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The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia

(14th Century – Mid-17th Century)

- Doctoral Dissertation -

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Introduction *

Regardless of society or age, titles were created to differentiate and rank, while also rewarding someone's merit. They would only reflect an image of the individual and place that person within a "social architecture". Moreover, their presence in society was seen as a factor of social order and welfare, but more often than not some intitulations were subject to hidden or overt ambitions and rivalries.

For the rulers of the Romanian Principalities, titles were part of their permanence and biography, so that such epithets can be appreciated to their true importance only by reference to the person bearing them, as well as to *the dynasty* or *the royal house* to which they belong. Also, the contribution of the royal chancery should not be overlooked, as it resulted in the creation of a diplomatic form of address influenced for the most part by the Byzantine Empire, the south-Danubian states (Bulgaria and Serbia) and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The study of the intitulations of the rulers of Moldova and Wallachia provided, through the results obtained, a more comprehensive understanding of the institutions and the ideology of power; this understanding based, of course, on a whole range of diplomatic and historical elements. The first researches in the field aimed rather to clarify the origin and meaning of the particle *Io [I]*. This has "for a long while been an insolvable problem of our historiography."

For this research, we used primarily narrative and documentary sources. Emphasis was placed on documentary sources, as they are reliable in terms of quality, but also the most frequent in terms of quantity. Although they seem to be rigid sources, they helped us understand this topic as accurately as possible. To a large extent, this category of sources consists of official documents issued by the royal chancery or its representatives.

Most documentary sources used in this approach have been published in the collection *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, B., Țara Românească [*Documenta Romaniae Historica*, B. Wallachia], as well as in the older collection *Documente privind istoria României* [*Documents on the History of Romania*], the same series.

For foreign relations we used primarily documents published by Ioan Bogdan, Gr. G. Tocilescu, Andrei Veress, P. P. Panaitescu, Nicolae Iorga, as well as those in the Hurmuzaki Collection. Added to these are the Turkish documents and chronicles on the history of the relations of Wallachia with the Ottoman Empire.

It should be noted that the works and studies available to us during the two stages of research conducted at the University of Angers (France) proved very helpful. Although we are talking about two different areas as regards the protocols and the diplomatic form of address of the two chanceries (Slavonic and Latin), the bibliography regarding the history of medieval France helped us understand in particular the role of the monarch in the act of exercising power, and the role of political theology, manifested primarily through biblical models.

The work methodology of this research is an analytical one, as it consists in identifying and explaining the emergence of the royal titles in various contexts, and aims at following the development of the Romanian diplomatic form of address by the end of the reign of Matei Basarab.

The structure of this paper consists of two parts. The first, entitled *The Beginnings*, deals with the issue of the origin of the Wallachian diplomatic form of address and the role played by the royal chancery in its future evolution. Here we study the chain of influences in the writing of the chancery documents from the time of Mircea the Elder until mid-15th century, when a standard (fixed and formal) form of address in the Wallachian documents is established, which we will also encounter in later centuries.

The second part of the paper (*Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia*) focuses on the main titles in the intitulations and titulatures of the rulers: *I, Sole Ruler, Hertzeg, God's Anointed, Tsar*, which will be analyzed in terms of the context in which they appear, the beneficiaries and "the editors" of these documents, in comparison with some previous charters.

Finally, we should mention that we attempted not to make absolute statements regarding particular data or assumptions, constantly making reference to the letter of the document as an argument. The paper also includes a detailed critical apparatus, as well as a review of the ideas expressed, which is necessary for a better understanding of the research conducted.

Chapter I

The Beginnings

1. The Royal Chancery

In the Romanian Principalities, the royal chancery was an institutionalized service in close relation with the central institutions along which it run, i.e. the reign and royal council, whose fundamental task was to record in official documents the decisions taken by the latter. The language used in writing documents of an external nature, but especially for those of a domestic nature was for the most part Slavonic, originally introduced in its old version as the idiom of worship in church. Later, after the 14th century, the Slavonic language prevails in its recent version, medio-Bulgarian, which the Romanian Principalities adopted because of the inherent cultural influences due to the immediate vicinity of vast areas of Slavic culture.

