something like a font or fountain rising from within the shrine, and Niphon himself thoroughly washing Radu's body. Indeed, by the time the washing was over the fetid and deformed corpse was glowing with purity and beauty."

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 154 (lines 4-13): "And in the morning a liturgy was performed, and many men and women gathered from the provincial cities of Wallachia, bringing with them countless diseased people. After the end of the service, and having obtained permission by the voivode, they were kissing the saint with faith and tears in their eyes and each one of

The quoted passages are much better understood when read in conjunction with an earlier section where Niphon's first reactions upon his arrival in Wallachia are narrated: the ex-patriarch is clearly shown to have set out working on the reorganisation of the Church and the spiritual revitalisation of the Wallachian people on the indispensable precondition that everyone in the country, and especially the ruler and his court who set an example for the masses, will "gladly" submit to his "πνευματικὴ νοουθεσία", his spiritual guidance, and will never seek to dispute or act against his authoritative judgment, especially in questions of religious or moral nature. Prince Radu seems at that point to have been fully aware of the binding character of the agreement, and he unconditionally commits himself and his subjects to Niphon's terms when he asserts:

Ἐκ τῆς σήμερον, πάτερ μου, σὲ ἔχομεν ὁδηγὸν καὶ ποιμένα μας, νὰ μᾶς ὁδηγήσῃς εἰς τὸν νόμον τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐγὼ μὲν νὰ ἀυθεντεύω εἰς τὰ ἐξωτερικά, ἡ δὲ ἀρχιερωσύνη σου νὰ ἔχῃς πᾶσαν τὴν φροντίδα τῆς ἐκκλησίας εἰς τὰ ἐσωτερικά. Καὶ εἴ τι προστάξις νὰ γίνῃται.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, the readers of the text would be entitled to assume that the disastrous circumstances that Niphon's death had activated were practically caused by Radu's audacity not to submit to the archbishop's instructions in respect to an issue that evidently fell under his jurisdiction. Once the responsibility for the moral guidance of the Wallachian people was placed with

---

them received their much-desired health back; invalids stood again on their feet, those suffering by fever recovered, and everyone who came to pay homage to the saint in sincere faith was cured of almost any kind of disease."

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80 (lines 4-8): "From this very day, my father, you are our guide and shepherd to lead us to the law of God. I shall rule as far as worldly matters are concerned, while your holiness will have full power on the church and spiritual affairs. And whatever you ordain shall be done." Cf. also Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, p. 74. Niphon's reply to Radu's affirmations – a brief but authoritative reflection on royal responsibility – articulates his content over the ruler's prudent judgment and voluntary submission, but is also invested with a kind of foresight of disagreeable things to come: "Ἐπαινώ σου, αὐθέντα, τὴν γνώμην τὴν καλήν, ὅπου κατὰ τὸ παρὸν ἔδειξες· τὴν ὁποίαν ἄμποτες νὰ ἔχῃς μέχρι τέλους. Δέομαι δὲ ὁ ἀνάξιος νὰ μὴ σου βαρύνῃ τὸ ἱλαρὸν ἦθος ὁ λόγος μου. Παρακαλῶ, εἴ τι ἐπιχειρισθῶ εἰς τὴν Τζάρα πρὸς νοουθεσίαν, νὰ τὸ δεχθῆτε μετὰ χαρᾶς. Καὶ ἐὰν καὶ ἐσὺ ὁ ἴδιος σφάλῃς, λάμβανε νοουθεσίαν πνευματικὴν, διότι, ὅποταν ἴδωῦν ὁ κοινὸς λαὸς τὸν αὐθέντην τοὺς δεχόμενον διόρθωσιν μετανοίας, καὶ αὐτοὶ εὐκόλα διορθοῦνται· ἐξεναντίας δὲ ἔταν ὁ αὐθέντης ἀγριώνηται εἰς τὰ ἐκκλησιαστικά καὶ καταπατῆ νόμους καὶ ἀθετῆ ἀποστολικὰς παραγγελίας, τότε γίνονται πτώσις πολλή, ὅτι εἰς τὸ κακὸν εὐκόλα καὶ οἱ ἐπίλοιποι κλίνουσιν." in V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, p. 80 (lines 10-21).

Nippon, in recognition of his rare achievement as a spiritual leader and man of the Church, both the ruler and his subjects entered into a state of perennial obligation to succumb to the ex-patriarch's judicial and legislative authority. The observance of this covenant would secure the prosperity of the country and validate Radu's sovereignty by sanctioning the Christian legitimacy of his temporal power. Characteristically, his unwise decision to revoke this state of unconditional surrender soon forced him to make things even worse by ordering not simply the dethronement of the archbishop but also his permanent banishment from Wallachia. In fact, this last ruinous move was inescapable, since Nippon's physical presence in the country thereafter would constantly reiterate the illegitimacy of Radu's rule.

Clearly, the conflict between Radu and Nippon should be understood as the result of an uncompromisable antagonism over power and jurisdiction. Were the prince's questionable matrimonial plans for his sister a matter of diplomacy or morality, of politics or religion? Did such a problem pertain to the *ἐξωτερικά* or the *ἐσωτερικά*, the temporal or the spiritual domain of the State? Should it have been handled by the Palace or the Church? Who will decide, who will ordain, who should be obeyed? In short, who will speak the law? The prince or the prelate? The secular administrator or the spiritual leader?<sup>43</sup> God's wrath and a series of miraculous occurrences seem to have given a definitive answer to these uneasy questions by means of rendering clear who among the

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the tense conversation between Radu and Nippon that precedes the official break of their relationship, Radu's (and the Moldavian boyar's) excommunication by Nippon and the latter's deposition by order of the prince, in V. Grecu, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87. The voivode is clearly furious with the archbishop's opposition to his political plans and he confronts him audaciously: "Δὲν σοῦ πρέπει, δέσποτα, τόσῃν ἀυστηρίαν νὰ ἔχῃς εἰς ἡμᾶς καὶ εἰς τὸν λαόν, ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ ἔχῃς καὶ ἐντροπὴν καὶ φόβον εἰς τοὺς ἀθέντας. Ἐγὼ καὶ προτῆτερα ἤθελα νὰ σοῦ εἰπῶ, ὅτι εὐθὺς ὁποῦ σὲ ἔφερα εἰς τὴν Τζάρα, κατεπάτησες καὶ ἀθέτησες ὅλας μας τὰς παραδόσεις καὶ τάξεις καὶ μόνον κατὰ τὴν γνώμην σου ἀλλοιώνεις τὰ πράγματα ὡς φρενοβλαβής. Διὰ τοῦτο ἀπὸ τὴν σήμερον μήτε τὴν διδασκαλίαν σου θέλομεν, μήτε τὰς παραδόσεις καὶ τάξεις σου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς εἴμεθα ἄνθρωποι τοῦ κόσμου καὶ δὲν ἠμποροῦμεν νὰ ἀκολουθοῦμεν κατὰ τὴν γνώμην σου." On the other hand, Nippon, who is genuinely shocked by the ruler's irreverent outburst, makes clear to him what he is going against and what the consequences of his actions will be not only for him personally but for the country as well: "Ὁ ἀλλοίμονον, βλέπω τώρα φανερά, ὅτι θέλει νὰ ἔλθῃ μεγάλη ὀργὴ εἰς τοῦ λόγου σας καὶ εἰς ὅλην τὴν Τζάρα καὶ λυποῦμαι διὰ τὰς ψυχὰς σας. [...] Ἡξευρε, ἀθέντα, πῶς ὅλη ἡ ἰσχὺς καὶ δύναμις ἡ ἐδικὴ μου εἶναι ὁ νόμος τῆς ἐκκλησίας, διὰ τὴν ὁποίαν ὁ Κύριός μου ἔχυσε τὸ πανάγιον αἷμα του, διὰ νὰ τὴν καθαρῶς ἀπὸ πάσης ἁμαρτίας καὶ νὰ τὴν ἀγιάσῃ· καὶ ἔσται καθαρὰ καὶ ἀγία μετὰ τὴν ἐργασίαν τῶν θείων ἐντολῶν, τὰς ὁποίας ποθῶ νὰ φυλάξω καὶ ἐγὼ μέχρι τέλους τῆς ζωῆς μου..." See also Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, p. 76.



