

ON THE MEDIEVAL URBAN ECONOMY IN WALLACHIA

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Abstract

The present study focuses on the background of the medieval urban economy in Wallachia. Townspeople earned most of their income through trade. Acting as middlemen in the trade between the Levant and Central Europe, the merchants in Brăila, Târgoviște, Câmpulung, București or Târgșor became involved in trading goods that were local or had been brought from beyond the Carpathians or the Black Sea. Raw materials were the goods of choice, and Wallachia had vast amounts of them: salt, cereals, livestock or animal products, skins, wax, honey; mostly imported were expensive cloth or finer goods, much sought after by the local rulers and boyars.

An analysis of the documents indicates that crafts were only secondary, witness the many raw goods imported: fine cloth (brought specifically from Flanders), weapons, tools. Products gained by practicing various crafts were sold, covering the food and clothing demand for townspeople and the rural population. As was the case with Moldavia, Wallachia stood out by its vintage wine, most of it coming from vineyards neighbouring towns. The study also deals with the ethnicity of the merchants present on the Wallachia market. Tradesmen from local towns were joined by numerous Transylvanians (Brașov, Sibiu), but also Balkans (Ragussa) or Poles (Lviv). The Transylvanian ones enjoyed some privileges, such as tax exemptions or reduced customs duties.

Key words: regional history; medieval trade; charters of privilege; merchants; craftsmen; Wallachia

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1. Introduction

The present study will look into the development of medieval urban economy in Wallachia, taking as its timeframe the 14th-16th centuries. The urban centres south of the Carpathians evolved in an unstable political climate. The throne was subject to almost constant competition, with only few longer reigns (such as that of Mircea the Old) having avoided this true curse, which brought along uncertainty and instability. Also, the frequent intermissions of neighbouring powers (Hungary, the Ottoman Empire) in the affairs of Wallachia impacted negatively the urban economy. As this study will show, this economy was grounded in trade, and towns in this area had flourished into true intermediaries between the centres of Central Europe, Transylvania, and South-Danubian land. Crafts were only secondary in nature, and, where agriculture was concerned, only viticulture was its

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most popular branch. Our study will look into every above-mentioned component of urban economy.

2. Trade relations with Transylvanian towns

Trade was at the foundation of town development in the 14th century and continued to be a major economic component until the dawn of modern times. Preserved sources limit our perception on town economy, since they provide information exclusively relating to external trade. The first half of the 14th century sees one alternate route of the road linking Hungary to the Black Sea and the Byzantium stabilize. After crossing Transylvania and reaching Brașov, this alternate route would cross the mountains at Câmpulung, where it split: the main road (*via Braylan*) reached the Brăila port by the Danube, crossing Târgoviște, Târgșor, Gherghița, Buzău; one secondary road crossed Argeș, Pitești, Slatina and Turnu, where it crossed the Danube to Bulgaria at Nikopol; from Slatina, travellers could enter Oltenia, at Vidin [*Documenta*, D, I, 86]. By controlling the southern Moldavian region, the rulers of Wallachia also gained control over another road linking Brașov to the Black Sea. This road would cross the mountains via the Oituz pass, the most significant among areas east of the Carpathians and Transylvania. It would then descend on the valley of the Trotuș towards Putna, Tecuci, probably Olteni and Galați, up to the port of Kilia. The rulers of Moldavia and Wallachia fought over this road and the area it crossed for several decades (around 1420-1473). It was ultimately Wallachia that lost the battle [Papacostea, 2007, 13-28]. Trade with Transylvania made the urban economy peak in Wallachia between the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th. The waiving of Brăila by the Ottomans (1538-1540) was the effigy of a new crisis, that compounded the effects of the religious Reform and other factors that were a negative influence on the development of towns in Wallachia.

Trade relations with Transylvanian towns were established, as the ruler of Wallachia took his vassal oath to the king of Hungary, Louis of Anjou. The latter made considerable political efforts to expand control over the mouths of the Danube. Although his plan was not as successful as he deemed it to be, some actions had long-term consequences. Among them, the 1368 privilege. The king had tried, ever since 1358, to ensure customs liberties for merchants in Brașov who travelled to the Danube. We are not aware of any effect the document issued then had in Wallachia, which held control over land in which merchants had been granted liberties [*Documenta*, D, I, 72]. Ten years later, negotiations set new rules for the merchants of Brașov (1368). They were granted tax exemptions for trade undertaken in Wallachia, as well as for trade with Vidin (by eliminating the Slatina customs). However, they were forced to pay the Câmpulung customs, one of the major markets of the country. Until the reign of Mircea the Old, trade and customs relations with the inhabitants of Brașov were changed again. Radu I or Dan I modified the privilege, introducing new customs duties. The document that contained these modifications has been lost to the passage of the time, but we have its later reinstatements, from 1412-1413 on [*Documenta*, D, I, 191; 197]. The Câmpulung customs house was eliminated, but taxes had to be paid for certain products nearby, at the stronghold of Dâmbovița, and at Rucăr as well. Taxes on fish were added in Brăila, Târgșor, Târgoviște and the stronghold of Dâmbovița. Another provision stated that the compensation by shared responsibility for members of the community was lifted and replaced by individual responsibility. Whoever had a debt was to find their debtor and could not get their money back off one of their fellow citizens. The ruler was to settle disputes over trade, in case of his subjects, and the rulers of Brașov for their own [*Documenta*, D, I,