The language of chancery documents is different from that used in literary writings and, in particular, the language of religious and historical works. However, the influences of the Byzantine diplomacy in Bulgaria, Serbia and the Romanian Principalities present some similarities, as well as some notable differences; for example, *subscriptio* written in red ink is found in all Bulgarian, Serbian and Romanian chancery documents, without being signed by the sovereign himself, as in Byzantium, but with a monogram. Conversely, in the Romanian Principalities, all official documents usually bear only a wax seal, compared to Bulgarian or Serbian documents, which present a gold seal, whereas, after the 13th century, they display wax seals. Nevertheless, in Bulgaria we find lead seals from the reign of Tsar Asen I and Tsar Boril.

2. *Intitulatio*

Most royal titles from Wallachia are found in chancery documents, specifically in *intitulatio*, where there are inserted the devotion formula, name and titles of the sovereign. H. Wolfram believes that the term *intitulatio* cannot be synonymous with that of *titulature*, because the former refers to the epithets used by the sovereign in the internal chancery documents, while *titulature* represents the titles included in external documents (treaties, conventions, books of faith etc.) and recognized by other monarchs.

Regardless of the period, *intitulation* and *titulature* were, by their meaning, different from *position*. Thus, if *the position* or *official position* represented the status in an administrative system, refuting any ambiguity of the term, which might have referred to a theological aspect, *the title* unites two types of offices: the first corresponds to the administrative burden and the second, to the “inactive” or honorific one, which also brings a theological quality to the forefront.

For the Wallach space, the titles of the rulers appear most clearly in the light of the internal chancery documents. Among them there are two categories: a) documents with ordinary intitulation (*By the Grace of God, Io Radul waivode and ruler (Radu the Handsome a.n.) of the whole country of Ungro-Wallachia, son of the great/and kind Vlad waivode*) and b) documents with formal intitulation (*In Christ God, the faithful and the worshipful and God-loving and sole ruler, Io Radul waivode and ruler, son of the great Vlad waivode, by the Grace of God and with God's mercy, ruling and reigning over the whole country of Ungro-Wallachia and the parts over mountains, hertzeg of Almas and Fagaras*) usually issued in documents to some monasteries in the country and of Mount Athos and to some officials close to the ruler.

With the reign of Mircea the Elder some changes appear within the *intitutio*; thus, the term “faithful” is replaced with a new one, “worshipful” and next to the title of waivode the adjective “great” is mentioned; “To whom, I, who in Christ God, the worshipful and God-loving Ioan Mircea great waivode and ruler of the whole country of

Ungro-Wallachia”. This is, as a matter of fact, the formal intitulation that was passed down several centuries, reaching the reign of Matei Basarab. It is one of the important legacies of the chancery of Wallachia to which was added the use, in certain situations, of the abovementioned expressions, including the one we consider to be the most important, *God’s anointed*.

Chapter II
The Titles of the Rulers of Wallachia
(14th Century – Mid-17th Century)

1. *Io*

The origin and true meaning of the title *Iw* from the Romanian medieval diplomatic form of address represented one of the main concerns of several Romanian and other historians. The common characteristic of the conclusions reached by most researchers was that the *Iw* particle could be a shortened form of the name of *Ioan [John]* (Greek, *Ιωάννης*) used initially in chancery of the Bulgarian Tsars (*Io* Alexander, *Io* Sisman or *Io* Strațimir) and could later have passed into the Serbian diplomatic form of address and, ultimately, the Romanian one.

The Latin version of this title, *Ioannes*, was not used in the Romanian foreign relations with neighbours. Nor was the title used by other sovereigns in the context of concluding treaties or alliances with the rulers of Wallachia. However, in some documents written in Latin, the title *Nos* can be found, for example in the treaty of alliance concluded by Mircea the Elder with Sigismund of Luxembourg. Also in the case of Mircea the Elder, the title *Nos* is mentioned in the reconfirmation of the treaty of alliance with Vladislav Jagello, king of Poland. Subsequently, the title is also found in the bequest provided by Michael I to the people of Cisnadie to exercise their right to graze sheep in the mountains on Wallachian territory. The personal pronoun *Nos* is also mentioned in the document of December 10, 1424, in which Dan II grants several trade privileges to the people of Brasov, and during the reign of Vlad the Impaler in the context of negotiating an agreement with Brasov for possible shelter in case of danger.

