

## THE ROMANIANS AND THE FALL OF THE BLACK SEA UNDER OTTOMAN RULE

EUGEN DENIZE

The end of the fourteenth century and the first half of the fifteenth century were marked by the transformation of the Black Sea from a turning plate of the medieval European and Asian trade<sup>1</sup> into a trading area of local interest, even if this had no sizeable effects on the quantity or quality of trade.

By the end of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth century, a considerable increase in the weight held by the Black Sea ports in relation to the major commercial roads of Asia and Europe could be seen, which enabled Constantinople to recover part of the importance<sup>2</sup> it had lost after the disaster of 1204. This enhancement occurred especially in favor of the Genoese trade. When the Turks conquered Constantinople, the Black Sea, at least in points of economy, looked very much like a Genoese lake. The Genoese were especially headquartered in Crimea, at Caffa, Soldaia and Cembalo, but they were also trading at Vosporo, La Copa in the Kerci Strait, Matrega and Bactiarum, as well as in all the important ports of the Black Sea – Tana, Trebizond, Sinope, etc., and even in Moldavia, at Suceava<sup>3</sup>. The Genoese had fostered the creation of a sort of common market in the Black Sea region, not only by ensuring the development of relations between opposite shores of the Black Sea, but also by linking this internal sea to the Mediterranean basin and securing it an international trading role<sup>4</sup>.

However, in the fifteenth century, the Genoese colonies in the Black Sea region, created not as much through private initiative as through the efforts of the Genoese state, whose interest was especially focused on the West, would experience a general crisis, constantly aggravating and leading eventually to their complete disappearance in 1475. The causes of this crisis are multiple. They are related to the internal situation of Genoa, the political and economic situation of the geographic space in which the colonies had been set up, and the situation of the colonies proper, especially that of Caffa, as being the most important of them.

The general, economic and political background of the Black Sea area underwent considerable deterioration at the end of the fourteenth century and in the first half of the fifteenth century. Here, the Genoese colonies experienced the detrimental effects of the actions of the Chinese Emperor Yung-lo, who took over Indochina and whose fleets reached as far as Aden and Ormuz. This favored the maritime trading routes between the Far East and the Middle East to the detriment

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<sup>1</sup> M. Berza, *La Mer Noire à la fin du Moyen Âge*, in "Balcania", IV, 1941, pp. 409-435; Gh. Brătianu, *La Mer Noire, plaque tournante du trafic international à la fin du Moyen Âge*, in "Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen", XXI, 1944, pp. 36-69.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Verlinden, *Les routes méditerranéennes*, in "Bulletin. Association Internationale d'Études du Sud-Est Européen", XII, no. 1, 1974, pp. 30-31.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Heers, *Gênes au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1971, pp. 259-261.

<sup>4</sup> Geo Pistarino, *Genova e i Genovesi nel Mar Nero*, in idem, *I Gin dell'Oltremare*, Genova, 1988, pp. 129-130.

of the land routes favored by the Mongol expansion<sup>5</sup>, and was one of the causes of the fall of Sinope and Trapezunt, conquered by the Turks in 1461. Moreover, the Genoese lost Famagusta, in Cyprus, in 1464<sup>6</sup>. On the other hand, the repeated raids of Tamerlan to the north of the Black Sea, between 1387 and 1396, not only arrested the trade with the Far East but, by preventing the attempts to recreate the Golden Horde<sup>7</sup>, they also fostered the emergence of a cluster of states which became an ever more serious threat to the Genoese colonies. Only a large and powerful state could really appreciate the existence of such colonies. A smaller state was rather inclined to attempt to conquer them<sup>8</sup>. Concurrently, trade in the Black Sea ceased to be large scale trade between continents, based on silk, spices and precious metals, and gradually turned into regional trade, ruled by local commodities, such as wood, grain, fish, wax, wines, and especially slaves<sup>9</sup>, the latter holding a preponderant place<sup>10</sup>.

Under the circumstances, the recreation of the unity of the Ottoman Empire in 1413 by Sultan Mehmed I opened a real era for the conquest of Constantinople, as a prelude to the conquest of the entire Pontic basin. With extraordinary tenaciousness, the Ottoman sultans Mehmed I, Murad II, Mehmed II and Bayezid II crushed their enemies, consolidated and extended their power over the Balkan Peninsula, conquered Constantinople in 1453, defeated Venice in a long and decisive war carried out between 1463 and 1479, conquered Sinope and Trapezunt in 1461, then Caffa and all the other Genoese colonies in the Pontic space in 1475, and after securing the city ports in the south of Moldavia, Kilia and Cetatea Albă, in 1484, turned the Black Sea into a genuine “Turkish lake” for several centuries.

The conqueror of Constantinople, Sultan Mehmed II (1451–1481), feeling entitled to bring under his authority all the territories formerly belonging to the Byzantine Empire which he had crushed, formulated the fundamental elements of setting up a world monarchy, to which purpose he tried to unite in his autocratic

<sup>5</sup> For the role and place held by the Mongols in the development of trade in the Pontic area, Virgil Ciocîltan, *Mongolii și Marea Neagră în secolele XIII-XIV. Contribuția Cinghizhanizilor la transformarea bazinului pontic în placă turnantă a comerțului euro-asiatic*, București, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> R.S. Lopez, *Storia delle colonie genovesi nel Mediterraneo*, Bologna, 1938, pp. 426-427; Nicolae Bănescu, *Le declin de Famagouste. Fin du Royaume de Chypre. Notes et documents*, Bucarest, 1946, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> B.D. Grecov, A.I. Iacubovschi, *Hoarda de Aur și decăderea ei*, București, 1953; V. Ciocîltan, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

<sup>8</sup> R.S. Lopez, *op. cit.*, pp. 430-431.