two contestants was the rightful and legitimate decision maker, or, to put it differently, who was better equipped to serve the country and its people as a divinely sanctioned and approved “pilote d’une économie de salut”.<sup>44</sup> After all, if politics is, or should be, inextricably bound to ethics, then even the regulating balance between the *regnum* and the *sacerdotium*, which had evolved into an urgent theoretical and practical requisite for Byzantine thinkers during the last centuries of Byzantium,<sup>45</sup> should in fact be leaning more toward the latter.<sup>46</sup>

Radu’s unforgivable crime then was that in his princely arrogance he sought to redraw the boundaries of that carefully outlined relationship by defying Niphon’s – that is, God’s – will. Not surprisingly, it is only through the ritual acknowledgment of the offender’s culpability that the whole process of crisis and destruction that was tearing Wallachia apart can be reversed. Naturally, Radu is unable to perform this indispensable gesture of penitence since he has already paid with his life for his improper conduct. Neagoe, on the other hand, can act on the latter’s behalf not only in his role as Niphon’s loyal spiritual offspring, but also as the person who now stands at the very place that the deceased ruler used to occupy, namely the head of the State. And for that matter, he can act on behalf of the endangered Wallachian people too.<sup>47</sup> In a

<sup>44</sup> I have borrowed the phrase from Gilbert Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre. Étude sur le “césaropapisme” byzantin*, Paris: Gallimard, 1996, p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> Cf., in this respect, the following quote from a 1380 synodical validation of an imperial decree, published in F. Miklosich and J. Müller (eds), *Acta et Diplomata Graeca Medii Aevi Sacra et Profana*, Vol. II, 1862, p. 9: “Καὶ γὰρ βασιλεία καὶ ἐκκλησία τῆς ἐν ἡμῶν ἡγερμονίας τὰ κράτιστα· ἡ μὲν γὰρ τοῖς ἐκτὸς καὶ φαινομένοις νομοθετεῖ, ἡ δὲ τοῖς ἐντὸς καὶ νοουμένοις.” It should also be observed that the vocabulary evoked in Radu’s previously quoted response to Niphon upon his arrival in Wallachia (τὰ ἐξωτερικά / τὰ ἐσωτερικά) is clearly reminiscent of the terminology employed in the official Byzantine document (τὰ ἐκτὸς / τὰ ἐντὸς).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the interesting discussion in Violeta Barbu, “*Lex animata* et le remploi des corps”, in P. Guran (ed.), *L’empereur hagiographe. Culte des saints et monarchie byzantine et post-byzantine*, esp. pp. 241-248, where the conflict between Radu the Great and Niphon is discussed in the context of “la permanente concurrence entre le droit coutumier et le droit positif qui ne cessa ni après l’apparition du droit positif écrit.” Indeed, N. Pantazopoulos has shown that the Ecumenical Patriarchate was particularly interested in expanding and enforcing the Patriarchal Law, a series of legislations known as *Canonical Edicts*, as “actually œcumenical to all the Christians of the Ottoman Empire”, especially when it came to matters of family law – dowry, betrothal, marriage and divorce. Thus, the Patriarchal Law was destined “to come into conflict with the Turkish as well as with the popular customary Law, which both had likewise expressed opposing tendencies towards a totalitarian predominance.” Cf. *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 91-112; quoted passages on p. 91.

<sup>47</sup> R. Păun has drawn attention to an intriguing ideological dimension of Neagoe’s agenda and its ritual manifestations: “L’hypostase du monarque comme le premier des fidèles

certain sense, therefore, after a brief but devastating instance of imbalance and disruption, Neagoe came to redefine, via Niphon, fundamental concepts such as law, power and sovereignty by re-introducing the relation between his country and the Great Church and its ministers fully within what the historian Daniel Barbu has seen as the defining characteristic of religious experience in pre-modern Romania: “Le statut de l’Orthodoxie roumaine serait plutôt d’ordre politique et juridique que de nature proprement religieuse. Elle implique moins la foi en un dieu rédempteur, que la conformité à un ensemble de normes de vie. Elle ne demande pas la participation, mais la soumission. Pour les Roumains, l’Orthodoxie est moins une foi personnelle que la loi organique appelée à organiser et à gouverner le corps politique de la nation.”<sup>48</sup>

As I see it, the text that can be indisputably regarded as the fundamental testament of moral and political thought of the Romanian Middle Ages, a two-part “mirror for princes” attributed to Neagoe Basarab and certainly composed under his auspices, not only gives a clear explanation as to what exactly that “loi organique” is, but also indicates emphatically the precise stance that the successful monarch should maintain toward it. In the *Învățăturile lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie* [Neagoe Basarab’s instructions to his own son Theodosius], the author or authors<sup>49</sup> warn the young prince, Neagoe’s son and

---

découvre le noyau dur de la pensée théologico-politique médiévale, à savoir le paradigme davidique de la responsabilité collective incarnée par le chef de la communauté. Comme David, Radu le Grand est responsable pour l’état du pays, frappe par la colère de Dieu. En suivant le même *antitypos*, Neagoe cherche à ramener son peuple dans l’état de grâce à travers sa piété personnelle.” Cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 195-196.

<sup>48</sup> Daniel Barbu, *Byzance, Rome et les Roumains. Essais sur la production politique de la foi au Moyen Âge*, Bucharest: Éditions Babel, 1998, p. 89.

<sup>49</sup> The work’s authorship and original language of composition are particularly difficult and notoriously controversial problems which to this day remain unresolved. The complex textual and linguistic relations between the Slavonic, Greek and Romanian versions cannot concern us here, nor will we discuss the different interpretations offered by prominent students and editors of the texts such as Dan Zamfirescu, Leandros Vranoussis or Petre Năsturel; for a brief and relatively recent overview, see Matei Cazacu, “Slavon ou grec, traduction ou adaptation? Comment on composait un ouvrage parénétiqne en Valachie au début du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle (Les Conseils de Neagoe Basarab à son fils Théodose)”, in *Traduction et traducteurs au Moyen Âge. Actes du Colloque international du CNRS organisé à Paris, Institut de Recherche et d’Histoire des Textes, les 26-28 mai 1986*, Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1989, pp. 41-50. It is particularly interesting, however, and it should not go unnoticed here, that the person who had perhaps been more directly involved in the composition of the work than anyone else was Manuel Korinthios, the grand orator of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, who had visited Wallachia at least once (on the occasion of the consecration of the Curtea

heir apparent: “My child, the prince who will rule according to justice will be recognised as a real sovereign and the Lord’s anointed. But he who will not govern according to *justice and the law of God* will never be a real ruler.”<sup>50</sup> Nobody would be better equipped and actually entitled to impart that indispensable, legitimising justice, as it is crystallised in the divine/canonical law, than a Constantinopolitan prelate. And no one could serve as a more appropriate mediator between the supreme cosmic ruler and his earthly representative than a man of the Church, exactly as he can be seen in the previously mentioned sixteenth-century icon preserved at the Athonite monastery of Dionysiou. Indeed, the visual language of the icon and the geometric arrangement of the two depicted figures are extremely suggestive in their striking directness and carefully calculated simplicity. A frontal, severe, otherworldly Niphon is shown firmly holding in his left hand a closed codex of the Gospel – God’s word – which stands almost suspended in the impenetrable darkness of the far right corner of the represented scene. The otherwise inaccessible energy and grace of the divine word is processed through the saint’s body, covered in priestly vestments and rising dominant in the middle of the icon, and is diagonally transferred to his right hand with which he extends a sign of blessing and approval to an entreating Neagoe, piously kneeling on the opposite side of the painting, crowned and richly clad in a royal robe, but considerably smaller in size than the haloed prelate.

---

de Argeş cathedral in 1517), and whom Neagoe is known to have been consulting in writing especially on questions of Orthodox doctrine. For Manuel, see L. Vranoussis, “Les ‘Conseils’ attribués au prince Neagoe (1512-1521) et le manuscrit autographe de leur auteur grec”, in *Actes du IIe Congrès international des études du Sud-Est européen (Athènes, 7-13 mai 1970)*, Vol. IV, Athens 1978, pp. 377-387

<sup>50</sup> Cited in French in V. Barbu, *op. cit.*, p. 247; translation and emphasis mine. In the Romanian version of Niphon’s *vita* it is clearly suggested that Neagoe had achieved the privileged status of a “real ruler” by means of his devotion to his saintly protector. In fact, Niphon is compared to Abraham and Samuel in such a way that Basarab is unavoidably linked to Melchizedek and David, the two archetypal kingly figures of the Old Testament. In this respect, the felicitous signs of the Wallachian prince’s divinely approved sovereignty can hardly be disputed: “Acestea făcu bunul credincios domn Io Neagoe Vodă, fericită să fie pomenirea lui, și totdeuna creștea și să înmulția bunătățile lui în inima acestui bun domn. Și scoase slujbă și rugăciuni dreptului și fericitului Nifon părintele lui și sprijinitoriului seu; iar rugăciunile lui îl păzea cu paze în Domnia sa și pre toți vrăjmașii lui îi supunea supt picioarele lui. Și cum înălță pre Avraam rugăciunea și dragostea și credința lui Melhisedec, și cum întăriră rugăciunile lui Samoil proroc și arhireul pre David asurpa lui Goliad, așa și acum ajutară rugăciunile sfintului Nifon lui Neagoe Vodă domnul Panonii.” Mihăilă and Zamfirescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.