217]. Along with Wallachian privileges, Braşov had gained in 1369 from King Louis staple right, as well as monopoly for wax brought from south of the Carpathians and the freedom to take merchandise to Wien [*Documente Hurmuzaki*, I/2, 146]. Staple right initially applied only to Polish and German merchants, who were joined in the former part of the 15th century at the latest by those arriving from Wallachia. The first law that requires the last group to sell their goods in Braşov is dated 1468 [*Documente Hurmuzaki*, XV/1, 69]. These measures effected Wallachian trade, since they granted Braşov (and Sibiu as well) control over products taken south of the mountains, as well as over those entering Transylvania. There was a negative impact. Prices varied by their origin: they increased for exported goods and were low for those entering Transylvania. It also hindered the freedom to travel in Transylvania for merchants from Wallachian towns.

The staple right was no uncommon procedure in the Middle Ages, but it sometimes sparked real trade wars. Hungarian towns faced the same issue in the former part of the 14th century, when Wien was granted staple right. King Charles Robert retaliated by enacting limitations on trade with Austria. This measure was not supported by Louis, privileges granted to Viennese merchants being extended [Pach, 1975, 296]. In their turn, to counteract the negative effects of the staple right for Braşov, Wallachian rulers (probably Mircea the Old) negotiated a privilege for their townspeople on this market. Dan II would confirm this privilege in 1431, that benefited merchants in the towns of Muntenia, Câmpulung, Argeş, Târgşor, Gherghiţa, Brăila, Buzău, Floci and the local *târgs* in Rucăr, Săcuieni and the stronghold of Dâmboviţa [*Documenta*, B, I, 130]. The document contained the right of these merchants to travel to Braşov and sell “whatever they pleased, be it wax, tallow, silver, gold, pearls, whatever they saw fit, without fear of anything,” and to buy from there “cloth, silver, florins, whatever they pleased.” The mutual relations governing trade with Braşov were not always complied with, especially by the townspeople of Transylvania or their customs officers. Proof to this are the many interventions by Wallachian rulers in favour of their own merchants. Despite them, the relationship had been thrown out of balance from the start. The interests of merchants from Wallachia clashed with the staple right in Braşov, and they often had to sell at the price of the market there. Instead, merchants from Braşov had freedom to travel wherever they wished in the entire Wallachia [Papacostea, 1999, 178].

After around 1450, the situation begins to change. Due to an increase in Ottoman influence, the international political status of Wallachia was challenged. Negotiations between Hungary and the Ottoman Empire stated that, beginning with 1451, rulers were to acknowledge vassal status towards both the kingdom and the empire, and both powers were committing to respect its autonomy. Taking advantage of the new balance of relations between Wallachia and Hungary, Radu the Handsome attempted to introduce the staple right for merchants arriving from Braşov [Papacostea, 1999, 183-191]. We cannot tell for which town this right was instated (Câmpulung, Târgovişte?). Certain data indicated that Radu had negotiated with one envoy sent by King Matthias Corvinus the right of Wallachian merchants to carry goods to Oradea, where they could leave them one month or more, being able to recuperate them in case they were not sold out. It was a first step towards surpassing the obstacles to free access for Wallachian merchants on Transylvanian markets [Bogdan, 1905, 108]. Neagoe Basarab took this even further, imposing new limitations on the freedom to travel in Wallachia for Braşov merchants. They were warned that, in case they did not give up their staple right, they would be forced to sell or purchase goods only in Câmpulung, Târgovişte and Târgşor, that were in their turn granted staple right. In letters that survived to this day, the prince hints that he would cancel this measure, only if it allowed his

merchants free passage through Transylvania, in Oradea, Cluj, or Timișoara. The townspeople of Brașov did not exactly take kindly to these measures: they attacked and killed several merchants in Wallachia [Bogdan, 1902, 80; 154]. Calm was restored during the reign of Neagoe's heir, Teodosie. The rulers that followed were not as consistent in defending the rights of their merchants, and returned to the so-called "old law." We have no information on the customs taxes in force.