Therefore, the vocable *Io* in the intitulation of the rulers (whether we are talking about chancery documents, inscriptions or markings, etc.) represented one of the attributes of sovereignty, which was always mentioned when referring to the person of the sovereign. As for the significance of this “theocratic appellation” (although this was

not the aim of our approach), it must be said that the sources have been sparing in providing satisfactory clues. However, the title itself seems to have rather a religious connotation referring inevitably to the name *Ioan [John]*, and its transition into the royal lineage was in fact an innovation in the diplomatic form of address made by members of the royal chancery. It is they, and we refer here especially to the secretaries in the royal chancery, who bear, for the most part, the main responsibility for the changes in the intitulation of the Romanian rulers.

2. Sole Ruler

On September 4, 1389 Mircea the Elder confirmed the border of Cozia monastery, granting it a territory that belonged to the village of Jiblea. In the intitulation of this formal document the epithet “sole lord ruler” (*samoderjavni gospodin*) also appears and this is, in fact, the first time such a title makes its appearance in a Wallachian chancery document. Before that date, the title could be found in the intitulation of Radu Negru, on the tombstone of Nicolae Alexandru in the Royal Church of Campulung (“the great and sole lord ruler Io Nicolae Alexandru, son of the great Basarab waivode”) and on the icon of St. Athanasius given by his successor, Vladislav I to the Mount Athos: “+ Ioan Vladislav great waivode believer in Christ God lord and sole ruler of the whole of Ungro-Wallachia”. Finally, in the same church from Arges, Radu I called himself “the faithful and only sole ruler” in an incomplete inscription of the founders portraits.

However, the origin of this title must be traced, most likely, to the Byzantine Empire, where we find in the intitulation of Alexios I Komnenos in a document of donation for Great Lavra of Mount Athos: “+Αλέξιος ἐν Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ πιστὸς ὀρθόδοξος βασιλεὺς καὶ αὐτοκράτωρ Ρωμαίων ὁ Κομωηνός”. Franz Dölger thought that ever since the reign of Heraclius, the title of *basileus* occupies an important place in the intitulation of the Byzantine emperors, so that the position of *αὐτοκράτωρ* (*autokrator*) lost some of its importance, being joined to that of *basileus* to distinguish between the emperor and his associate, although both sovereigns bore the title of *basileus*.

As previously mentioned, the first document in whose intitulation we find this epithet is during the period of Mircea the Elder (1386-1418) on September 4, 1389.

According to this charter until the end of the reign of Matei Basarab the same characteristic is preserved as regards the changes in the intitulation formula. It should be noted, however, that the mentioning of the title *sole ruler* usually occurs in the context of issuing formal documents addressed to places of worship in the country or to very important officials.

In conclusion, the analysis of the diplomatic form of address of the era showed the perseverance of the royal chancery in placing the title of *sole ruler* along with other epithets characterizing the formal intitulation (“In Christ God, the faithful and worshipful and God-loving ...”) only in a certain context, which more often than not is not entirely accidental. Regarding the significance of this epithet, the explanation is offered by an event that occurred at the end of the reign of Serban Cantacuzino (1688). Shortly before his death, he had sent to Vienna a delegation consisting of several boyars to negotiate some treaties with Emperor Leopold. But following the death of Serban, the newly seated ruler, Constantin Brancoveanu (1688-1714), sent new instructions to the delegation, which made the passage of Wallachia on the Austrians’ side subject to conditions. The third point of the requests made by the ruler’s emissaries regarded the fact that the future sovereigns of the country were to be “the sole lord rulers”, meaning that “he could do whatever he wanted with the country and those of the country and no one should stopped him”. Therefore, the significance of the title was translated as an Oriental despotic leadership which illustrates exactly the term *autokrator*.