At any rate, Neagoe's ingenious manipulation of his (real or fabricated) spiritual relation with Niphon, and the way this relation is represented in the textual versions of the latter's hagiography and in the related visual evidence, seem to me to be particularly interesting examples of what D. Barbu has called "la production politique de la foi" in pre-modern Romania.<sup>51</sup> Within that specific context, they can also serve as a useful point of reference in regard to the early stages of the Greek infusion into the Danubian principalities and the terms and conditions in which it was taking place. I would claim that what we have here is quite possibly one of the first instances pointing to the mechanisms that enabled a gradual consolidation of the ideological prerequisites upon which the prolonged contact between the two peoples in the post-Byzantine period was to be grounded. To my mind, both the specific circumstances and the potential of that contact were largely determined on the basis of two separate but not unrelated principles, which, not accidentally, were invariably given a prominent role in all the different versions of Niphon's *vita*: first, Orthodoxy, that is, a common religious identity; and then, a mutually acknowledged sense of developmental inequality. I argue that this particular set of ideological catalysts, in all their ramifications or the different forms they assumed in the ensuing centuries, must be taken into account as one of the most important factors that had facilitated the arduous process of Greek-Romanian coexistence in the principalities, eventually securing its continuity and endurance even in the face of constantly recurring tension and grave internal reactions. It is by no means a mere coincidence, I believe, that at the beginning of the seventeenth century, a hundred years after the composition of Niphon's original *vita*, it was precisely this conceptual deposit that Matthew of Myra resorted to and drew upon when faced with the difficult task of having to argue convincingly on the rightful presence of the "Greek lords" in Wallachia against the threatening indignation of the mistreated autochthons.<sup>52</sup>

#### IV. *Priests and Merchants*

Historical evidence indicating a strong and uninterrupted Greek presence in the Danubian principalities from the sixteenth century onwards can be found throughout the period in question. Not surprisingly, Niphon's trajectory from the traditional territorial core of Eastern Christianity to its remote but quite receptive periphery – the semi-autonomous, strategically and economically

---

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, pp. 13-17 of the introductory essay, as well as the chapter titled "Monde byzantin ou monde orthodoxe?", esp. pp. 85-89.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. N. Panou, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 77-81.

important principalities – soon became a viable as much as attractive option for enterprising individuals of all vocations.<sup>53</sup> But at this early stage it was clerics who had perhaps played the most important role in the incipient process of religious assimilation, socio-political infiltration and cultural osmosis that was taking place in the context of direct and extensive contacts between the two peoples, resulting in the consolidation and intensification of relational patterns that would in many ways affect the future course of things. The decisive presence of Greek Orthodox monks and priests in the area was considerably facilitated by the deeply rooted adherence of pre-modern Romanians to Orthodoxy. It was also fostered by the ideologically invested support and patronage of the local rulers which had essentially enabled the creation (or reconstruction) of a complex and programmatically sustained network of spiritual and material affiliations regulating the nature and extent of the relations between the principalities and the patriarchates, the Athonite monasteries and other important institutions of Orthodox Christianity.

Within that general frame of communication, the role played by the Greek clergy can be best traced in the Romanian people's unhindered exposure to an ever-increasing number of low- and high-ranking representatives of the Orthodox Church who sooner or later found their way to Moldavia or Wallachia. Monks and priests often travelled to the principalities, either invited by the respective voivode or a powerful boyar, or sent there on a mission: to raise money in relief of the financial difficulties of the Church;<sup>54</sup> take care of some

---

<sup>53</sup> Commenting on the synthesis and socio-cultural identity of the first generations of immigrants, Tsourkas has touched upon an interesting issue, I think, when he writes: "Parmi les réfugiés se trouvaient aussi des modestes intellectuels, des moines, des professeurs et de chantres d'église, contrairement à ce qui passa en Italie où l'élite des savants de Byzance se réfugia." Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 118. Indeed, the suggested discrepancy represents an intriguing problem which has not been confronted yet by modern historians. Although it will not be attempted here, a comparative analysis of the historical terms under which the two parallel processes of migration took place would prove to be particularly helpful in defining the impulses and expectations which had determined the geographical orientation of the centrifugal tendencies that emerged within the peculiar circumstances generated by the rapid disintegration of the Byzantine Empire especially in the second half of the fifteenth century.

<sup>54</sup> Cf., for instance, N. Iorga, *Roumains et Grecs au cours des siècles. À l'occasion des mariages princiers de MDCCCXXI*, Bucharest: Cultura Neamului Românesc, 1921, p. 28: "Le manque d'argent contraignait ces chefs de la 'nation grecque' du Roum ecclésiastique, qui gardait un caractère politique incontestable, à visiter les Courts des potentats orthodoxes. C'est pourquoi on rencontre dans les pays roumains au cours du seizième siècle quatre patriarches, dont le premier fut enseveli à Târgoviște, la capitale de la Valachie. Ceux qui les recevaient en grande pompe entendaient certainement conserver les seuls liens hiérarchiques légitimes et possibles."

business or administer the oftentimes colossal fortune that the monastic or ecclesiastical institution they represented had acquired there;<sup>55</sup> or preach against heresy and put a check on the proselytising fervour of Catholic and Protestant missionaries who had also been cruising the area in a never-ending struggle for religious (to say the least) control over the indigenous population.<sup>56</sup> In addition to that, and perhaps more importantly, the principalities had become a major pole of attraction for ambitious clerics who saw in those semi-independent, prosperous and profoundly Orthodox fringe areas of the Ottoman Empire a great potential for personal and vocational advancement. Greek or Hellenised monks, for instance, often relocated from their original monasteries, either by invitation or on their own initiative, and settled in Wallachian or Moldavian monasteries where they would normally reach the highest ranks of monastic hierarchy or grow to be spiritual leaders of their new communities.<sup>57</sup> It was a small step before these highly respected ecclesiastics – well-connected monks or influential bishops, priests and preachers – could integrate into the religious and social landscape of the principalities as carriers or agents of fundamental resources for the spiritual sufficiency of the two countries, inescapably playing,

---

<sup>55</sup> Mainly landed estates and dependent churches or monasteries. Alexandru Xenopol has recognised in these establishments, which had spread throughout the principalities, the most significant centres of transmission of Greek language and culture in the area during the early modern period; cf. his *Istoria Românilor din Dacia Traiană*, Vol. VI: *Lupta contra elementului Grecesc, 1601-1633* [History of the Romanians since Trajanic Dacia, Vol. VI: Struggle against the Greek element, 1601-1633], Bucharest: Cartea Românească, [1925], esp. pp. 22-32.

<sup>56</sup> The following passage from C. Tsourkas, *op. cit.*, p. 121, is worth reproducing here, I believe, as it rightly detects a relationship of causal dependence between the intense programme of propagandist counter-attack launched in the principalities by the Orthodox Church and the spread of the Greek language in the area: “Les assauts lancés par les deux camps adverses en Occident et les efforts de leurs propagandes pour convertir à leur dogmes les peuples orthodoxes rendirent la présence de hauts prélats Grecs nécessaire si non indispensable. La préoccupation majeure à cette époque était le sentiment religieux et la défense de la pureté du dogme orthodoxe. C’était le mobile de toute activité. C’est pourquoi la connaissance du grec devenait indispensable, car c’est dans son arsenal qu’on pouvait trouver les armes théologiques pour combattre la double propagande et le double danger qui menaçait l’Orthodoxie.”