<sup>9</sup> Marian Malowist, *Kaffa – kolonia genuenska na Krymie i problem wschodni w latach 1453-1475*, Warszawa, 1947, p. IV; J. Heers, *L'Occident au XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles. Aspects économiques et sociaux*, Paris, 1963, p. 143; Teofilo Ossian de Negri, *Storia di Genova*, Milano, 1968, pp. 598-599.

<sup>10</sup> For the slave trade in the Black Sea and Constantinopolis, Ch. Verlinden, *art. cit.*, p. 33. The slave trade with the Genoese of Caffa fell into a genuine triangle Tunisia–Alexandria–Caffa and back, but the dominant line of this trade was Caffa–Alexandria. The falling of this axis after 1475, the year of the conquest of Caffa by the Turks, was one of the causes which favored the conquest of Egypt by the same Turks, in 1517 (idem, *Le commerce en Mer Noire des débuts de l'époque byzantine au lendemain de la conquête de l'Égypte par les Ottomans (1517)*, Moscou, 1970, pp. 10-11).

hand the old Islamic Turkish traditions and the Roman ones<sup>11</sup>. The conquest of Constantinople earned Mehmed II the reputation of the most prestigious Moslem leader from the first four caliphs onward. Fully aware of the extraordinary political and moral importance of this victory in the Moslem world, the sultan capitalized on its religious character. Although least of all comparable to a fanatic Islamic despot, but rather exhibiting the traits of a renaissance ruler, Mehmed II never hesitated to channel the energy of the entire Islamic world towards the new Ottoman policy of world domination<sup>12</sup>.

From the viewpoint of the Christian world, the conquest of Constantinople could have and actually had detrimental consequences, in stark opposition to the benefits gained by the Turkish-Osman and Islamic world in general. This can explain the amazement and terror aroused in Christian Europe by the news<sup>13</sup>. The fall of the great town, no doubt turning into ruin, but holding nonetheless strategic value and the value of an unmatched symbol, was putting an end to all reasonable hopes of ever being able to drive the Turks out of Europe. It also meant a steady increase in the pressure exerted by the Ottomans over the entire Pontic space, which from a turning plate of international trade in the Middle Ages was at high risk of becoming, and eventually became a mere Turkish lake. From the economic, political and strategic points of view, the Ottoman Pontic policy was inseparably linked to the importance of the imperial Danube. In other words, the Pontic policy, and further on, to a certain extent, the Mediterranean policy were the fundamental elements of the Ottoman political and military system directed especially towards the middle Danube, against Central Europe. The Ottoman control over the Black Sea and the Romanian Danube was meant not only to bring under the exclusive authority of the Porte the economic wealth and strategic positions which had ensured the existence of Byzantium for centuries and had contributed to the flourishing of renaissance Italy, but also to stop or hinder the development of the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom, by gradually cutting off its trading routes to the East, and especially by weakening the political and economic structure of rival Hungary. Thus, the Ottomans stifled the Danubian trade of Hungary and threatened its land economy through repeated raids throughout the kingdom. It is believed that the settling of the Ottomans on the Danube shores, up to Belgrade, was a prelude to the

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<sup>11</sup> Halil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire. The Classical Age. 1300-1600*, London, 1973, pp. 23-30; idem, *The Place of the Ottoman-Turkish Empire in History*, in "Cultura Turcica", I, no. 1, 1963, pp. 57-58; Tahsin Gemil, *România și otomanii în secolele XIV-XVI*, București, 1991, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> Tahsin Gemil, *op. cit.*, p. 130. In Gheorghe Brătianu's opinion, the restoration of Byzantium to its imperial position did not occur in 1261, but rather in 1453 (Gh. Brătianu, *La question de l'approvisionnement de Constantinople à l'époque byzantine et ottomane*, in "Byzantion", V, 1929-1930, p. 102).

<sup>13</sup> Agostino Pertusi, *Ripercussioni della caduta di Costantinopoli: un esempio di interrelazioni culturali nel sec. XV tra il sud-est europeo, il mondo mediterraneo e quello pontico*, f. l., f. a., p. 8; Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire*, Edimburgh, 1966, p. 11; V. Grecu, *La chute de Constantinople dans la littérature populaire roumaine*, in "Byzantinoslavica", XIV, 1953, pp. 55-81.

victory of Mohács (1526), the Danubian basin being in this respect a genuine “branch” of the Black Sea<sup>14</sup>.

The fall of Constantinople under Ottoman domination also marked an unprecedented increase in the pressure exerted by the Turks on the Romanian space, especially on Wallachia and Moldavia, but also on Transylvania<sup>15</sup>. These bleak prospects were clearly seen by political leaders in the Romanian space, especially by the great figures in Romanian history, including Mircea the Elder, John Hunyadi, Vlad the Impaler, and Stephen the Great.

