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PhD THESIS

DNIESTER – COLACZIN – CHEREMOSH
The Settling of the Ancient Northern Border of Moldavia

– ABSTRACT –

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A new research on medieval Moldavia's northern border theme is necessary because the subject of medieval borders was treated by Romanian historians, during the last century, only when the “political context” required a discussion about past realities, to prove “historic rights” on territories. As a consequence, the subject of past borders with foreign neighbors was treated with a bias, because the circumstances of the present were almost always reflected in the way historians imagined the past. This paper is also useful because a survey of Romanian publications on this subject proves that an exhaustive research of all of Moldavia's medieval borders was never accomplished and a comprehensive study was dedicated only to the border with the Kingdom of Poland, but a long time ago, in 1910. The bibliographic survey reveals also that the large majority of researches on Moldova's medieval borders were carried away some 50 years ago or more, therefore not benefitting from the new progresses in historical sciences. In the foreign historiographies, although the issue of Moldavia's medieval borders raised some interest since the end of the 19th century, the results were only hypotheses, sketches or theories borrowed from works of Romanian historians. These arguments convey the necessity of a renewed research (exhaustive or, at least, comprehensive) of all of Moldavia's medieval borders. The first step towards fulfilling this aim is to isolate and to inquire specific borders. The northern one is, among the others, the most important and interesting border, because it can serve as a key to understand how Moldavia was founded. Comprehending how the colliding “willpowers of territorial expansion” of the kings of Poland and Hungary, of the Lithuanian dukes and of the first Moldavian voivodes achieved a line of balance on the upper courses of Sereth, Pruth and Dniester could be a major accomplishment for all the historians interested in the foundation of Moldavia.

The first step of the research has to be the description of the studied border. Its characteristics were specified not as geographers do, with latitudes, longitudes, distances, compass points and landmarks, but by using a reference to an ancient description. Three hundred years ago, Dimitrie Cantemir has described this way the northern border of Moldavia: “Northwards and eastwards, the river Tyras or Dniester, named Turla by the Turks, separates the Poles and the Tartars of Oceakov from Moldavia; its banks, but only up to Khotin, were in the past under Moldavian rule; from there, the border of the region was a straight line, through Pruth and Cheremosh rivers; after that, by means of the braveness of

Stephen the Great, the neighboring Podolian land, up to the mouth of Seraphinetz stream, was included in Moldavian domain and in this way the three water courses of Dniester, Seraphinetz, Colaczin and Cheremosh have become the northern border of Moldavia, where it lays the land of Ruthenian Câmpulung”. Although the geographers could be puzzled, because Cheremosh river flows northward and the streams Colaczin and Seraphinetz follow the same direction, only Dniester river flowing from west-northwest to east-southeast towards Khotin, still Cantemir was right, because Podolia, Rus' and the kingdom of Poland, in which the former were included, were regarded as lands from the north and the border with them can be properly considered the northern one. Cantemir's description reveals the area of interest, where the border ‘floated’: Pruth-Dniester interfluve, from Colaczin to Khotin, and a part of Sereth-Pruth interfluve, from Cheremosh eastwards. According to this account, Dniester river, downstream from Khotin, was making part of Moldavia's eastern border. The above description suggests also the time frame for the research: from the middle of the 14th century, time of the *founding*, to the beginning of the 18th century. The end of the time frame cannot be set during the reign of Stephen the Great, as we can understand from Cantemir's account, because we know for sure that after the latter's reign it occurred some minor adjustments of the border, from Black Cheremosh river to White Cheremosh river, and the former waterway was still depicted as the border of Moldavia on the map drawn by the scholar prince.

Another preliminary stage, after a brief but necessary survey of the foreign historiography, in search of concepts and words used in late Middle Ages in connection with borders, was the establishing of the goals and the methods of research. After a preliminary evaluation of the subject, three main goals were established. The first one is solving an old dispute in historiography: was the Dniester, Colaczin and Cheremosh border stable, since the end of the 14th century till the 18th century, as it was hypothesized first by Ion I. Nistor, and many of the Romanian historians accepted, afterwards, or its course changed in time, in many stages, until it reached the final line, defined by the three waterways? Proving the border has ‘floated’ in time implies that one must find the stages, their causes, the time frame, the way changes were achieved and the people involved. The second goal is finding an answer to a fundamental question for the subject: “why the ‘willpowers of territorial expansion’ of the kings of Poland and Hungary, of the Lithuanian dukes and of the first Moldavian voivodes have achieved a line of balance on the upper courses of Sereth, Pruth and Dniester?”. The last goal, but not the least in importance, is the broadening of the time frame and space limits for the research of Moldavia's northern border subject, in order to build a comprehensive foundation for a better reconstruction of the past. To reach these goals, the research has to

take into account the historical sources regarding both sides of the border, which had to be carefully and thoroughly analyzed, because ignoring one side can only produce an incomplete image of the past.