Along with Brașov, Sibiu also enjoyed a trade privilege granted by King Louis in 1351, which allowed its inhabitants to carry merchandise all throughout the kingdom [*Documenta*, C, X, 100]. In 1382, the same king granted the town staple right, foreign merchants being forbidden to carry the goods not sold in Sibiu to Wallachia [*Documenta*, D, I, 113; 117-120]. As with Brașov, no document was kept to confirm the staple right of Sibiu against merchants coming from the south. This obligation was, however, imposed. As customs records show, the market of Sibiu saw townspeople from nearby centres: Râmnic and Argeș, but also merchants from Câmpulung, Târgoviște, Slatina, Pitești, Bucharest and Craiova. In 1500, the merchants from Argeș were the most active: 71 merchants had acquired over 600000 dinars from sales in Sibiu; Râmnic was second with transactions over 350000 dinars; Câmpulung was next, with over 210000 dinars [*Rechnungen*, 1880, 271-322]. No information on the existence of a privileged customs treatment for the merchants of Sibiu who brought goods into Wallachia exist.

Trade with Brașov and Sibiu was part of a much larger economic circuit which not only involved Wallachia, but the entire South-Eastern Europe, spreading to the centre and the north of the continent. This was the trade with the Eastern world, where Transylvania and the Romanian Principalities acted as intermediaries [Murgescu, Bonciu, 1993, 539-542]. Economic relations from Central Europe – Eastern world were largely unchanged. Only the beneficiaries and those in control of trade routes changed regularly. Until the 15th century, Italians had the lion's share, with the Levant merchants gradually increasing their earnings in the latter half of this century (after 1475-1484). These were the Greeks, the Turks, the Jews and the Ragusans. Sea and land routes then switched from under the control of Balkanic and Byzantine states to that of the Ottomans. These changes naturally led to a change in trade habits, specialisation on certain products, the decline of some towns and the rise of others. Until the 16th century, from Levant to Hungary and Poland, there were three main avenues where this trade was carried out, on land or at sea:

- 1) via the Mediterranean, the Adriatic, then on land, through Venice or the Dalmatian centres;
- 2) via the Black Sea, on land, then on through the Italian harbours, the towns of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania;
- 3) only on land, through the towns of Bulgaria, Serbia, Wallachia and Transylvania [Pach, 1975, 295-303].

In this circuit, Transylvanian and Wallachia towns were protagonists as well, benefiting from the trade. One appropriate example here: Wallachian merchants intermediating export of metal goods on Eastern markets. Styrian knives would enter the Ottoman Empire as "Wallachian knives", pass through the markets of Skopje, Adrianople and Bursa, and finally reach Egypt via Antalya [Beldiceanu-Steinherr, Beldiceanu, 1964, 94]. This commercial "chain" had Wallachian traders take knives from Austrian and Transylvanian merchants and resell them to Levantine merchants.

3. Trade relations with the Balkans

When approaching the South-Danubian trade scheme, we must also mention merchants from the Balkans. Those in Ragusa were encouraged to come to Bulgaria ever since 1192, when the Byzantine emperor Isaac Angelos granted them a trade privilege, ensuring full freedom to trade “in the whole of Romania and the kingdom of Bulgaria [Cankova-Petkova, Primov, 1966, 81-82].” Bulgarian rulers adopted and continued this policy. Ivan Asen II granted them a privilege in 1230, allowing passage to Târnovo, Vidin and Kavarna, where they could create their own trade establishments. After reaching the river, the Ragusans came into contact with tradesmen from Wallachia [*Documente Hurmuzaki*, I/2, 781; Grecu, 1949, 109]. The 1349 treaty, concluded between Ragusa and Stefan Dušan, king of the Serbs, makes an indirect reference in one of its provisions to trade with areas inhabited by the Romanians (weapons trade with Wallachia was prohibited) [Panaitescu, 2000, 125]. The advent of Ottoman rule had no bearing on the Ragusan trade. In 1442, the Ragusans obtained a privilege from the Turks as well, allowing them to bring goods to Bulgaria and Wallachia [Giurescu, 1973, 45]. In the 15th-16th centuries, they were still acting as middlemen in trade with the Eastern world or the Southern Danubian area. Among others, they brought fine Bulgarian wool on the Braşov market. The letters sent by a Ragusan who lived briefly in Wallachia, Piero di Giovanni, relate his concern over seeing his merchandise delivered safely, as well as the negotiations he was engaged in to he import this product [Pall, 1958, 115-120]. As Wallachia entered the Ottoman scope of influence, an ever-growing number of Turkish and Greek merchants entered the towns of the country. Turks and Greeks rivalled local merchants and those in Braşov, who did not take kindly to this competition [Manolescu, 1965, 74-78].