Mircea the Elder never hesitated to take sides in the internal strife for power in what had been left of the Ottoman Empire after the disaster of Ankara in 1402, while applying himself to turn to good account the Venetian-Ottoman antagonism<sup>16</sup>, all this in the hope to be able to give a finishing blow to the Ottoman presence in Europe, which nonetheless never happened.

The recreation of the Ottoman Empire and the resuming of its aggressive policy towards the Pontic area and the Lower Danube forced John Hunyadi to throw into the battle against the Turks a great part of the united potential of the Romanian Principalities and Hungary, while also trying to secure the collaboration of the Italian states professing an interest in this struggle. Thus, he established close links with the Papacy, after the victory of Belgrade in 1456 being proclaimed *the bravest athlete of Christ – fortissimus athleta Christi*<sup>17</sup> by Pope Calixt III, with Alfons V King of Aragon and of Naples<sup>18</sup>, with Venice<sup>19</sup>, and with Genoa<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, for a rather short period of time, between 1440 and 1444, he contributed to the establishment of a dynastic Polish-Hungarian union in the person of King Ladislas I of Hungary and III of Poland<sup>21</sup>, and to the promotion of genuine medieval Romanian state unity<sup>22</sup>, which provided him with considerable military

<sup>14</sup> Carl Max Kortepeter, *Ottoman Imperialism during the Reformation: Europe and the Caucasus*, London, New York, 1973, pp. 3-4; T. Gemil, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

<sup>15</sup> Eugen Denize, *Impactul căderii Constantinopolului asupra spațiului românesc*, in vol. *Închinare lui Petre Ș. Năsturel la 80 de ani*, Brăila, 2003, pp. 119-132.

<sup>16</sup> Idem, *Le relazioni ottomano-veneziane ed i Romeni. Dalla battaglia di Nicopoli alla caduta di Salonicco (1396-1430)*, in vol. *L'Italia e L'Europa centro-orientale attraverso i secoli. Miscellanea di studi di storia politico-diplomatica, economica e dei rapporti culturali*, edited by Cristian Luca, Gianluca Masi e Andrea Piccardi, Brăila, Venezia, 2004, pp. 81-94.

<sup>17</sup> Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, II, 2, pp. 61-62; Ioan Lupaș, *Voievodul transilvan Ioan Huniade – „Fortissimus athleta Christi”*, in idem, *Studii, conferințe și comunicări istorice*, vol. II, Cluj, 1940, pp. 79-101.

<sup>18</sup> Eugen Denize, *Relațiile lui Iancu de Hunedoara cu Alfons al V-lea de Aragon și lupta antiotomană la mijlocul secolului al XV-lea*, in “Revista de Istorie”, t. 38, 1985, no. 8, pp. 782-795.

<sup>19</sup> Idem, *Relațiile lui Iancu de Hunedoara cu Veneția*, in vol. *România în istoria universală*, II, 1, Iași, 1987, pp. 197-211.

<sup>20</sup> Idem, *Iancu de Hunedoara, genovezii și expansiunea otomană*, in “Studii și materiale de istorie medie”, t. XIV, 1996, pp. 19-29.

<sup>21</sup> Vilmos Fraknoi, *A Hunyadiak és a Jagellók kora (1440-1526)*, in *A Magyar nemzet története*, vol. IV, Budapest, 1896, pp. 43-68.

<sup>22</sup> Francisc Pall, *Intervenția lui Iancu de Hunedoara în Țara Românească și Moldova în anii 1447-1448*, in “Studii. Revistă de Istorie”, t. 16, 1963, no. 5, pp. 1049-1072; idem, *De nouveau sur l'action de Ianco de Hunedoara (Hunyadi) en Valachie pendant l'année 1447*, in “Revue Roumaine d'Histoire”, t. XV, 1976, no. 3, pp. 447-463; idem, *Encore une fois sur l'action de Ianco de*

forces, with which he attempted not only to hinder the Ottoman expansion towards Central Europe and the Pontic region, but also to oust the Turks from Europe. In my opinion, John Hunyadi was the last genuine crusader produced by Christian Europe, and his anti-Ottoman expeditions can be considered the last classical medieval crusades, heralding the beginnings of the late crusade and of the so-termed “holy leagues” directed by the Christian powers against the Ottoman Empire.

Being a highly skilled military commander and enjoying support from the entire Romanian space, from the lower and middle nobility in Transylvania and Hungary, John Hunyadi was able to carry out a large-scale offensive policy against the Ottoman Empire. His winter campaigns of 1443 and 1444, the so-termed “long campaign”, the campaigns ending in the battles of Varna in 1444, Kossovopoljje in 1448, and Belgrade in 1456, as well as other campaigns of smaller scale, meant nonetheless to fuel the conflictual state with the Turks and to demonstrate that the Romanians were ready to oppose their expansionist ambitions, are widely known.

Unfortunately, lack of adequate support from the western powers, promising lavishly and delivering little or nothing, prevented John Hunyadi from attaining his major objective, namely the expulsion of the Turks from Europe. Although he succeeded in hindering the Ottoman expansion towards Central Europe, he was unable to defend Constantinople efficiently or prevent the launching of the final stage (1453–1484) in the conquest of the Pontic basin by the sultans who had taken headquarters in the former capital of the Byzantine emperors.