<sup>57</sup> For a general discussion on the significant influence of Athonite monks and their contribution to the educational and cultural role that the Orthodox monastic establishments in both Wallachia and Moldavia were called to play as early as the fifteenth century, see Georgios Cioran, *Σχέσεις των ρουμανικών χωρών μετά του Άθω και δη των μονών Κουτλουμουσίου, Λαύρας, Δοχειαρίου και Αγίου Παντελεήμονος ή των Ρώσων* [Relations between the Romanian lands and Mount Athos and especially the monasteries of

consciously or unconsciously, a leading role in the process of transfusion of post-Byzantine Greek language and culture therein.

Although there is still a great number of dark areas and urgent desiderata in terms of the prosopographic “mapping” of the early modern period in the Ottoman Balkans, even a cursory investigation into the available information on important religious figures of the first post-Byzantine centuries would be enough to confirm these observations. Here we will briefly focus on just one case, which will hopefully prove to be useful in exemplifying certain aspects of the phenomena under consideration. Nikiphoros Paraschis, a late sixteenth-century Orthodox deacon, is an interesting example of a Greek member of the Great Church whose life and career had been inextricably intertwined with the political and intellectual developments in the Danubian principalities at a critical point in the history of the region.<sup>58</sup> He was born in Thessaly probably in the early 1540s and died imprisoned in Poland at some point between 1597 and 1599,<sup>59</sup> having been condemned by the Polish authorities for conspiracy and espionage.<sup>60</sup> He was ordained a monk in 1557, and despite the fact that he

---

Koutloumoussiou, Laura, Docheiarou and St Panteleimonos or of the Russians], Athens: Verlag der “Byzantinisch-Neugriechischen Jahrbuecher”, 1938, esp. pp. 65-68.

<sup>58</sup> Paraschis is an unjustly neglected sixteenth-century personality. Further study of his problematic biography will yield a considerable amount of little-known information concerning the condition of the Orthodox Church and the state of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in that obscure period, as well as the intricate nature of Ottoman administration and the overall political, social and religious situation in the Balkans. The only available secondary source on him, an article by Athinagoras, Bishop of Paramythia, titled “Ο σοφός διδάσκαλος και ιερομάρτυς Νικηφόρος Παράσχος [sic] ο Καντακουζηνός” [The erudite teacher and martyr Nikiphoros Paraschos Kantakouzinus] and published in *Γρηγόριος ο Παλαμάς* 20/1-4 (1936), pp. 7-15, 45-54, 77-82, 125-133, seems to me to have stemmed from a conscientious attempt to reconstruct his life and times, which, however, did not lead to entirely satisfactory results.

<sup>59</sup> For a more detailed account of his life, see *ibid.*, esp. pp. 7-12, 77-82 and 125-129. The biographical information in Athinagoras’ article is mainly derived from Paraschis’ correspondence (with prestigious personalities of the time such as Gabriel Seviros, Maximos Margounios and Meletios Pigas), as well as from the transcript of his 1597 interrogation, on which see the following note. Apparently, Paraschis had suffered a bad reputation during his lifetime, and even posthumously, as a self-promoter and ruthless schemer, and the article involves an effort to expose the inaccurate and unfair nature of the accusations coined by Nikiphoros’ critics, especially the “κάκιστος λιβελλογράφος” Maximos Peloponnisios. Nevertheless, the fact that Athinagoras strives to present Paraschis as a modern martyr of Christianity is certainly far-fetched and, to my mind, it can hardly correspond to any historical or psychological reality in Paraschis’ life and death.

<sup>60</sup> Paraschis’ activity in Poland against the officially supported Catholic propaganda is

never became a priest,<sup>61</sup> he served at the Ecumenical Patriarchate as archdeacon and exarch for nearly four decades, enjoying an influential, though quite controversial, career. Indeed, in the course of the second half of the sixteenth century Paraschis had probably evolved into one of the most powerful Orthodox clerics in Constantinople. Most likely, he owed that power to his influential connections among the highest strata of Ottoman administrative circles,<sup>62</sup> his family background,<sup>63</sup> superior education<sup>64</sup> and devoted

---

discussed in *ibid.*, pp. 125-129. For a Greek translation of the Latin proceedings of the interrogation to which Nikiphoros was submitted soon after his arrest, see pp. 130-133; unfortunately, Athinagoras gives no bibliographical information about the original Latin text which I have not been able to locate. The interrogation took place in Danzig (present-day Gdańsk in northern Poland) and is dated “1597, March 14”. Apparently, Nikiphoros was not able to repudiate the serious accusations he was charged with, and his arrest and examination resulted in his imprisonment in Marienburg, from which he was never released. It can be claimed, of course, that his conviction was primarily a matter of politics, dictated by the strongly pro-Catholic orientation of the Polish government, and, in this sense, it could not have been avoided regardless his actual innocence or guilt. In any case, though, the text is a remarkable document, be it almost impenetrable at times, as it gives a good sense not only of Nikiphoros’ involvement in affairs that by far exceeded his ecclesiastical duties and of his admittedly shady activities in the principalities and in Poland, but also of the extremely complicated situation in the Balkans at the end of the sixteenth century.

<sup>61</sup> As he himself clearly indicates in his confession; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 81-82, and esp. p. 130 (note 3). Athinagoras was right to have corrected previous church historians who have claimed that Paraschis was a priest or even an archimandrite. On the contrary, he insists that “Nikiphoros was the only *megas protosyngellos* after the fall of Constantinople to have been a mere deacon” (p. 80), emphasising, thus, the rather peculiar nature of Paraschis’ service at the Patriarchate.

<sup>62</sup> He proudly asserts in his confession that he had often managed to persuade the mother of the sultan – a crypto-Christian daughter of a Euboean priest – to deter, revert or cancel decisions of the Porte which were unfavourable or potentially detrimental to Orthodox interests. On the other hand, his very close (indeed suspicious) relation with the Grand Vizier Sinan Pasha was exactly what gave a good excuse to the Polish authorities to accuse him of being a spy for the Turks. On the Valide Sultan, cf., for example, *ibid.*, pp. 130-131 (notes 6 and 9); on Sinan Pasha, see pp. 132-133 (notes 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 26 and 27), where, despite Nikiphoros’ clearly embarrassed refutations of the horrible things he was accused of, one feels that the Polish interrogators were not really off the mark in asking “why did he, a Christian, engage in unthinkable and offensive activities on behalf of Sinan Pasha” (p. 133).

<sup>63</sup> His father was a wealthy merchant from Thessaly based in Trikala, the see of the influential metropolitan of Larissa, which flourished in the sixteenth century mainly due to its busy trade. His brother was a priest and high official of the diocese in Trikala, and it cannot be accidental that it was right after Ieremias (who had been metropolitan of Larissa for many years) became patriarch in 1572 that Nikiphoros’ career in the Church literally



attachment to Ieremias II Tranos, who had occupied the patriarchal throne three times between 1572 and his death twenty-three years later (1572-1579, 1580-1584 and 1587-1595).

Typically, Nikiphoros had sustained a broad interest in the politics of the principalities and had managed to build an extensive network of acquaintances and affiliations in both Moldavia and Wallachia.<sup>65</sup> His extensive travels and intimate relations with the rulers and nobility in both countries had enabled him not only to monitor closely the political and military developments in the area but also to pursue an active involvement in them, and from a position of considerable power and authority indeed.<sup>66</sup> Significantly, Ieremias had appointed him patriarchal exarch in the principalities on the basis of the good knowledge he had obtained of the general situation in the region. Furthermore, the Moldavian voivode had trusted him with the crucial task of supervising the diplomatic work of the country's representatives in the Ottoman capital.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, it should also be noted that during his prolonged sojourns in the principalities he probably offered his services as a private tutor, probably teaching Greek, rhetoric and philosophy to the offspring of native boyars or to

---

took off. Most importantly, though, Nikiphoros was on his mother's side a nephew of Michael Kantakouzinos, also known as "Seitanoglou", the Satan's son, who was one of the wealthiest and most powerful merchants in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century.

<sup>64</sup> There is no concrete information about his education, which, however, we can imagine as having been the standard at the time for a well-to-do young man destined to occupy some high office in the Orthodox Church. Athinagoras (*op. cit.*, p. 10) mentions that Paraschis studied in his native town for twelve years, and it is quite possible that he continued his studies in Venice and Padua, where he spent several years in the 1570s, serving as patriarchal exarch, that is, an official representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. At any rate, he seems to have been greatly esteemed by his contemporaries for his profound cultivation and erudition.