4. Trade relations with Polish towns

Trade relations with Poland were only secondary in nature. In 1390, in Lublin, an alliance treaty between the representatives of Mircea the Old and those of Wladyslaw Jagiello was concluded, and renewed in 1391 and 1411 [*Documenta*, D, I, 122-125; 186]. Mircea gave this political deal its finishing touch by a trade privilege, granted in 1403 to merchants in Poland and Lithuania, who were allowed freedom to trade in Wallachia. The town of Târgovişte received staple right for the products they brought in, and was also the only place where the customs duty was to be collected (the *tricesima*). The ruler kept the right to be the first to choose among the goods the Polish brought in [Hasdeu, 1864, 3-4]. Another privilege, that granted the town of Lviv by Alexandru the Good in 1408, makes reference to Polish merchants who went to Brăila to buy fish or those taking pepper and wool from Wallachia [Costăchescu, 1932, 630]. The Polish presence on the Wallachian markets of 1408 reveals that the opportunities that Mircea had created in 1403 had yielded results. To buy pepper on the Wallachian market, the merchants of Lviv had to make contact with other middlemen who brought it from the East, purchasing it directly from the Genovese or local merchants. In 1409, Mircea renews the privilege and acknowledges the staple right for Târgovişte. We now find out that the Polish merchants brought cloth from Flanders, but they were forbidden to import silver, required for the local coinage [Panaitescu, 2000, 122; 419]. Vlad the Dragon renewed in 1439 the privilege his father had previously granted. The beneficiaries included in it are the merchants of Krakow, Lviv, from the “Russian country” (former Galician Rus’), but from Moldavia as well. The ancient privilege is modified, with

limitations added to the tax exemption granted by Mircea the Old. The first customs tax they were to pay was in Râmnicul Sărat. The customs duties in other towns were added, and free access to “the land of the Turks” was also available [Hasdeu, 1864, 84]. Towards the end of the 15th century, Ottoman sources in Kilia and Cetatea Albă show that Wallachia exported into Poland wax, wine, marten furs, fresh or brined fish, and Poland provided cloth and fabric [Beldiceanu, 1973, 127-130]. In the 16th century, the transit trade for Polish merchants through Wallachia was no longer regular, a situation which would shortly change only in the last quarter of the next century [Iorga, 1913, 405; 430].

Rulers of Wallachia were mindful of the economic and military importance of direct access to the Black Sea. In the latter half of Mircea the Old’s reign, until the one of Dan II, Wallachia ruled over Kilia (after 1403-1404, until 1426), and controlled Dobruja with Silistra after 1388-1389 [Panaitescu, 2000, 257-258; 361-362; Andreescu, 2001, 46-48]. Princes of Wallachia probably had control of Kilia also between 1439 and 1445/1446, with the town coming under the control of Iancu of Hunedoara from 1448 on [Andreescu, 2001, 38-42]. Rule over harbours by the Danube facilitated the access of merchants in the country to the Black Sea, and implicitly to its harbours. A Venetian report in 1462 shows that a ship belonging to “the Wallachs” had been retained in Constantinople, then released, another one being noted in Crete as well [Meteș, 1921, 13]. Many Wallachian products were shipped on the water. The customs taxes in Calafat also include the salted fish delivered “by ship.” The customs tax was 30 asprons for a ship with fish [*Documenta*, B, II, 41].

5. Products involved in trade

Merchants from Wallachian towns, as well as the foreign ones, brought home finer goods than those manufactured or available here: spices, pepper, saffron, ginger, cloves, etc. These products were brought directly off the Levantine market, on the Danube and on land as well, but also off the Mediterranean market as well. In 1382, when the staple right for Sibiu was reinstated, it was stated that foreign merchants no longer had the right to bring pepper and saffron to Wallachia, these products being brought in via the Adriatic [*Documenta*, D, I, 113]. Along with spices, foreign merchants brought in fine cloth, manufactured in Ypres, Bruges, Louvain, Nuremberg and Köln, French, Polish and Bohemian cloth, fine clothes and shoes (sheepskin coat, furs, boots, fur caps, caps or hats), ropes, but also metals and metal objects (iron, swords, spears, knives or bows) [*Documenta*, D, I, 191; 197-198]. Merchants from Brașov brought copper in Wallachia as well, an imported good which was regularly prohibited by the rulers, who relied on copper mining operations at Baia de Aramă [*Documenta*, B, I, 33; 39; Bogdan, 1905, 64]. Foreign merchants had no monopoly over these products, that were brought south of the Carpathians by the locals as well. They would buy and the resell in the main markets of the country cloth, weapons, iron objects, clothes and horses [Bogdan, 1905, 88; 241]. The economic circuit was completed by exports from Wallachia, which included raw products, gained by working the soil, the subsoil, or animal husbandry. Among these, there were many agricultural products. Salt, first mentioned in the Hospitaller Charter (1247), was a major export, Wallachia having a wealth of salt mines within its boundaries [*Călători*, I, 109]. As with Transylvania, the salt-selling process was under monarch control. This product did not feature in any trade privilege granted by the rulers, indicating that it was not available as such for foreign traders. In 1375, King Louis of Hungary ordered the *comes* of Timișoara to stop the salt import from Wallachia in Orșova [*Documente Hurmuzaki*, I/2, 213]. At the customs house, salt was taxed according to its des-