Well-aware of the Ottoman military preparations against Constantinople, John Hunyadi did not choose to lead a policy of expectative or inactivity, a policy that would have been actually highly uncharacteristic of him. Unfortunately, his offensive military capacity was far lesser than before, and the internal disagreements in the Hungarian Kingdom, generated mainly by the higher nobility, forced him into taking strictly defensive actions on the anti-Ottoman front, directly linked with defending Hungary and the Romanian Principalities. Despite this, John Hunyadi tried to help Byzantium, also hoping that the Italian powers, especially Venice and Genoa, who had a direct interest in free navigation through the Straits, would give assistance in their turn.

In the autumn of 1452 John Hunyadi’s envoys<sup>23</sup> sailed to Constantinople, in answer to the appeal of the Byzantine emperor<sup>24</sup>. They promised assistance in

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*Hunedoara (Hunyadi) en Valachie pendant l’année 1447*, in *ibidem*, t. XVII, 1978, no. 4, pp. 443-453.

<sup>23</sup> *Ubertini Pasculi Constantinopoleos libri IV*, cartea III, lines 462-472, ed. A. Elissen, *Analekten der mittelung neugriechischen literatur*, III, Leipzig, appendage, p. 51; see also Gyula Moravcsik, *Ungarisch-Byzantinische Beziehungen zur Zeit des Falles von Byzanz*, in “Acta antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungarica”, II, fasc. 3-4, pp. 355 and in *Studia Byzantina*, Budapesta, 1967, pp. 361-381; Fr. Pall, *Byzance à la veille de sa chute et Janco de Hunedoara (Hunyadi)*, in “Byzantinoslavica”, XXX, 1969, p. 119; Camil Mureşan, *Iancu de Hunedoara*, second edition, Bucureşti, 1968, p. 180.

<sup>24</sup> L. Brehier, *Le monde byzantin*, I, Paris, 1948, pp. 514-515.

exchange for a port on the Black Sea coast, either Selimbria or Mesembria<sup>25</sup>. After a first refusal, the emperor secretly consented to hand over Mesembria to John Hunyadi, with the latter taking it over as a dependent possession, as if he had been a subject of the basileus<sup>26</sup>. However, the donation act never reached John Hunyadi, who most probably thought that the Emperor had decided to keep Mesembria after all<sup>27</sup>. This port was necessary to John Hunyadi, as it was lying in an area still dominated by the Byzantine, until February or March 1453, and the reinforcement troops could have been disembarked there, to subsequently reach Constantinople on land.

On 16 January 1453, at John Hunyadi's repeated requests, the new king of Hungary, Ladislas V the Posthumous, answered the basileus' appeal in his turn. However, his answer was vague, made in general terms, and lacking any positive offer<sup>28</sup>. At the beginning of the same year, Ladislas V the Posthumous and John Hunyadi wrote to Pope Nicholas V to inform him that they were ready to participate in an anti-Ottoman crusade<sup>29</sup>. However, the only thing John Hunyadi was able to do was to send an envoy to Sultan Mehmed II in April 1453, demanding that the siege to Constantinople should be raised, and threatening otherwise to break the treaty signed the previous year<sup>30</sup>. The failure of this attempt determined Ladislas V, in the last weeks of the siege to the Byzantine capital, to make a new request that the sultan should make peace with the emperor, under the threat that a war declaration would follow<sup>31</sup>. Again, nothing was gained of it, the offensive potential of Hungary being actually null at that time. However, John Hunyadi, with the assistance of the Wallachian voivode Vladislav II, managed to send a weapon transport from Braşov to the garrison of Chilia, defended by Stoica Ghizdavic<sup>32</sup>. He was no doubt fearing that the Turks, like in 1448<sup>33</sup>, would attempt a simultaneous attack on Constantinople and Chilia, which in fact never happened.

<sup>25</sup> Georgios Sphrantzes, *Memorii. 1401-1477*, in *Fontes Historiae Daco-Romanae*, vol. IV, *Scriptores et acta imperii byzantini saeculorum IV-XV*, ed. Haralambie Mihăescu, Radu Lăzărescu, Nicolae Şerban Tanaşoca, Tudor Teoteoi, Bucureşti, 1982, p. 441; C. Mureşan, *op. cit.*, p. 180; Fr. Pall, *Byzance à la veille de sa chute...*, p. 119.

<sup>26</sup> G. Sphrantzes, *op. cit.*, p. 441.

<sup>27</sup> Rodolphe Guiland, *Les appels de Constantin XII Dragases à l'Occident pour sauver Constantinople*, in idem, *Etudes byzantines*, Paris, 1959, p. 142; Fr. Pall, *Byzance à la veille de sa chute...*, p. 120.

<sup>28</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des croisades au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. II, Paris, 1899, p. 512.

<sup>29</sup> *A History of the Crusades*, Kenneth M. Setton general editor, vol. III, *The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, edited by Harry W. Hazard, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1975, p. 101; R. Guiland, *Les appels de Constantin XI Paléologue à Rome et à Venise*, in "Byzantinoslavica", XIV, 1953, pp. 226-244.