<sup>65</sup> He was by no means the only one to have done so: Ieremias II, Dionysios Rallis, Bishop of Tyrnovo, and Kyrillos Loukaris are only three examples of highly influential personalities who had exhibited the same kind of intense preoccupation about the religious and political affairs of the principalities.

<sup>66</sup> For Nikiphoros' activities in the principalities, which spanned the last twenty years of the sixteenth century, see *ibid.*, esp. pp. 78-82. On p. 10, note 1, Athinagoras refers to an article on Nikiphoros and his presence in the Romanian countries by Nicolae Iorga, titled "Nikiphoros dascalul Exarh Partiarhat si legaturile lui cu tarile noastre, 1580-1599" [The patriarchal exarch Nikiphoros the teacher and his ties with our lands, 1580-1599] and published in *Analecta Academiei Române*, ser. II, XXVII (1905), which I have not been able to consult.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Athinagoras, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

interested individuals. Despite the lack of conclusive evidence, we can be almost certain about that aspect of his presence in the Danubian states and beyond, which, of course, is by no means less interesting than his politically-oriented activity in the area.<sup>68</sup> The fact that the epithet “*dascalul*” – the teacher – was attached to his Christian name, often at the expense of his legal surname, can certainly be regarded as an indicative detail in this respect.<sup>69</sup>

In any case, it is rather characteristic that Nikiphoros’ activity in the principalities intensified drastically in the last decade of the sixteenth century. This was a period when the already problematic situation in the area had reached an unprecedented level of complication and intensity, with Michael the Brave openly confronting the internal opposition of the boyars as well as Ottoman and European geopolitical aspirations, and leading the united principalities through a series of spectacular feats of arms towards the materialisation of an ideal which, although too ambitious and unavoidably short-lived, would leave indelible marks on the collective consciousness of the Romanian people. At precisely that crucial moment, a Greek deacon of the Great Church was found to have been playing dangerous games involving shifting alliances and double-dealing, secret communications, undercover missions and even political assassination. To a modern student of the period, Paraschis gives the distinct impression of a person deeply entangled in the labyrinth of a lethal antagonism that involved all the powers struggling over supremacy and control in that highly controversial area: Wallachia and Moldavia, naturally, but also Poland, Austria and the Ottoman Empire.

Admittedly, it seems rather unlikely that there will ever be sufficient proof as to whether Nikiphoros Paraschis had been the mastermind behind an elaborately orchestrated plan of political manipulation and espionage or a mere pawn in the hands of others. Nevertheless, what seems to me to be much more important than the clarification of that obscure detail is the realisation of the

---

<sup>68</sup> A certain Greek living in Poland, for instance, Gabriel Dorotheidis by name, mentions in a letter addressed to Kyrillos Loukaris that “ὄργανον Ἀριστοτέλους ἔχω καὶ ὁ Νικηφόρος ἐπέταξέ μοι διὰ μνήμης ἐκμεμαθημέναι τὴν εἰσαγωγὴν τοῦ Πορφύριου ἕως ἔλθῃ καὶ αὐτός.” Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 126; my emphasis.

<sup>69</sup> The titles “*διδάσκαλος*” and “*σοφὸς διδάσκαλος*” are often attributed to him in Greek official documents as well; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 10-11. It is not quite clear, however, whether the Romanian “*dascalul*” is a mere translation of a Greek title that he had regularly been identified with or a surname that reflects an important aspect of his activity in the principalities. At any rate, in the proceedings of his interrogation there is no reference to his real last name and he is merely put down as “*Νικηφόρος διδάσκαλος*”, at least according to Athinagoras’ translation (cf. p. 130, headline).

fact that the specific individual emerges from behind a foggy screen of mystery and intrigue as one of many Ottoman Greeks of his standing who played a distinctive role in the process of religious, political and cultural development of the early modern Balkans, and the Danubian principalities in particular. He was a well-travelled, influential prelate with proven diplomatic skills and a sharpened understanding of socio-political specificities. In his extensive travels in the area, he carried with him the prestige of his position and a vast experience accumulated over several years of navigating the Ecumenical Patriarchate through the perpetual tensions of implacable enmities and priestly machinations or the sinister vibrations of Ottoman greed. He was also bringing along his socio-cultural references, his educational background and his native language, as they had been moulded in the Greek mainland, the prolific environment of major Italian intellectual centres and the imperial capital of the Ottoman East.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out again that Paraschis was only one of a number of clerics whose life and career in the Church involved a great deal of direct or indirect engagement in the convoluted situation that had been constantly shifting the balance of powers and changing the landscape in the Ottoman periphery. There are indeed several similar cases, most of which are still waiting to be brought to light by modern historians. One can only speculate, but with considerable certainty, that throughout the centuries there had been a long series of people who contributed, in all sorts of ways and with varying degrees of intensity, to this singular process of inter-ethnic mobility and fusion, but who left no trail behind for us to be able to retrace their steps. Indeed, the peculiar circumstances that the Ottoman domination had engendered in the region and a characteristic attitude towards religion and the clergy in the Danubian principalities had made it possible for the agents and institutions of the Great Church to gain a central place in the life of the two countries, and for their authority to rise above dispute. They also allowed for the power and multi-layered influence that this authority entailed to remain essentially unaffected by conflict and direct confrontation.

The immunity to expressions of resentment or outbursts of discontent that was from early on secured for the representatives of the Church could have hardly been extended to the other professional group that had played a very important role in the communication and interaction between the Greek-speaking element of the Ottoman Empire and the Romanian peoples, namely the Greek merchants. On the contrary, it can be safely claimed that their massive economic and social penetration in the area had always been accompanied by a significant amount of internal tension and controversy

among the native populations of the principalities, despite the fact that their extraordinary activity as conduits of “a non-material or ideal culture”<sup>70</sup> equalled that of the clergy’s, both in the variety of its manifestations and the importance of its results. It should be kept in mind that it was precisely such an instance of aggressive opposition to the expansion of Greek commercial activity (and political influence) in Wallachia that Matthew of Myra deemed necessary to address and condemn in his embittered address to the Greek and Wallachian readers of his chronicle.<sup>71</sup>

Greek merchants, along with their Armenian, Serbian, Bulgarian and Albanian counterparts, were representative specimens of the increasingly powerful group of professional Balkan traders, a “middle class”<sup>72</sup> which to a large extent controlled and regulated the internal and external commerce of the Ottoman Empire between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. In a seminal 1960 article eloquently titled “The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant”, Traian Stoianovich set out to discuss issues of “chronology, ecology, and the manner of development of the new Balkan merchant class, and suggest the pregnant consequences of their appearance on the scene of human history”.<sup>73</sup> He has shown that the first steps toward a creation of the “class” or the “classes” of Balkan merchants can be traced back to the fourteenth century. Although their appearance at that point was not really a phenomenon inspired or provoked by Ottoman mediation, the gradual consolidation of Ottoman power and the climactic establishment of the Empire’s political and military domination in the area in the fifteenth and mainly the sixteenth centuries played a significant role in the formation of their basic characteristics and the historical evolution of their socio-economic function from the early modern period until deep into the “age of nationalism”. The military successes of the Ottoman army, the rapid territorial expansion and the energetic building process of a strong and competitive Empire, all of which had been central aspects of the policies and agendas of the Ottoman sultans, not only prepared the ground for the emergence of a new group of people with concrete commercial aspirations, but had also facilitated its gradual imposition over traditionally established mercantile powers in the area, foreign or autochthonous.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Traian Stoianovich, “The Conquering Balkan Orthodox Merchant”, repr. in *id.*, *Between East and West: The Balkan and Mediterranean Worlds*, Vol. II: *Economies and Societies: Traders, Towns, and Households*, New York: Aristide D. Caratzas, 1992, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. the discussion on the specific section in the *History of Wallachia* in N. Panou, *op. cit.*, esp. pp. 77 ff.

<sup>72</sup> T. Stoianovich, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Cf., in addition, Halil İnalcık’s important observations on the peculiar configuration

Indeed, Balkan merchants eventually assumed a role of capital importance in the financial life of the Ottoman Empire. A series of political, military, sociological and even hygienic reasons gradually led to the strengthening of the non-Turkish element in the Ottoman territories, the settlement of new or restored Balkan towns with Orthodox or/and Muslim populations of Serbian, Greek or Albanian origin, and the eventual passing of the region's trade into their hands. The role that this newly emerged "class" was called upon to play was accommodated by a systematic policy of founding towns and centres of commercial activity throughout the Balkans and by the creation or improvement of a network of commercial arteries that enabled and secured the communication between them. Moreover, the programmatic prohibition, at least for a certain period, of foreign agents from participating in or laying claim to the commercial activities of the Empire had certainly proven to be a most favourable development in this respect.