tinuation: salt being carried to the fords of the Danube, Turkish or “imperial.” It was carried as rock salt and grains [*Documenta*, B, XXII, 665]. Wax was another much sought product. Braşov’s staple right mentioned the right of the townspeople to collect the wax brought “from whichever part and especially from Wallachia” and which was to be melted, poured, purified, and sold in this town [*Documenta*, D, I, 135; Bogdan, 1902, 140]. The Wallachian wax would even reach the Venice market. Bartolomeo Locadello and Petru Bakšić mention in late sources the Greek merchants in Târgovişte who brought wax every year in Venice [*Călători*, V, 35; 216]. The privileges granted to Braşov by Mircea the Old also include other products: wine, mead, honey, livestock, the skins of wild and tame animals, cheese, etc [*Documenta*, D, I, 218; 221; 227-230]. Rulers temporarily forbade the sale of certain products, such as the skins of wild beasts, that they kept as their own income [Bogdan, 1905, 108]. Instead, manufacturers of sheepskin coats in Sibiu and other Transylvanian towns had gained from the king of Hungary the right for exclusive purchase and sale of raw skins imported from Wallachia [*Documente Hurmuzaki*, II/3, 133]. Along with the inhabitants of Braşov, the craftsmen in Sibiu were also interested in buying indigo dye, brought from south of the mountains and used to paint cloth [Goldenberg, Belu, 1967, 169-174].

Other products required abroad were the cereal crops. Numerous sources reveal that Genovese merchants took interest in cereals, that were collected and taken to Constantinople via the centres where they had distributors. Forbidden to do the same, the Venetians would submit a protest in Genoa, in 1349, accusing their Black Sea rivals that they would not let them trade this product [Andreescu, 2001, 66-73]. The Genovese obtained the cereals via the traders in Dobruja, Moldavia and Wallachia, the exchange taking place in the harbours by the Danube, Kilia, Brăila and Floci. After the Ottomans gained control over the Black Sea, Italian merchants lost the benefits brought by cereal trade, which the Levantine merchants soon availed themselves of. Grain exports were also carried on land, witness the mention made to “the sack of wheat” unit of measurement in customs taxes by the Danube, which was charged with two asprons [*Documenta*, B, II, 41].

The livestock trade was very profitable, and Wallachia had plenty of animals. Laonic Chalcocondyl mentioned that, in the 1462 campaign, Ottomans had captured over 200000 horses, oxen and cattle [Chalcocondil, 1958, 291]. This figure, although probably played up, reveals that the local population also engaged in animal husbandry. The meat was required to fill the demand on the Central and Western European markets. Livestock reached them after being handed by several middlemen. From Wallachian merchants, they were taken over by merchants in Transylvania, who sold them in the large fairs in Western Hungary, where they were taken to Austria, in Wien and Moravia. It was from here on that livestock entered the German market, in Regensburg and Augsburg, even reaching the Rhine-Main area [Pach, 1968, 310-311]. Ever since the 15th century, the livestock demand increased in the Ottoman Empire, especially in Istanbul. 1476 sees the *Valahia* horses mentioned, brought on land in the capital of the empire [Beldiceanu, 1960, 112, 146]. Their purchase and transport was handled by tradesmen called *gelepi*, even more frequent after 1500 on [*Documente*, XVI, B, V, 204]. Rulers would also engage in livestock trade later on. The surname borne by one of them (Mircea Ciobanul, where Ciobanul means “shepherd”) seems to originate in the animal trading he carried out while in Istanbul [Rezachevici, 2001, 224-226]. A Wallachian town, Craiova become a major livestock market in the 16th century [*Documente*, XVI, B, V, 434].