<sup>30</sup> C. Mureşan, *op. cit.*, p. 180; Fr. Pall, *Stăpânirea lui Iancu de Hunedoara asupra Chiliei și problema ajutorării Bizanţului*, pp. 622-633.

<sup>31</sup> Fr. Pall, *Byzance à la veille de sa chute...*, p. 120.

<sup>32</sup> Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV,1, p. 38; Fr. Pall, *Byzance à la veille de sa chute...*, p. 123.

<sup>33</sup> Matei Cazacu, Petre Ş. Năsturel, *Une démonstration navale des turcs devant Constantinople et la bataille de Kilia (1448)*, in "Journal des savants", juillet-septembre 1978, pp. 197-210.

Even if John Hunyadi had had the necessary military potential, his project to assist Byzantium would have been unfeasible. He did not have a fleet, the Turks were already controlling the Bosphorus, and he himself had begun in March-April 1453 negotiations with Milan and Florence for a possible intervention in Friul, against Venice<sup>34</sup>. Moreover, despite his intercessions by the sultan, the king of Hungary Ladislas V the Posthumous seemed to be rather considering in the first half of 1453 an attack against the Hussites, and had even instructed John Hunyadi to begin military preparations to this effect<sup>35</sup>. This would explain why, until May, John Hunyadi was in Vienna, Bratislava, Győr, and Buda, and only subsequently, when it was still unclear what the Turks would do after the conquest of Constantinople, in Banat and Transylvania, to prepare for a possible Ottoman attack (Timișoara, Caransebeș, Hațeg, Hunedoara, Vinț, Turda, Cluj, Bistrița, Dej, and Lipova)<sup>36</sup>. Nonetheless, one should note that on 3 May 1453, in the Turkish camp laying siege to Constantinople, rumor spread about the Venetian fleet sailing to the Byzantine capital, and about preparations for an expedition on land by John Hunyadi<sup>37</sup>. This rumor, which was never confirmed, shows what the Turks feared most at that time.

Shortly after the conquest of Constantinople, the Turks took absolute control of navigation through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, and embarked upon the final stage in their policy to conquer the entire basin of the Black Sea, a goal to be reached three decades later, in 1484, when the last major Christian bastions, the Moldavian fortresses of Chilia and Cetatea Albă, were eventually conquered<sup>38</sup>. The Ottoman control over the Straits and over navigation throughout the Black Sea served several purposes<sup>39</sup>. It was meant to ensure complete security to the link between Anatolia and Rumelia, remove the threat of a surprise attack on the capital, enable the provisioning of Istanbul, put an end and replace the economic and political domination of the maritime Italian states, and bring to the Ottoman treasury the benefits from the trading activity in the region, in which the tributary states enjoyed a preferential statute. For all these reasons, in the summer of 1453, the riparian states in the Black Sea region were given ultimatums to submit to the new ruler who had taken up residence on the Bosphorus banks.

<sup>34</sup> N. Iorga, *op. cit.*, II, p. 513; Fr. Pall, *Relazioni di Giovanni di Hunedoara con l'Italia negli anni 1452-1453 (Documenti inediti preceduti da uno studio)*, I, in "Revue des Etudes Sud-Est Européennes", t. XIII, 1975, no. 3, p. 459.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Held, *Hunyadi. Legend and Reality*, Columbus University Press, New York, 1985, p. 147.

<sup>36</sup> Adrian A. Rusu, *Întregiri și interpretări privitoare la itinerariile lui Iancu de Hunedoara*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie A.D. Xenopol", t. XXVII, 1990, p. 183.

<sup>37</sup> The testimony of Leonardo de Chios, archbishop of Mitilene, in a letter to Pope Nicholas V (A. Pertusi, *La caduta di Costantinopoli*, vol. I, *Le testimonianze dei contemporanei*, Verona, 1976, p. LXXIX and pp. 154-155).

<sup>38</sup> Șerban Papacostea, *Premisele politice ale dominației economice a Imperiului otoman în spațiul Mării Negre (1453-1484)*, in "Revista Istorică", new series, t. 10, 1999, nos 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> Halil Inalcik, *The Question of the Closing of the Black Sea under the Ottomans*, in "Arheion Pontou", 35, 1979, pp. 107-108; T. Gemil, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

If the fall of Constantinople had serious consequences for the Italians, not so much for the Venetians as for the Genoese, affecting their source of revenue from trading activities, but posing no threat to their independence and state existence, the same event had serious detrimental effects on the Romanian Principalities, especially on Moldavia and Wallachia, being liable to affect their territorial integrity and, possibly, their independence.