As a matter of fact, these had been the three "principal stimuli" that, according to Stoianovich, had awakened suppressed commercial impulses among the subjected populations of the Ottoman Empire and created, or accelerated the creation of, the conditions under which the formation and expansion of a mercantile "class" could actually take place. The consecutive generations of Ottoman administrators had officially opened the ground for commercial exchange both within and without the vast Ottoman territory mainly by means of facilitating it in several ways that were all stemming from a general financial programme designed to encourage the potential agents of this vital activity by securing the best possible terms and conditions for engaging in it. In addition, the Porte assumed a policy that tended to restrict

---

of the Ottoman economy in his "The Ottoman Economic Mind and Aspects of the Ottoman Economy", in Melvin A. Cook (ed.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East from the Rise of Islam to the Present Day*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 217: "The Ottoman economic mind was closely related to the basic concepts of state and society in the Middle East. It professed that the ultimate goal of a state was consolidation and extension of the ruler's power and the only way to reach it was to get rich sources of revenues. This in turn depended on the conditions making the productive classes prosperous. So the essential function of the state was to keep in force these conditions." Moreover, the organisation of Ottoman society on the basis of a rigid division between a ruling class not engaged in production and the productive/tax-paying masses, as well as a philosophy of administration which could not have incorporated the principles of a capitalist economy, had served as factors that contributed greatly to the development of a flourishing domestic and international trade system concentrated in hands other than those of the Empire's Turkish element; cf. *ibid.*, pp. 217-218.

considerably the handling of the Empire's commercial affairs by foreign interests. A characteristic result of this policy was the gradual exclusion of all the ships that were not sailing under the Ottoman flag from the Black Sea, which by the end of the sixteenth century had already been turned into a *mare clausum*, or, as Vlad Georgescu has put it, a "Turkish lake".<sup>75</sup> Finally, the Porte's policy of urbanisation of the Ottoman territories, applied first to the imperial capital itself and subsequently to key areas in the Balkans, soon resulted either in the foundation of several lively commercial centres or the revival of those that had been in decline.<sup>76</sup>

The Ottoman determination to elevate Constantinople into the centre of Mediterranean commerce, mainly by making it a focal point for the trade of spice, sugar and silk from Asia and Africa,<sup>77</sup> had inevitably led to the creation of a distinct category of professionals who could direct the traffic of the precious merchandise westwards. Balkan and Levantine merchants were not merely allowed but also prompted with privileges and monopoly licenses to establish extensive commercial networks that would connect the Ottoman East to Italy and Central or Western Europe by way of the Adriatic or, slightly later, the Danube and the major Balkan commercial routes. In addition to that, Constantinople itself had rapidly evolved into the vital core of the expanding Empire's elaborate nervous system. The ever-increasing accumulation of human resources and the centripetal concentration of administrative powers and functions brought about an urgent need to ensure that there could and

---

<sup>75</sup> Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians: A History*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991, p. 26. As Stoianovich has insightfully observed: "The establishment of empire and resurgence of Constantinople, now known to the Turks as Istanbul, as an imperial metropolis confronted Ottoman officials with the problem of securing a dependable market for the pressing needs of the state and people and of finding reliable traders and contractors. The Empire could not risk allowing the provisioning of the capital and supplying of the army and navy to remain in the hands of foreign merchants with whose governments it might one day find itself at war. Slowly, and under circumstances thus far vaguely elucidated, the right to navigate in the waters of the Black Sea, increasingly considered a preserve of the wants of the state and capital, was denied to ever larger groups of foreign ships and merchants." *Op. cit.*, p. 5. See also Halil İnalcık, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600", in Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (eds), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, Vol. I: 1300-1600, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 179-187 ("Istanbul and the Imperial Economy").

<sup>76</sup> Cf. T. Stoianovich, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-18.

<sup>77</sup> H. İnalcık, "The Ottoman Economic Mind and Aspects of the Ottoman Economy", esp. pp. 212-215.

would be a continuous and unhindered flow of commercial goods into the imperial city. Under these circumstances, the Empire had to open its doors to imports from Europe, while, at the same time, the produce of the Ottoman provinces needed to be transported and channelled into the capital in the first place and subsequently to the markets of other important Ottoman cities. The role that domestic merchants were given the chance to play in both activities was instrumental.

Though hardly unaffected by the dynamic expansion of the Ottoman Turks, the Danubian principalities had been trading freely and profitably with European markets for at least two centuries after their formation in the late Middle Ages. By the beginning of the sixteenth century, however, Wallachian and Moldavian trade with countries such as Italy, Austria, Germany and Poland began to decrease considerably, while, on the other hand, commercial relations with the Ottoman-controlled East kept growing on a steady basis.<sup>78</sup> The primary historical reasons that led to this major shift in the direction of Romanian trade can be traced in a series of geopolitical developments, all of which were closely related to decisive moments in the early history of the Ottoman Empire: the conquest of the Genoese city of Caffa in 1475; the crushing defeat of Louis II's army by Suleiman the Magnificent at Mohács in 1526 and the establishment of Turkish rule over Hungary; the subsequent imposition of Ottoman suzerainty in Transylvania; and, naturally, the gradual but steadily-paced seclusion of the Black Sea.<sup>79</sup>

Indeed, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, the entire region from north of the Carpathians to south of the Danube had come under Ottoman control, and trade relations of the Romanian lands with the West were severely damaged. Not accidentally, the first exports from the principalities to the Empire date from exactly that period.<sup>80</sup> But more than that, the rapid strengthening of Ottoman domination in both countries resulted in a gradual monopolisation over Romanian foreign commerce. The first known concrete manifestations of this phenomenon have been detected in 1568, and it is indicative of the rhythm of commercial integration that by the end of the sixteenth century the Porte had already become the main market for Wallachian and Moldavian goods.<sup>81</sup> It

<sup>78</sup> Cf. V. Georgescu, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 25-26. For an informed discussion on the conditions under which the annexation of Hungary by the Ottoman Empire took place and its dramatic consequences on the commercial life in the area, see H. İnalcık, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600", pp. 304-311.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. V. Georgescu, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26. It should be observed, however, that Romanian trade with other countries was not completely banned. The export of certain products – grain and sheep mainly – was

should be made clear, however, that the reasons behind this tactic were not exclusively related to an organised plan of political and financial pressure designed to consolidate Ottoman suzerainty in that remote part of the Balkans. Halil İnalcik has explained that a rather unsophisticated Ottoman policy of buying products at fixed prices had caused a significant decrease in agricultural production within the directly subjected and controlled Ottoman territories.<sup>82</sup> As a result, Constantinople was rendered increasingly dependent on the semi-autonomous principalities for its food supplies, especially since the imperial authorities were eager to make sure that there would be no destabilising and potentially dangerous food shortages among the urban masses of the Ottoman domain. In Moldavia and Wallachia, where the principal economic activities were agriculture and animal breeding, they found an abundant source of those things that were most necessary to the capital city for its daily consumption needs, namely grain, sheep- and cattle-meat and salt. The Romanian voivodes were obliged to provide the Porte with predetermined amounts of these products on an annual basis and at fixed prices.<sup>83</sup> Failure to do so would normally bring their career in politics to an abrupt end.

The strategic position of the Danubian principalities had also been a crucial factor for the attentive concentration of Ottoman political and financial interests in the area. Significantly, two of the four most important trade routes connecting the Baltic with the Black Sea, and Central Europe with the Balkans and Constantinople, crossed through Moldavia and Wallachia, giving them a unique geographical importance for international commerce.<sup>84</sup> With inter-regional trade and tax-farming as their main financial activities, Ottoman Greek merchants had by the beginning of the seventeenth century gained control over a considerable portion of the trade in the Eastern Balkans, to the extent that tension and dissatisfaction sprang up occasionally even among Muslim populations who interpreted this striking development as a clear

---

indeed forbidden. As a general rule, though, the surplus of the main rural commodities of the principalities could be directed towards other markets after the needs of the Empire were fully met and satisfied. With a feudal economy that lacked a substantial domestic market where farm products could be profitably dispensed and absorbed, the landowning classes favoured this settlement which guaranteed a steady buying interest on behalf of the Sublime Porte and even allowed for the possibility of extra profit.