To conclude their business, some of the townspeople in Wallachia bought merchandise on trust from Turkish or Jewish merchants. They would set a debt payment term, after which

they would sell the products at a higher price in Brașov or Sibiu. They would go bankrupt if they did not cover their debt, the rulers or town leaders being forced to intervene on several occasions [Bogdan, 1902, 266; Bogdan, 1905, 175]. Other townspeople dealt with a different sort of trade. A certain Turcul, on close terms with Rădilă of Câmpulung, would redeem prisoners from the Turks [Bogdan, 1905, 187; 285]. Other townspeople, especially Jews and Greeks, were usurers, lending money to other merchants or nobles [*Documenta*, B, XI, 480].

Several testimonies certify the existence of a thriving trade in the main Wallachian towns. Câmpulung's renown, as one of the most developed centres, is also reflected in its presence in Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia* [*Călători*, I, 504-505]. Each July, this town hosted *zborul Sfântului Ilie*, a large fair that attracted merchants from all over Europe. Târgoviște frequently came under the patronage of rulers. Mircea the Old granted it staple right for merchandise brought in by the Polish, as well as the privilege to trade freely across the country. The largest Danubian port for Wallachia was in Brăila. The decline of Vicina benefited this town, as it took over a large part of the raw products exported by the Romanian Principalities, as well as the import of goods arriving via the Black Sea. The first mention of trade with the Eastern world for Brăila can be found in Johann Schiltberger, around 1400: "there are the boats and the ships that the merchants bring merchandise (*niderlegung*) with from heathen lands [*Călători*, I, 30]." In this case, "heathen land" may have been the Ottoman Empire, but the Mongol khanates as well. Usage of the term *niderlegung* had Dinu C. Giurescu state as probable the existence of staple right for Eastern goods in Brăila [Giurescu, 1965, 176]. This claim is not directly backed up by sources, but it does rely on tenable arguments: even today, one of the meanings of the verb *niederlegen* is that of "depositing". Ships carrying goods from Brăila to Levant are also confirmed by other testimonies, such as that of the expedition by Walerand of Wavrin or the chronicle of Laonic Chalcocondyl [*Călători*, I, 85; Chalcocondil, 1958, 285]. An Ottoman report addressed in 1520 to the sultan by Mevlana Küçük Piri, qadi of Kazanlik (Bulgaria) includes several excerpts from a customs registry. Among others, mention is made to the arrival in the harbour of Brăila of over 70 ships from the Black Sea, from Trebizonda, Caffa, Sinope, Samsun and Istanbul. The Eastern goods they brought along were sold, and cereals were loaded up in exchange. The merchants attempted to carry these through without paying the Ottoman customs duty [Beldiceanu-Steinherr, Beldiceanu, 1964, 107-108].

Other towns, such as Târgșor and Gherghița, were actively trading with Brașov. In the 1503 customs records, a peak year in relations with the Brașov market, the two towns feature as having transports of over 950000 asprons (Târgșor) and 400000 asprons (Gherghița). They are second and fourth to Câmpulung (the first) and Târgoviște (the third) when it comes to the amount of trade exchanges. In 1529-1530, a not so favourable year, Târgșor exceeded all other earnings per town, trading merchandise worth over 110000 asprons [Manolescu, 1965, 260-264]. In Târgșor, the annual fair took place before Easter, as a document issued around 1533 indicates [Bogdan, 1902, 309]. Râmnic was relied largely on trade with Sibiu, where numerous merchants had their products entered into customs records. Pitești was famous for the wines that the vine-clad hills around it yielded, Floci was renowned for the wool that exited the country through it, whereas Cornățel benefited from selling fish from the nearby ponds [*Călători*, V, 208-209].

6. Crafts

Other occupations were also practiced. Although only secondary to trade, crafts were intimately connected to them. Products gained by practicing various crafts were sold, covering the food and clothing demand for townspeople and the rural population. There are several categories: craftsmen who processed harvests or meats (bakers, butchers); craftsmen specializing in processing skins and working fabrics (tailors, sheepskin makers, furriers); craftsmen skilled in processing metal and creating simple weapons (blacksmiths, farriers, bowyers), but seldom engaging in manufacturing heavy weaponry (arquebuses, cannons, etc.) or in erecting fortifications. Towns also had many potters who catered for the local demand. Argeş and Câmpulung had neighbourhoods called *Olari* (Rom. olar = potter), and Floci displayed traces of several kilns [Păunescu, 1998-2000, 175-186]. Along with ceramics, the first crafts to develop in towns also included milling. All towns were located on riverbanks, which then had watermills, requiring the presence of craftsmen skilled in their use [Cernea, 1991, 98-99].