3. Hertzeg

Written in the second half of the 17th century, the Cantacuzin Chronicle sketches in its first pages the image of the formation of Wallachia, through the descent of the legendary waivode Radu Negru (or the Black Prince) “great hertzeg over Almas and Fagaras” to the south of the Carpathians, where “he started to found a new country.” Subsequently, the same source describes the submission of the great officials to Radul Waivode to be “under his command and he alone to be above all. Since then, they called it Wallachia and the rulers title was the following: In Christ God faithful and worshipful and the honourable and Christ loving and sole victor, Io Radul Waivode, by the Grace of God ruler of the whole Wallachia descending from Hungary and hertzeg from Almas and

Fagaras. This is the title of the ruler since then until now, as truly can be seen written in all the charters of the country”.

The title was preserved for a long time in the intitulation of Wallachian rulers, but in the absence of demonstrating evidence we are not convinced that this title and the entire *intitulatio* would belong to the first rulers at the turn of the 13th-14th centuries. As a matter of fact, we find the title of *hertzeg* for the first time on the seal attached to a Latin document from Vladislav I of January 20, 1368, establishing the custom fees to be paid by the people of Brasov in his country. On the seal of this document, the ruler calls himself “ban of Severin” and “duke of Fagaras”, although in the intitulation of the document only the title of “ban” is mentioned: “*Ladislaus, Dei et Regie Maiestatis gracia Wayvoda Transalpinus et Banus de Zevrinio*”.

Thus, the title of *hertzeg*, found in most formal charters issued by our first rulers, reflected in the beginning both the actual dominion over the two Transylvanian areas, and the acknowledgment of the Hungarian suzerainty; this is demonstrated by the treaties concluded between the two countries. Later, after the withdrawal of the lands of Amlas and Fagaras from the possession of the Wallachian ruler, it became customary for the royal chancery to always mention the epithet *hertzeg* up to the reign of Matei Basarab in the internal formal documents, without for it to ever appear in external documents or treaties concluded with other countries. This shows, rather, the desire of the Wallachian rulers for those lost territories, a desire constantly illustrated in the intitulation of the Wallachian rulers.

4. God's Anointed

In an undated document during the reign of Michael I, son of Mircea the Old, the title of God-*anointed* (*bogompomazani*) appears for the first time in the intitulation of the Wallachian rulers. This document is a bequest granted by the ruler to the monasteries of Cozia and Cotmeana, foundations of the rulers Radu I and Mircea the Elder. The chain of transmission of this title can be traced relatively easily. Thus, in an interesting study on the charters of the Bulgarian tsars and their legal terminology, Ivan Biliarsky identified the term *ПОМАЗАННЕ* (*anointment*), which was based on the verb *ПОМАЗАТИ* taken in turn

from the Greek μωρόνω (*to anoint*). Moreover, according to the information we have so far, the Byzantine Chrysobulls (formal acts of the Byzantine Chancery) never mention the expression *God's anointed*.

Dimitrie Cantemir describes a coronation ritual officiated by Metropolitan Bishop, during which the new ruler was anointed “with holy chrism on the forehead”: “The Metropolitan Bishop came out to meet him at door of the holy sanctuary with two candles before him, waving a censor towards him and gave him to kiss the Cross and Holy Gospel, and worshipping these, he was introduced in church. Then the ruler had to kneel down at the altar in front of the Royal Doors, as they are called, and lean his head against the edge of the Prestol (Holy Table), where the Metropolitan, putting the omophorion over his head read aloud the prayers that are usually read on the coronation of Orthodox kings and anointed him with on the forehead with the holy chrism”.

Therefore, it should be noted that the title *God's Anointed / Anointed by God* is found only among formal chancery documents, representing donations to the royal foundations and to the Mount Athos or addressed to people very close to the ruler. The presence of this title in the royal intitulation has a special character. Hence I believe that the title *God's Anointed / Anointed by God* was not part of the current practices of the Wallachian chancery, but was rather an element of the liturgical vocabulary of the time, taken up from the Holy Scripture. The latter provided, in fact, many models necessary for a *legitimizing discourse* that is invoked by the very chancery document.