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The rights invoked by Eastern European kings and princes as basis for their claims over Galician Rus' and Moldavia were investigated in the second part of the dissertation. Such an inquiry was necessary because one must accept that the territory on which Moldavia was founded neighbored, at north, in the 14th century, *regnum* (or *terra*) *Russie*, finally integrated as a province in the Kingdom of Poland only around 1430. The rights and claims over Galician Rus', invoked in the period when Moldavia was founded, have concerned territories that either were later to be part of the Romanian principality, either were claimed by the voivodes in Suceava, in the 15th and 16th centuries. The understanding of the sources and strengths of the rights of Polish and Hungarian kings, as basis for their claim over the three neighboring countries, Rus', Podolia and Moldavia, offers clues about how the region's political map was redrawn, when the Galician dynasty ended and the power of Mongols faded away.

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The third chapter was built upon the analysis of 131 foreign documents, issued between 1387 and 1612 and inventoried in the first annex: documents issued by the voivods of Moldavia, but, also, treaties and agreements between the kings of Hungary and Poland, through which the relations between the two kingdoms and the principality of Moldavia were settled. These documents contain provisions regarding the northern border of the new country, where it neighbored Rus' and Podolia, countries also disputed by the two kings, because in South-Eastern Europe, in the 14th to 16th centuries, feudal relations were used mainly to settle international relations.

A preliminary stage, consisting in a renewed analysis of all the sources for the period before the founding of Moldavia, proved that, according to our knowledge, there isn't any proof that a Romanians' political entity existed in the northern part of the future principality during that time. This conclusion restricts the upper limit for the time frame of the research to the times after Moldavia's founding.

As a consequence, it arose the necessity of an inquest to determine if the first voivodes were able to define the limits of the territory in which their authority was exerted.

An investigation of their status has proved that before 1387 they either were excluded from the rule of law, either were equal in status with the territorial dignitaries of the kingdoms in Eastern Europe. This conclusion suggested the hypothesis that the first voivodes ruled a territory that wasn't shaped by them at north, where it neighbored an old and disputed country. The supposition that the kings of Hungary and Poland agreed (maybe verbally) in 1350, when they arranged the future of Galician Rus', the border between that principality and the territory controlled by Louis of Anjou eastward of Carpathian Mountains, is confirmed by an unnoticed passage from a treaty concluded in the beginning of the 16th century.

The issue of the loan offered in 1388 by Petru I to Władysław Jagiełło, with territories from the periphery of Galician Rus' as mortgage, and the consequences of this act, extending, in the first stage, up to mid 15th century, is well reflected in the foreign documents of the Moldavian voivodes and of the Polish kings. Their analysis has proved fruitful in suggestions and conclusions regarding the way Moldavia's northern border reached Dniester river.

The passing of Szepeniker Land into the hands of Moldavia's voivodes was the most important consequence of the loan from 1388. The analysis of the foreign documents has revealed the stages and the mechanisms through which this change happened, but, also, has shed light on the existence of some rights on that territory, originating from a wedding gift. The research had in sight, therefore, the issue of the role the domains received as a dowry or as a wedding gift by the spouses of Moldavian voivodes might have had in the process of establishing the northern border of the country, because the sources reveal that almost all the first voivodes sought to marry relatives of the kings of Poland. The analysis has revealed, however, that all the matrimonial alliances brought no lands to Moldavian voivodes.

Foreign documents analysis had in sight, also, the way the mental depiction of the separation between the northern kingdom and Moldavia was changed by the renewed conflict on Pokutia, from the end of Stephen the Great's reign till the final defeat of Petru Rareș and the treaty signed on august 1538, which ended the old struggle.

However, the treaties and the acts that recorded the oaths of fealty, due to their concise nature, couldn't clarify all the controversial issues. More clues and information had to be searched in the internal documents, issued in Moldavia and the Kingdom of Poland.