Ever since the 15th century, different classes of artisans begin to emerge. The lack of sources does not allow us to state whether guilds existed at that point. One Laslău *protomeşter* or “head artisan” sold a vineyard in Râmnic in 1440 [*Documenta*, B, I, 158]. His designation indicates a hierarchy among artisans in town. Some of the craftsmen originating in towns as Argeş, Râmnic or Câmpulung, were members of the associations across the mountains. This was how “The Brotherhood of St John,” for bootmakers in Sibiu, came to include three artisans in Argeş as well (in the 1484-1499 period), and the furriers' guild in Braşov had two artisans from Câmpulung signed up (1489-1509) [Manolescu, 1969, 38].

7. Other occupations

Some townspeople had agricultural pursuits. Each town had its more or less extensive domain, and this land was used for crops or raising livestock. These pursuits are also proven by the duties off products obtained on the domain that the townspeople owed to the prince. Agricultural products were kept more for own use, and the fact that rulers donated few of them is proof to this. The main agricultural pursuit for townspeople (commercial and artisan alike) was wine making and selling. In all of Central and Eastern Europe, Wallon and German colonists alike had introduced new and efficient techniques in viticulture. They can be found in Austria, then in Hungary, on the river Tisza, where they planted grapevines from the Tokaj region [Gutkas, 1977, 154]. They then reach Transylvania, where the 1206 privilege granted by King Andrew II to the Saxons in Cricău, Ighiu, and Romos stated that: “not to pay anyone any donation for the vineyards they had planted [*Documente*, XI-XIII, C, I, 32].” From here, they crossed into Wallachia and Moldavia, where they dealt with viticulture near towns. Grapevines were largely cultivated in the area before the Saxons had arrived, but they introduced new techniques and extended cultivated land. They had their own vineyards, as was the case of the Câmpulung Saxons, who had vineyards further south, in Topoloveni hill. Along with the townspeople of Câmpulung, those in Târgovişte and Piteşti were exempted of certain taxes for the vineyards they owned. Those in Câmpulung even had monopoly on wine selling in their town [*Documenta*, B, XXV, 469]. Wine selling was a good source of income for townspeople. The inhabitants of Braşov bought more wine from Wallachia, the privilege of 1413 setting a tax of six ducats for the cask of wine they bought [*Documenta*, D, I, 197].

Research into the economy of towns generates a series of questions. Why was it especially Wallachia (as well as Moldavia) that raw goods were exported from? Have foreign merchants played an important part in the economy of Wallachian towns? Why is it that crafts are only secondary in urban economy? An explanation for these situations must be searched among the factors that influenced trade specialization, factors that acted according to the demand for certain products on the European or Eastern markets. Following the population increase of the 14th century, but also due to better standards of living, the demand for fine cloth, furs, as well as agricultural products and spices increased. Furthermore, agriculture was the main economic branch in the Romanian Principalities, that specialized in growing cereals, grapevines and livestock, bees, etc. Benefiting from significant resources of salt, it was only natural for this wealth to be used to obtain income. A similar situation is displayed by fish. Towns did not have crafts that covered more than the local demand, so the trade in Wallachia, largely in the hands of the prince and the townspeople, relied on the products that the country had plenty of. Imports covered the demand for goods that were unavailable locally: expensive cloth, metal goods and weapons, required by the elite, the family of the ruler, the boyars and the urban patriciate, and also by the Church.

Geographic factors combined with traditional pursuits. There was an economic complementarity, both European and regional, which lasted until the 16th century [Topolski, 1985, 130-139]. In this process, the political factor played its part. A specialization in export on import on certain products was influenced by the privileges granted by the rulers of Wallachia, when they were vassals to the Hungarian kings. The provisions regarding merchandise also took into account supply and demand in centres in Transylvania and all across the country, as well as the interests of the authority. This was largely the case when Ottoman rule came into its own. This required a specialization on certain products, in high demand south of the Danube or officially requested by the Porte.

An explanation for the significance of foreigners in trade within towns is also given by how Wallachia was involved in the international trade circuit. The South-Carpathian area was an space of mediation between two large economic and political regions: the Byzantium, continued by the Bulgarian empire, then by the Ottoman Empire (the Levantine area) and the Hungarian kingdom (the Central-European area). The Romanian-inhabited area swayed between the two, where the winds of change in politics blew. Until 1500, the Western influence had the upper hand, as proved by the fact that the wealthiest Wallachian towns were at the foothills (Câmpulung, Argeș, and Târgoviște), close to the Transylvanian centres of commerce (Brașov and Sibiu). It was at that time that, vassals to the king of Hungary, the rulers of Wallachia acknowledged for merchants in Transylvanian towns rights more significant than those of their own merchants, even though they later tried to change them. The former part of the 16th century was the turning point between the two influences. In the latter half of this century, the Levantine influence prevailed. From this point on, the urban centres in Wallachia, especially those in the Southern half of the country, begin having an ever-growing number of Greek, Armenian, and Jewish settlers. The significant place that foreigners held in trade and crafts does not rule out the locals. Sources document their large numbers in towns. They were involved in economic activities both locally, and abroad. The role of foreigners was important also due to delicate nature of urbanization in Wallachia. Urban density was relatively low, and in some areas town only emerged in the 15th-16th centuries. Whereas older towns had more generous privileges, the newer ones did not enjoy the same treatment. They received the pattern of organization found in older towns in the country, but not the tax exemptions or the more extended domain rights of them. All these