For the Romanian Principalities, the fall of Constantinople marked the beginning of a historical process of erosion of their position in their relations with the Ottoman Empire. As already mentioned, shortly after the conquest of the Byzantine capital, in the summer of 1453, the riparian states in the Black Sea region were summoned to submit to the victorious sultan. However, the sultan's ultimatum was rejected in a first stage both by Moldavia and by Caffa, Mangop, as well as Sinope and Trapezunt, all these states being still unaware of the fact that the Turks were in full process of consolidating their naval power<sup>40</sup>. Under the circumstances, in 1454, a fleet of 56 Turkish vessels launched an unsuccessful attack on Cetatea Albă, to subsequently raid the northern shores of the Black Sea and attack Caffa and other Genoese colonies in the area<sup>41</sup>. Under the Ottoman military pressure, the riparian states in the Black Sea region, one by one, were forced into paying the tribute demanded by the sultan. Thus, Caffa paid in 1454 a tribute of 1,600 ducats, to be raised to 3,000 ducats the following year, and to 4,000 ducats in 1470<sup>42</sup>. Moldavia in her turn, abandoned by Casimir IV's Poland and engaged in a decisive war against the Teutonic Knights, yielded to the payment of a tribute of 2,000 golden zloties in 1455–1456<sup>43</sup>. Mangop began to pay the haratch before Moldavia, Sinope in August 1455, and Trapezunt in 1456<sup>44</sup>.

Even if of lesser military importance, this first Ottoman naval demonstration wielded serious political consequences. The Ottoman-Tatar collaboration, the intervention of the Crimean Khan Hagi Ghiray, essential to forcing Caffa into the

<sup>40</sup> Andrew C. Hess, *The Evolution of the ottoman Seaborne Empire in the Age of the oceanic Discoveries. 1453-1525*, in "American Historical Review", LXXV, 1970, 7, pp. 1892-1919.

<sup>41</sup> Mustafa A. Mehmet, *Din raporturile Moldovei cu Imperiul otoman în a doua jumătate a veacului al XV-lea*, in "Studii. Revistă de Istorie", t. 13, 1960, no. 5, p. 165; idem, *La politique ottomane à l'égard de la Moldavie et du khanat de Crimée vers la fin du règne du sultan Mehmed II „le Conquérant”*, in "Revue Roumaine d'Histoire", t. XIII, 1974, no. 3, p. 518; Amedeo Vigna, *Codice diplomatico delle colonie tauro-liguri durante la signoria dell'Ufficio di S. Giorgio (1453-1475)*, I, Genova, 1868, pp. 87-89; 112-113; Gh. Brătianu, *La Mer Noire. Des origines à la conquête ottomane*, Monachii, 1969, pp. 314-315; Ș. Papacostea, *art. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> W. Heyd, *Histoire du Commerce de Levant*, vol. II, Leipzig, 1886, pp. 383-399; M. Malowist, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-160; M.A. Mehmet, *La politique ottomane...*, p. 518; A. Vigna, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 118-121, 298-300 and 660; Ș. Papacostea, *art. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Șerban Papacostea, *La Moldavie Etat tributaire de l'Empire ottoman au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle: le cadre international des rapports établis en 1455-1456*, in "Revue Roumaine d'Histoire", t. XIII, no. 3, pp. 445-461; Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Moldova în "Casa Păcii". Pe marginea izvoarelor privind primul secol de relații moldo-otomane*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie A.D. Xenopol", XVII, 1980, pp. 633-635; Franz Babinger, *Cel dintâi bir al Moldovei către sultan*, in vol. *Fraților Alexandru și Ion I. Lapedatu la împlinirea vârstei de 60 de ani*, București, 1936, pp. 29-37.

<sup>44</sup> Ș. Papacostea, *Premisele...*, p. 20.

payment of the tribute<sup>45</sup>, and especially the reserved attitude of Poland, who was engaged on other battle fronts, and the lack of reaction from Genoa forced the riparian states in the Black Sea area to accept the payment of the tribute demanded by the sultan. In exchange for this, both Caffa and Moldavia were given deeds of commercial privileges.

While this major Genoese trading center in Crimea had especially economic value to the Porte, its political value deriving exclusively from the opportunity to attract the Tatar khan into the Ottoman sphere of influence, the subjection of Moldavia to the payment of the haratch was from the very beginning of political consequence. Without neglecting the value of Cetatea Albă as a point of commercial transit, one should note that the attraction of Moldavia into the sphere of influence of the Porte marked not only the introduction of the Ottoman control at the Danube Mouths and in the north-Pontic basin, but also opened the way to the undermining of the anti-Ottoman potential of Christian Europe, gathered at that time mainly around John Hunyadi. Throughout his life, John Hunyadi would strive heroically to lessen the possible impact of the fall of Constantinople on the Romanian Principalities. This can be seen in the apparently paradoxical fact that Moldavia, even if further away from the Ottoman Empire, had more to suffer from the fall of the Byzantine capital, possibly also owing to the fact that she was a riparian state and had had no obligations towards the Porte until then. On the contrary, the statute of Wallachia, established through the Hungarian-Ottoman treaty of 1451-1452<sup>46</sup>, suffered no alteration until 1462, more exactly until the fall of Vlad the Impaler.

The fall of Constantinople, the consolidation of the Ottoman power in Europe and the deterioration of the relations with the Ottoman Empire to the detriment of the Romanian Principalities forced the power factors in the Romanian space to take the necessary steps so as to slow down the process, if not to stop it altogether.

John Hunyadi wrested several victories against the Turks in 1454, and in 1456, in Belgrade, he managed to defeat the conqueror of Constantinople in such a way as to hinder the Ottoman advance towards Central Europe until 1521, thus giving the western powers, especially the Habsburgs, the necessary respite in order to consolidate themselves and become able to put a final stop to the Ottoman advance into Central and Western Europe. In any case, Transylvania would elude direct subordination to the Ottoman Porte until 1541, when after the disappearance of the Hungarian Kingdom she became an autonomous principality liable for an annual tribute to the sultan in Constantinople.