<sup>82</sup> H. İnalcik, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600", pp. 185-186.

<sup>83</sup> On grain supplies, see *ibid.*, p. 185; for very interesting information about the monopoly and taxation on Wallachian rock salt, see p. 64.

<sup>84</sup> See Arno Mehlan, "Die Handelstraßen des Balkans während der Türkenzeit", *Südost-deutsche Forschungen* 4/2 (1939), pp. 255-257.



indication of the Porte's favouritism towards its Greek trading subjects.<sup>85</sup> Not surprisingly, the latter soon became the primary agents of the bustling commercial activity in the area north of the Danube too and at the expense of all other foreign or local antagonistic groups.<sup>86</sup> Although there were no organised commercial companies in the principalities, like those established in neighbouring Transylvania in the seventeenth century,<sup>87</sup> the penetration of Greek traders from Constantinople and other parts of the Empire into the commercial network of Moldavia and Wallachia had been quite extensive throughout the period in question. Again, it was politically supported by the Sublime Porte, mainly through the granting of special privileges, and facilitated by the generalised use of Ottoman coinage, which had eventually come to absorb or replace local monetary systems.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the insufficiency of precise data, a series of collective manifestations or individualised episodes pertaining to the social and economic history of the area in the first post-Byzantine centuries can serve as suggestive evidence with regard to the extent of Ottoman Greek commercial activity in the principalities. It is particularly interesting, for instance, that as early as the mid-sixteenth century the inhabitants of Braşov, an important and prosperous trade centre on the Transylvanian-Wallachian border, felt compelled to sign a petition to the Wallachian voivode specifically requesting that Greek merchants not be allowed to pass through Transylvanian territory.<sup>89</sup> By filing a formal

---

<sup>85</sup> For a brief survey of the period after the fall of Constantinople and until 1600, see H. İnalcık, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600", pp. 209-212.

<sup>86</sup> Cf., for instance, T. Stoianovich, *op. cit.*, p. 6: "Partly displacing or absorbing the Genoese, Armenian, and native Rumanian merchant classes, Greek merchants settled in increasing numbers in grain- and especially cattle-rich Wallachia and Moldavia, upon which the Ottoman capital depended so much for its daily bread and salt and mutton."

<sup>87</sup> The history, organisation and activity of the Greek companies in Transylvania, especially in Sibiu and Braşov, have been studied by historians such as Nestor Camariano, Olga Cicanci and Cornelia Papacostea-Danielopolu. The most recent monograph, focusing on their significant contributions to the political, religious and cultural history of the Balkans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is Athanasios Karathanasis' *L'Hellénisme en Transylvanie. L'activité culturelle, nationale et religieuse des compagnies commerciales helléniques de Sibiu et de Braşov aux XVIIIe-XIXe siècles*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1989. For cases of participation of Moldavia- or Wallachia-based Greek merchants in the Transylvanian commercial companies and basic information about relations developed from early on between the latter and mercantile or administrative circles in the principalities, see especially pp. 46-47, with bibliographical references.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. H. İnalcık, "The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600", pp. 288-289.

<sup>89</sup> The incident is mentioned in Ion Ionaşcu, "Le degré de l'influence des Grecs des

complaint, the people of Braşov were reacting to the overwhelming presence of Greek-speaking traders in the area, which was undoubtedly being experienced as a serious threat against their own business interests.<sup>90</sup> It is worth mentioning that they were by no means successful in their attempt to provoke some sort of intervention that could slow their rivals down.<sup>91</sup> In this sense, the specific event can and should be taken into account as an indicator pointing to the same type of socio-economic developments in the region that we have already seen fuelling, some sixty years later, Bărcan's much more aggressive plotting against Radu Mihnea and the Greek element in Wallachia.<sup>92</sup>

At any rate, merchants and artisans constituted a significant part of the substantial Greek presence that was steadily intensifying from the early sixteenth century onwards in the major centres of political and commercial activity in the principalities. It is mostly among merchants that one would have to look for the first Greek-speaking individuals to have been involved in the politics of the two countries, starting in the second half of the sixteenth century and for several decades thereafter, until, that is, the socio-political circumstances allowed for the emergence of a specialised caste of Constantinopolitan courtiers and public officers with exclusively administrative duties. The growing financial power of Greek merchants, who often had the opportunity to accumulate immense fortunes, inevitably became a practical advantage that enabled them to consolidate their political aspirations and pursue an active

---

Principautés Roumaines dans la vie politique de ces pays”, in *Symposium L'époque phanariote, 21-25 Octobre 1970*, Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1974, p. 217.

<sup>90</sup> For Braşov, see briefly H. İnalcik, “The Ottoman State: Economy and Society, 1300-1600”, pp. 301-303; for the phenomenon that was forcing these people to defend their interests in any way they thought best, cf. İnalcik's characteristic remarks on pp. 302-303: “Competition among ‘Levantine merchants,’ Greeks, Jews, Armenians and Turks, was sharp during the second half of the sixteenth century. With the support of the Turks, read the Ottoman government, these Levantine merchants specialized in the commerce in oriental goods, and being free from all kinds of corporate regulations, violated the rights of transit and storage of the merchants of Braşov, and, finally, they extended their trading all over Transylvania. The efforts of Braşov merchants and the measures taken by the municipalities to protect the trade monopoly all failed. By the end of the sixteenth century, Greeks in Braşov, along with Transylvanian merchants, Vlachs, Armenian and Turks, Arabs, Italian and Poles, were trading as well.”

<sup>91</sup> Ionaşcu, *op. cit.*, also indicates that the voivode to whom the said petition was submitted, Radu Paisie (*reg.* 1535-1545), rejected it on account of the fact that “notre pays est au très puissant empereur, tout comme eux-mêmes le sont”.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. the section titled “An Early Seventeenth-century Testimony”, in N. Panou, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-87.

involvement in the political life of the Ottoman capital, in the first place, and soon enough in that of the Ottoman-controlled principalities.<sup>93</sup> Their interest in the latter was initially expressed in indirect but nonetheless concrete terms, as it can be inferred, for instance, from early cases of political and financial support extended by Greek individuals to prominent members of the Romanian ruling classes.<sup>94</sup> It hardly needs to be mentioned that investing part of their wealth in such a way could sooner or later turn out to be a strategic advantage for ambitious magnates which could yield extraordinary political and financial profit. By helping a powerful boyar to be appointed to the Moldavian or Wallachian throne or a voivode to raise money necessary for standing up to pressing financial obligations, Greek patrons were essentially strengthening their negotiating power and gaining unprecedented access to high-level spheres of administrative and economic decision-making in the semi-autonomous Danubian states.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, this groundwork had generated a prolific climate of interaction and coexistence in the two countries that was certainly very highly valued by the Greek side and, as a rule, tolerated and even endorsed or facilitated by the majority of consecutive local governments. It can be arguably claimed that Radu Mihnea was the first in a series of Romanian rulers whose political programme and administrative procedures and goals involved or largely depended on agents familiar with or active within Ottoman Greek intellectual, cultural and religious forms and practices; and not only in the sense that he surrounded himself and populated his court with Greeks, some of whom rose to considerable power.<sup>95</sup> Other rulers had shown similar tendencies before him.<sup>96</sup> More importantly, Mihnea consciously initiated and sustained on an institutional level a state policy that practically opened the ground for Greek-speaking subjects of the Ottoman

<sup>93</sup> Cf., for example, I. Ionaşcu, *op. cit.*, pp. 217-218 (and note 3).

<sup>94</sup> Cf. A. Karathanasis, *Οι Έλληνες λόγιοι στη Βλαχία (1670-1714). Συμβολή στη μελέτη της ελληνικής πνευματικής κίνησης στις Παραδουνάβιες ηγεμονίες κατά την προφαναριώτικη περίοδο* [Greek erudites in Wallachia (1670-1714): contribution to the study of Greek intellectual activity in the Danubian principalities in the pre-Phanariot period], Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 1982, p. 23; see also I. Ionaşcu, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>95</sup> It has been observed that not only were Mihnea's spouse and intimates Greek, but also "cinq des neuf membres du conseil princier soient des gréco-levantins, y représentant de la sorte 55% des voix"; cf. I. Ionaşcu, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

<sup>96</sup> Cf., for example, the interesting information given about Michael the Brave in Démètre S. Soutzo, "Les familles princières grecques de Valachie et de la Moldavie", in *Symposium L'époque phanariote*, p. 232.