shattered the balance between towns, that were unable to keep up with the competition of Transylvanian towns.

In town economy, trade was the main focus, a feature specific to towns ever since they emerged. Romanian historiography was unable to avoid a debate on the main economic purpose of medieval towns: the trade focus is supported by written sources, whereas the focus on craftsmanship relies more on archaeological sources [Matei, 1997, 112-118]. In our opinion the latter do not provide sufficient data to consider the production of goods as more important than trade. Crafts in towns were of local importance, their role being that of covering internal demand, the internal requirements of the rural and urban environment, their production being lacking both the quantity and the quality to be carried abroad. Raw materials were mostly prized in Wallachia, and it had plenty of them. More developed were probably the crafts related to the export of these materials, such as tanning [*Documente Hurmuzaki*, II/3, 133]. We have no data, be they documentary or archaeological, which would certify until the end of the 16th century the existence of workshops with a large production in Wallachia, that were involved in exporting goods. Income derived from crafts is not nearly close to the one gained by trading, where millions of asprons were handed out each year. Furthermore, documents do not note the artisans involved in buying land and houses with a high value. This situation beings to change partly at the turn of the 17th century, when the number of craftsmen mentioned in sources, as well as their economic and social role in towns increase.

The economy of Wallachian towns depended substantially on the local and international environment. The periodical struggles between the various factions of boyars in order to push their ascendants to the throne or outside attacks impacted trade negatively. Towns were dealt the heaviest blow, since they were the main target for attacks and robberies. This was where wealth and merchandise were concentrated, making them even more appealing to foreign armies. Battles at the turn of the 16th century between the rulers of Moldavia (Ștefan the Great, Bogdan III and Ștefăniță) and those of Wallachia (Radu the Handsome, Basarab the Young, Radu the Great and Radu of Afumați), impacted towns in the Eastern part of Wallachia and Southern Moldavia. Where Wallachia is concerned, sources mention forays led by the rulers of Moldavia in 1470 (when Brăila and Floci were set on fire), in 1471 (the battle of Soci), culminating in Ștefan the Great's raid in 1473, which resulted in the occupation of Bucharest. Other expeditions were undertaken in 1474, 1476, 1481, 1482, 1507 and 1526 [*Cronicile*, 16-19; 30-31]. Brăila and Floci were devastated, but also Râmnicul Sărat and the *târg* of Soci. The decline of the last one began in the first part of the 16th century. The lives of townspeople were dramatically affected by the battles in the area, but the economy was no less altered. Sometimes, it was simple rumours that fractured trade relations with towns beyond the mountains. At one point, Vlad the Impaler sent one customs officer to Brașov, to disclaim the rumour that Turks were making inroads into the country. One envoy from Brașov had delayed his visit in Wallachia due to this rumour [*Documenta*, D, I, 454].

8. Conclusions

From the 15th century on, but especially since its latter half, the Ottoman influence increases in Wallachia. Consequences are manifold:

1. ethnic and demographic (an influx of Greeks and Jews into towns);

2. economic and territorial (merchants in the Ottoman Empire compete both with Transylvanian merchants, as well as with those in Wallachian towns); Ottoman control over settlements in the Danubian fords of Turnu and Giurgiu, and the implied control over the customs points there was a heavy loss, depriving the treasury of important income [Panaitescu, 2000, 401-403]. The fall of Brăila, the largest town by the Danube, would play an even greater part in this turn of events. Wallachia was giving up a harbour which had been a gateway for its trade with the Eastern world.

This is the backdrop against which the main trade directions begin to be gradually re-traced, so the economic circuit in Southern and Eastern Europe, from the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, stops being the centre piece. The bulk of international trade is shifted towards the west of the continent and the Atlantic, owing to the great discoveries of the time and the economic transformations in Europe (the decrease in trade with luxury goods and an increase in the production of basic items) [Pach, 1968, 290-303]. Towns in the Romanian Principalities will not be able to sidestep transformations brought about by the 16th century.

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