While in Moldavia the fall of Constantinople had immediate repercussions, as already pointed out above, in Wallachia the effects were felt almost a decade

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<sup>45</sup> Alan Fisher, *The Crimean Tatars*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford, California, 1978, pp. 4-5.

<sup>46</sup> N. Iorga, *Acte și fragmente cu privire la istoria românilor*, vol. III, București, 1897, pp. 23-27; idem, *Privilegiul lui Mahomed al II-lea pentru Pera (1 iunie 1453)*, in "Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice", second series, t. XXXVI, 1913-1914, pp. 88-91; C. Mureșan, *op. cit.*, p. 176; T. Gemil, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

later, in 1462. This can be explained by the fact that Wallachia was part of a specific system of relations established between Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, she was subject to double suzerainty in relation to the two powers, and had well-established financial obligations that could not be changed abruptly, without the agreement of both parties.

Thus, it is only in 1462, when John Hunyadi had long departed and his son, Mathias Corvinus, was leading a hesitating policy towards the Turks, that the relations between Wallachia and the Porte were rethought. This marked an increase in the dependency of Wallachia upon the Porte, and the newly established relations remained valid, with slight alterations, until 1540<sup>47</sup>.

Wishing from the beginning of his reign to limit drastically, if not even eliminate the asymmetry in the relations between his country and the Ottoman Empire, Vlad the Impaler not only challenged the sultan in 1459 by not paying the tribute, which situation was presented as a consequence of his war with the Saxons of southern Transylvania, but was eventually forced to accept a decisive confrontation in 1462, at quite an unsuitable time, when the anti-Ottoman coalition of the eastern powers had already been defeated, whereas the coalition of the western powers had not yet taken shape, and when the decisive Venetian-Ottoman war of 1463-1479 had not been launched yet<sup>48</sup>.

The importance of the Ottoman expedition of 1462, the presence at its leadership of the conqueror of Constantinople himself, the victories wrested in the previous years in his presence and under his command (Moreea – 1458, 1460, Serbia – 1459, Sinope and Trapezunt – 1461), lead us to believe that Sultan Mehmed II had the clear intention to turn Wallachia into a pashalik and advance the border of the Ottoman Empire from the Danube line to the Carpathians<sup>49</sup>. The sultan had the prudence to bring along Radu the Handsome, Vlad the Impaler's brother, whom he could present as a credible substitute to the Wallachian throne, suitable both to him and to the autochthonous political élites, in case the project of turning Wallachia into a pashalik failed. The "treason" of the boyars would occur exactly when the sultan had failed in his attempt to turn the country into a pashalik, which would have meant their elimination as a political élite, and had withdrawn south of the Danube, leaving behind Radu the Handsome. Once rid of the greater evil, the boyars chose, and could not do otherwise, the lesser evil, namely to replace Vlad the Impaler with Radu the Handsome, and to establish new relations with the Ottoman Empire.

However, in 1462, the political circumstances bestowed a concrete and restrictive character on the protection exerted by the Ottoman sultan over Wallachia. In addition to the almost forcible enthronement of the new prince, a consequential fact was that Mihaloglu Ali bey and his raiders (*akinci*) remained

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<sup>47</sup> Ștefan Ștefănescu, *Țara Românească de la Basarab „Întemeietorul” până la Mihai Viteazul*, București, 1970, p. 117.

<sup>48</sup> For all these, see Eugen Denize, *Vlad Țepeș, lupta antiotomană și Veneția. Câteva considerații*, in "Revista Istorică", new series, t. 6, 1995, nos 3-4, pp. 371-387.

<sup>49</sup> Sergiu Iosipescu, *Invaziile otomane în ținuturile carpato-dunăreano-pontice (sec. XIV-XVI)*, in "Studii și materiale de muzeografie și istorie militară", 13, 1980, pp. 151-172.

posted in Wallachia, in order to ensure the authority held by Radu the Handsome<sup>50</sup>. This marked not only the beginning of a process of direct subordination of the Wallachian princes to the sultan's authority, but also the exertion of military and political control by the borderline beys on the action taken by the prince and the boyars. As a clear indication of the new political and legal statute of Wallachia, Radu the Handsome minted a silver coin very similar in legend and weight with the Ottoman akça<sup>51</sup>, whereas Vlad the Impaler had minted a coin of the *ban* type<sup>52</sup>. Indeed, to begin with the second half of the fifteenth century, as an economic effect of the Ottoman superiority in the Pontic area and in the area of the Romanian Danube, the Ottoman aspre (akça) became a genuine unit of measure in monetary exchanges not only in Wallachia, but in Moldavia and Transylvania as well<sup>53</sup>.

As a sign of the increased political subordination occurring after 1462, the haratch of Wallachia was raised to 12,000 ducats<sup>54</sup>, and the Wallachian princes and their contingents began to take part in the Ottoman expeditions on a regular basis.