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The present-day historian must follow the example of commissioners from the past who had to settle the boundaries. They were surveying the land by foot, making an inventory

of the landmarks and checking the documents and the people's testimonies, where they encountered settlements. The historian, therefore, must check the documents of all the settlements located near the border, to find out exactly where the dividing line was. To reach this goal, all the internal documents issued up to mid 17th century in Moldavia and Red Ruthenia for the settlements situated near to the northern border (the former Śniatyn and Kołomyja districts of the Kingdom of Poland and Chernivtsi district, with parts of Suceava and Khotin districts, of Moldavia) were inventoried in the second annex.

The large number of sources has helped solving some controversial issues. Some of the questions formulated by historians could be answered, such as “Were Moldavia's voivodes put in possession for the land mortgaged in 1388, starting from 1391, when the three year deadline expired, up to 1394?”, or “Was Alexander the Good put in possession of Śniatyn, Kołomyja and Pokutia in the years after the conclusion of the two year deadline fixed in 1411, when the king of Poland has mortgaged them?”. Internal documents' analysis has offered supplementary information on the moment when the king of Poland relinquished his rights over Szepieniker Land to the Moldavian voivode and, also, on the date when the same territory was returned to Stephen II, after his brother was forced to grant it to the king of Poland, in 1436.

Using the data in internal documents has helped solving some old and new controversies in historiography, for example regarding the position of the northern border before the reign of Stephen the Great, or regarding the episode known in Romanian historiography as “The Donation on Cheremosh River”, that has had, as a consequence, the setting of the northern border on this waterway. Internal documents have made possible an inquiry on the last change in the route of Moldavia's northern border, dating from the 18th century, which occurred in the mountains.

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The systematic analysis of all the sources has shed light, step by step, on all the subjects, whether controversial or difficult to grasp. The results of this research can be described better by remembering the goals established in the beginning. The first one was expressed as one question: “Was the northern border of Moldavia stable, from the end of the 14th century till the 18th century, or its route changed in time, in many stages, until it reached the final line, defined by the three waterways of Dniester, Colaczin and Cheremosh?”. The answer is straightforward: the ‘stability thesis’, put forward for the first time by Ion I. Nistor, is false. The northern border of Moldavia was a ‘floating’ one and it has settled in a number of

stages, which will be described next.

The initial border was fixed in the middle of the 14th century, when it was actually the separation between the lands of the king of Hungary eastwards of Carpathian Mountains and the Rus' lands possessed by the king of Poland and the Lithuanian dukes. The first route was, roughly, the 'straight line' described by Dimitrie Cantemir some 300 years later, starting somewhere near Khotin and passing "through Pruth and Cheremosh rivers". It was outlined by the great forested area that bridged the gap between Dniester river and the Carpathians, described in 1412 in the treaty of Lublau. This border has remained unchanged till 1395, when Szepeniker Land, split from Podolia after the defeat of Fyodor Koriatovych, was given to Stephen I of Moldavia, as a new mortgage for a part of the money lent by his brother to the king of Poland in 1388. That moment, the northern border was set on Dniester river and Colaczin stream, but only *de facto*. In 1411, when probably the king has relinquished his rights over Szepeniker Land to the Moldavian voivode, renouncing to repay a part of the mortgage, the waterways have become *de jure* the true border. Although Władysław Jagiełło, on that occasion, has mortgaged again Śniatyn, Kołomyja and Pokutia, for the agreed remainder of the debt, there's no proof in sources that the Moldavian voivode actually has possessed that territory after the two year deadline expired in 1413. Essentially, the border agreement from December 13th 1433, concluded by Władysław Jagiełło and Stephen II of Moldavia soon after the death of Alexander the Good, was a sanctioning of the existing terrain situation. That moment, the northern border followed the courses of Dniester river and Colaczin stream, but not of Cheremosh river. South of Pruth, the confirmed border was the same, the great beech forest described in 1412. On 23rd of September 1436, voivode Elias of Moldavia has returned to the king of Poland Szepeniker Land, with Cecin, Hmelov and Khotin fortresses, as a compensation for the damages done by his father's raid in the kingdom in 1431, thus reverting the northern border of his country to the initial alignment. That situation has lasted only less than a decade, Szepeniker Land being returned to Stephen II of Moldavia in 1444 or 1445. The northern border remained unchanged, as established in 1411, until the end of Stephen the Great's reign. Then, on occasion of the peace concluded in 1499 with the Polish king, Moldavian chancellor Tăutul has received from the king a lifelong donation of eleven villages situated on the right bank of Cheremosh river. As a consequence, Moldavia's northern border has moved *de facto* westwards, to the course of the waterway. A couple of years later, at the end of September 1502, Stephen the Great has occupied the territory named Pokutia by Moldavians, moving again the country's border to the north and west with almost 100 kilometers. His son, Bogdan III of Moldavia, has given away the