5. Czar (Цар)

In 1959, Petre P. Panaitescu signed a new critical edition of *Cronicilor slavo-române publicate de Ioan Bogdan [The Slavic-Romanian Chronicles Published by Ioan Bogdan]*, giving us one more Romanian, and personal, translation thereof. The acclaimed Slavacist, like Ioan Bogdan, equated the terms *tsar* and *ruler*, believing that it only reproduced some Byzantine literary models. The opposite was demonstrated in the following decades by a number of studies that researched mainly the influence of imperial origin on our rulers of Wallachia.

For Wallachia, the title of *Tsar* does not appear, as it happens in the case of Moldova, in any official document issued by the royal chancery, but it does feature, for example, in a manuscript from Bistrita Monastery, titled *Viața Sf. Grigore Decapolitul [The Life of St. Gregory of Decapolis]*. We learn that the manuscript “was at Tsar Neagoe a year and did not take it”, meaning that the ruler (Neagoe Basarab o.n.) consulted the manuscript without having kept it at the Court; unfortunately, there is no clue as to the date when that entry was made. Almost certainly, the title *Tsar* was attributed to the future ruler after his marriage with Despina-Milița, successor of the Serbian despots by the Brankovič branch, so Neagoe inherited, according to N. Iorga, a “glimpse” of the Byzantium of old.

On the other hand, exploring the documentary sources from Wallachia reveals an interesting fact regarding the occurrence of the terms *king* and *kingdom*. Thus, the first such case is found during the reign of Mircea the Elder, in an act of donation issued by the waivode to the church founded by him at Cozia monastery. In the preamble of this charter *the kingdom of heaven* is mentioned, and after the intitulation there appears the phrase: *kings reign and rulers rule*. This phrase is also found in another act of donation, without proem, granted as well to the holy abode of Cozia, but, as in the previous case, the name of the secretary or of the subprefect is not mentioned.

Therefore, the use of the term *kingdom*, *king* or *royal* in chancery documents of Wallachia was rather made under the impetus of a biblical and historical example at the same time. However, the occurrence of the title of *tsar* in other sources besides the documentary takes place only during Neagoe Basarab, who was married to a princess of imperial origin (Lady Despina). Nevertheless, the pious ruler did not assume the title of *tsar* in any chancery document of his time, which shows that our rulers have not used and have asked no one “to acknowledge a title superior to that which they were aware that embodied all the power” (N. Iorga).

Final Considerations

At the end of this brief study we can state beyond doubt that the research on the titles of the rulers of Wallachia allows easy access to understanding the institutions and the ideology of power. As shown in the previous pages, our rulers have acquired, through the royal chancery, a diplomatic form of address, which was based on various influences: Byzantine, Bulgarian, Serbian and Latin. All these influences have contributed significantly to the creation of the standard form of address used in chancery documents in Wallachia. However, in the words of our great historian N. Iorga, our rulers never took up “a title superior to that which they were aware that embodied all the power”.

The huge number of documentary materials also showed us that the deviation from the protocols of the chancery on the royal intitulations was caused mostly by secretaries and much less by the subprefects or the ruler. Moreover, we observed that the diplomatic form of address of some chancery documents (we are speaking here mainly of *proem* and *intitulatio*) was contextual. Therefore, the occurrence or the lack of certain terms or formal expressions in royal charters was due to the context in which the document was issued, as clearly seen along our presentation. Noteworthy is that such pompous documents are found almost during each ruler and refer to an act of donation to a royal monastery or award a property for the benefit of one of the ruler’s close friends.

Such protocols of the Wallachian chancery on internal documents show us an “idyllic” picture of the ruler as *faithful, worshipful, Christ loving, sole ruler* and *anointed* by the Divinity. This image is not reflected in the external documents. The latter contain rather a purely pragmatic political form of address (*Io, wayvoda, dominus, dominus et wayvoda, heres* or *princeps*), which expresses the sovereignty of the issuer, without using titles of liturgical origin, as in the case of the documents issued for domestic use.

All the elements of this research provide us with a complete picture of the rulers of Wallachia depicted through the titles they held in various circumstances. The outcome can be useful for the perception of some realities that bring to the fore the person of the issuer (the ruler of Wallachia) with an understanding of his deeper political and spiritual aspirations and achievements.