Empire not simply to do business or settle in Wallachia, but also to play a much more direct and decisive role in the country's socio-political and cultural life.<sup>97</sup> Not accidentally, it was in the first quarter of the seventeenth century that the Greek presence in the principality entered a distinctly new phase and assumed a more substantial character with unprecedented ramifications. The striking

---

<sup>97</sup> A modern Romanian historian, for instance, has described Mihnea's reign in the following terms: "[In 1611] the Turks install as voivode of Wallachia Radu Mihnea, son of Mihnea Turcitul, who surrounded himself with Greek high officials, stirring the dissatisfaction of the autochthonous boyars. The Greek high officials had penetrated into Wallachia and Moldavia at the end of the 16th century, as reliable persons and sometimes as creditors of some voivodes named by the Turks. During the first decades of the 17th century, their number increases, because of their relations at the Porte too, as well as due to their skill in what concerns the affairs of the Ottoman Empire. Some families of such high officials (Cantacuzino, Catargi, Palade, Ruset, etc.) will naturalize and assimilate themselves quite rapidly and will play a leading part in the political history of both countries." Constantin Giurescu (ed.), *Chronological History of Romania*, Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1972, p. 115. The passage offers an accurate, if synoptic, description of the situation in the period under review, but also raises an interesting question, namely the possible existence of a connection between the Greek presence in the principalities and the fluctuations of the Ottoman domination in the area. Indeed, it is worth considering whether there was or is likely to have been a causal relationship between Radu Mihnea's ethnic-oriented "favoritism" and the fact that he was one of the most openly pro-Ottoman Wallachian voivodes in the seventeenth century, having had repeatedly proven his loyalty to his Ottoman protectors exactly like his father had done before him. There can be no doubt that the Ottoman-induced and supported replacement of Radu Șerban by Mihnea in 1611 was the result of the latter's willingness to conform his policy as a ruling prince to the directives of the Sublime Porte. In fact, Mihnea enjoyed the trust of the Ottoman authorities to the extent that in 1616, five years after his first appointment to the Wallachian throne, he was transferred to Moldavia, where he reigned until 1619, with the mission to put back to order the restive boyars and smooth out their autonomist tendencies, which had been destabilising the situation in the country. Subsequently, he returned to Wallachia and ruled for three more years, after which he was succeeded by his son Alexander Coconul, who was appointed to the Wallachian throne, again with full Ottoman approval, in order to further cultivate the climate of internal conciliation, obedience and submission that Mihnea had brought about during his reign there. What still needs to be clarified, however, is the extent to which the process of migration and/or settlement of Greek-speaking Ottoman subjects to the Danubian principalities was related to the rather exceptional situation of semi-autonomous vassalage to the Porte that had been regulating the political landscape there since the fifteenth century. On the other hand, it should also be made clear in what precise way was the consolidation of that peculiar political situation enabled, advanced or facilitated by the prolonged exposure of the principalities to agents of Greek ethnic origin. These are essential questions that have not yet been adequately addressed by modern scholars either

results of this development were to become more obvious than ever before within a few decades, and especially during the crucial reigns of Șerban Cantacuzino (1678-1688) and Constantin Brâncoveanu (1688-1714), right on the verge of the complete transfer of the country's government into the hands of the Phanariot bureaucrats

But with Radu Mihnea we find ourselves back at the exact moment that set our exploration into the religious, political and socio-economic landscape of the late medieval and early modern Danubian states in motion. It should be recalled that the events narrated in the section of the *History of Wallachia* discussed in the previous issue of *The Historical Review* had occurred during none other than Mihnea's first reign (1611-1616), and this, as I see it, is by no means an insignificant detail. The specific passage in Matthew of Myra's chronicle not only offers a fairly accurate, if somewhat schematic, account of the basic anthropological patterns that regulated the rhythm and extent of the Greek diffusion in the principality in the early stages of the seventeenth century; it also stands, to the best of my knowledge, as the first written record of an almost materialised clash between the Greek-speaking population in Wallachia and the native aristocracy. Bărcan's conspiracy against Mihnea attests to the historicity and the far-reaching activity of a strong Greek element in the country and provides a useful frame of reference for understanding the extent and historical impact of this phenomenon not only in Matthew's time but also in the course of the ensuing decades.

The Romanian historian Eugen Stanescu was right to point out that the conflict between Mihnea and the boyar coalition is indicative of the emergence and consolidation of a new social and political reality in the principalities that was competitively imposing itself upon traditionally established local infrastructures, presenting the autochthonous nobility with serious challenges and resulting in the partial appropriation of its administrative and financial supremacy by agents of a different ethnic origin.<sup>98</sup> The specific event clearly represents a moment of social crisis which had forced the threatened Wallachian élite to assume a defensive attitude urgently instantiated as a planned coup of subversion and persecution. In fact, similar attempts were to be re-enacted on several different occasions throughout the pre-Phanariot period with varying degrees of success but without ever producing definitive

---

because of the considerable ideological load they still carry today or due to a frustrating lack of sufficient demographic, sociological and other pertinent data.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. his "Préphanariotes et phanariotes dans la vision de la société roumaine des XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles", in *Symposium L'époque phanariote*, pp. 348-349.

results or managing to prevent what their instigators dreaded most from eventually happening. Thus, the incident that had drawn Matthew's attention should not be understood as an isolated and spasmodic occurrence. On the contrary, it must be recognised as an eloquent manifestation of a long and dramatic process of inter-ethnic contact that was to reach a climactic level of intensity in the latter part of the seventeenth century.

That such an occurrence carried a considerable weight, exactly because it was indicative of shifting balances and changing realities in the social, political and financial order in the principality, is also confirmed by the interesting fact that all the relevant verses in the *History of Wallachia* are conspicuously absent in the Romanian redaction of the chronicle that was carried out by an otherwise unknown monk called Axinte in the first quarter of the eighteenth century and under the auspices of Nikolaos Mavrokordatos, the first Phanariot voivode of Wallachia (reg. 1715-1716 and 1719-1730).<sup>99</sup> To be sure, this is not the only case where Axinte left out segments of the original Greek text: according to Dan Simonesco's calculations, 545 verses were completely omitted in the Romanian rendition, while 700 were literally translated and 479 loosely paraphrased or reduced to a summary.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, the obliteration of the particular section in its entirety seems to be invested with a special significance which becomes clearer if the exclusion is understood in the context of the vigorous but delicate situation that was shaping up at precisely that point in the Danubian countries.

Indeed, Axinte embarked on the production of a Romanian version of Matthew's text at a time when a series of radical political developments in the principalities dictated more than ever before the strengthening and consolidation of those cultivated ties that had been facilitating the religious and socio-economic interaction between Greeks and Romanians, while the place and role of the old landed aristocracy was necessarily undergoing a process of redefinition in relation to the new Phanariot élite. Despite Matthew of Myra's careful phrasing and diplomatic neutrality throughout this focal section of his chronicle, the straightforward exposure of the destabilising tension between the Wallachian nobility and the rising Greek element, and especially his austere

---

<sup>99</sup> Dan Simonesco's discussion in his "Le chroniqueur Matthieu de Myre et une traduction ignorée de son 'Histoire'", *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 4 (1966), pp. 81-114, remains the only available source of information about this interesting rendition of Matthew's chronicle into Romanian; for issues of chronology and authorship, see esp. pp. 102 and 109 (note 13).

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 99

remarks on the latter's reproachable behaviour towards the indigenous inhabitants, could not have been included in a "translation" of the old but apparently still pertinent work commissioned by a cautious and highly experienced Phanariot ruler; a ruler whose groundbreaking appointment to the Wallachian throne had been the key move in the Sublime Porte's strategic reaction to the increasing unreliability and autonomist aspirations of the country's native voivodes.

But what separated Matthew of Myra and Radu Mihnea in the beginning of the seventeenth century from Axinte and Nikolaos Mavrokordatos in the beginning of the eighteenth was a critical period in the course of which the phenomena we have been discussing so far intensified radically, bearing extraordinary results and giving rise to an unprecedented situation of inter-ethnic mobility and fusion in the region north of the Danube. In fact, an updated, synthetic study of the complex and prolific nature of Greco-Romanian relations in precisely that period, the immediate pre-Phanariot era, would prove to be indispensable before we can claim to have acquired a substantial understanding of the historical forces in operation during the previous centuries, as well as of the unequalled symbiotic outburst that left its indelible marks on the next one, the century of the Phanariots, and beyond.

*Harvard University*