conquered territory in 1505, as a goodwill gesture, hoping to marry the king's sister. But his plans didn't succeed, and in 1506, in the first part of September, he has reoccupied Pokutia. This time, the border on the upper Dniester was held only for three years, a Polish army routing, in September 1509, the Moldavian garrisons in Pokutia. On occasion of the peace concluded in 1510, the eleven villages were confirmed in possession of chancellor Tăutul. The three waterways, Dniester, Colaczin and Cheremosh, represented then the *de facto* northern border of Moldavia, but the situation has changed when the chancellor died. Up until the legal dispute was settled, another attempt to conquer Pokutia, in December 1530, was undertaken by another son of Stephen the Great, Petru Rareș. The decisive Polish victory at Obertyn, in August 1531, has ended forever the Moldavian rule of Pokutia. The peace was concluded after a few years, in 1538, in the last days of August, when Petru Rareș, pressured by Polish and Othoman military interventions, has accepted to sign a treaty with the Polish king, in which he has renounced forever at any claims on Pokutia. The military commander of the Polish army, Jan Tarnowski, authorized by the king to negotiate, has accepted on his behalf some demands of the Moldavian voivode. Although they are not openly recorded in the text of the treaty, we have all the reasons to believe that the king has relinquished at that particular moment his rights over the small territory on the right bank of Cheremosh to Moldavia's voivodes. In conclusion, only starting from 1538 we can speak about Moldavia's northern border on Dniester, Colaczin and Cheremosh. The peace of 1538 wasn't, however, the final stage in the evolution of this particular border. In the 18th century, a minor correction in the mountains has moved the border from the Black Cheremosh, upper stream of Cheremosh river, to the other upper stream, the White Cheremosh.

The second goal was expressed too as a question: “why the ‘willpowers of territorial expansion’ of the kings of Poland and Hungary, of the Lithuanian dukes and of the first Moldavian voivodes have achieved a line of balance on the upper courses of Sereth, Pruth and Dniester?”. The answer can be easily formulated. The balance was ancient. The first northern border of Moldavia has followed, in fact, the separation between Cumania and Galician Rus'. When Eastern Europe's kings were again in position to reclaim the lands outside the Carpathian arc, at the middle of the 14th century, that ancient border was sanctioned, around 1350, as a separation between the land possessed by the king of Poland (Galician Rus') and the land owned by the king of Hungary, as *rex Cumaniae*, eastward of Carpathian mountains. The first northern border of Moldavia was the expression of an ancient state of balance, reached in the great forested area that closed the gap between Dniester river and the Carpathians, but the border's route in the next stage (when Szepeniker Land was united to

Moldavia) did not rely, north of Pruth, on any natural landmark. That situation, however, was also the result of a state of balance between the Polish king and the Lithuanian dukes, who owned Podolia. It is very likely that sometimes, in the second part of the 14th century, it existed an agreement between them to demarcate the border between Galician Rus' and Podolia, based on the holding of some fortified places, that has settled the border on Colaczin stream, which was inherited by the voivods of Moldavia.

The third goal, “the broadening of the time frame and space limits for the research of Moldavia's northern border subject, in order to build a comprehensive foundation for a better reconstruction of the past”, was achieved by pursuing an investigation of the dispute for the inheritance of Galician Rus'. The connection achieved between the representation of the past put forward in this work and the historical context of the Central and Eastern Europe was, in a way, a method of validating it.

This representation of the past was built using information from all the sources, trying to make it as coherent as possible, whilst keeping the number of speculative hypotheses low. But, after all, it is only a screenplay, developed using as much imagination as the thorough analysis of sources, and, as a consequence, it isn't the only possible reconstruction of the events. It is the job of future historians to assess how close it was to the actual facts.