Moldavia, forced into paying the haratch to the sultan as a direct consequence of the fall of Constantinople, was during the reign of Stephen the Great the fiercest enemy of the Ottoman Empire in the Pontic area and the Lower Danube. Moldavia had direct exit to the Black Sea through the important fortress of Cetatea Albă, and further strengthened her positions in the Lower Danube by conquering Chilia<sup>55</sup>, in January 1465. Stephen the Great carried out a consistent policy of alliances in the Pontic area with Mangop, Kiev, Uzun Hasan, etc., with the purpose to counterbalance the Ottoman expansionism in the area<sup>56</sup>. However, he was unable to settle an efficient anti-Ottoman alliance with the Genoese of Caffa<sup>57</sup>. To begin with 1470, he acted energetically so as to attract Wallachia on a

<sup>50</sup> Aurel Decei, *Istoria Imperiului otoman până la 1656*, București, 1978, p. 118.

<sup>51</sup> Matei Cazacu, *L'impact ottoman sur les Pays Roumains et ses incidences monétaires (1452-1504)*, in "Revue Roumaine d'Histoire", t. XII, 1973, no. 1, p. 188.

<sup>52</sup> Octavian Iliescu, *Vlad l'Empereur et le droit monétaire*, in ibidem, t. XVIII, 1979, no. 1, pp. 107-131.

<sup>53</sup> Idem, *Un tezaur de aspri turcești de la începuturile secolului al XVI-lea găsit în București*, in "Studii și cercetări de numismatică", III, 1960, p. 307; Aurel Golimas, *Limitele cronologice ale reformei monetare a lui Petru Aron*, in "Buletinul Societății Numismatice Române", LXX-LXXIV, 1976-1980, pp. 321-330.

<sup>54</sup> T. Gemil, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> Grigore Ureche, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, ed. P.P. Panaitescu, second edition, București, 1958, p. 92; P.P. Panaitescu, *Legăturile moldo-polone în secolul XV și problema Chilieii*, in "Romanoslavica", III, 1958, p. 111; S. Iosipescu, *Ștefan cel Mare – coordonate de strategie pontică*, in "Revista de Istorie", t. 35, 1982, nos 5-6, pp. 645-647.

<sup>56</sup> Eugen Denize, *Veneția, Țările Române și ofensiva otomană după căderea Constantinopolului (1453-1479)*, in "Revista Istorică", new series, t. V, 1994, nos 11-12, pp. 1157-1181; Jean Ciută, *Politica matrimonială a lui Ștefan cel Mare*, in "Carpica", XXVI, 1997, 2, pp. 39-41; Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Alianțe dinastice ale domnilor Moldovei în secolele XIV-XVI*, in vol. *Românii în istoria universală*, II, 1, Iași, 1987, pp. 695-696; P. Cancel, *Data epistolei lui Uzun Hasan către Ștefan cel Mare și misiunea lui Isak-beg. Parte din "Relațiile lui Ștefan cel Mare cu Roma, Veneția și Genua"*, București, 1912, 40 pp.

<sup>57</sup> Șerban Papacostea, *Caffa et la Moldavie face à l'expansion ottomane (1453-1484)*, in *Colocviul român-italian "Genovezii la Marea Neagră în secolele XIII-XV"*, București, 27-28 March 1975, București, 1977, pp. 131-153.

common anti-Ottoman battle front, and towards the end of 1474 he began a large-scale confrontation with the Ottoman Empire<sup>58</sup>. Unfortunately, due to constant lack of support from his allies, from Poland, Hungary or the Italian states, Stephen the Great was unable to prevent the unavoidable, namely the conquest of Chilia and Cetatea Albă by the Turks in the summer of 1484 and, concurrently, the turning of the Black Sea into an area of exclusive Ottoman domination.

Even if unable to prevent the fall of the Pontic area and of the Lower Danube under Ottoman domination, the Romanians, through their war effort full of self-sacrifice, were able to postpone this process and offer the states in Central and Western Europe the necessary respite to find the efficient methods and means to arrest the Ottoman expansionism once and for all. On the other hand, the establishment of the Ottoman domination in these regions had considerable detrimental effects on the local states and on the entire Romanian space. Several such states (Caffa, Mangop, Sinope, Trapezunt, and Hungary) lost their independence, while others, with the Pontic region definitely taken out of the great routes of world trade, were deprived of their traditional contacts with the East and of the important deriving benefits, which led to a weakening of the central power, an increase in the centrifugal tendencies of the boyar and aristocratic élites, the onset of a genuine process of re-feudalization and, eventually, the failure to embark upon modernization. While in Western Europe various phenomena were heralding ever more clearly the modern world, especially those related to the Renaissance and the Reform, in the eastern and southeastern regions of the continent, the Romanian space included, economic, political and social stagnation was predominant, together with the unending strife for power among boyar factions interested in promoting their own interests rather than the interests of the state, the Ottoman Empire itself proving to be unable to face the challenges of the modern world. The closure of the Black Sea by the Turks had negative and long-term consequences in all regards, the most important of them being most probably the failure to embark upon modernization, the effects of which are still experienced nowadays.

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<sup>58</sup> Eugen Denize, *Ștefan cel Mare și luptele cu turcii. O nouă abordare*, in "Studii și materiale de istorie medie", t. XIX, 2001, pp. 115-128.