

## MIRCEA THE GREAT'S MOTHER

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**Abstract.** The present paper highlights that the prince of Wallachia Radu I - Negru Vodă (1377-1383) had two wives, namely Ana and Calinichia. His second wife Calinichia was the mother of the voivode Mircea the Great (Mircea the Elder). Calinichia was mentioned in the documents papers as the lady of the country and mother of voivode Mircea cel Mare, not of his brother the voivode Dan I, respectively grandmother of the voivode Vlad Dracul and great-grandmother of the voivode Radu the Frumos. The term "lady" (doamna) was used in the Middle Ages exclusively for the voivode's official wife. Given the properties donated by her to the monasteries, one can say that she came from a Romanian great boyar family of Oltenia. So while both Mircea's parents were Romanian, the voivode was also Romanian, among other achievements being the creator of several cities, such as Târgoviște, Pitești, Ramnicu-Valcea, Giurgiu.

**Keywords:** *lady of Wallachia, Mircea the Great, ethnic origin, local boyars*

This year we commemorate six centuries since the departure to another, better world on 31 January 1418<sup>1</sup> of Mircea the Great, Ruler of Wallachia from 1386 to 1418.

In numerous instances during the latest 150 years, there have been discussions about the ascendants of the Ruler Mircea the Great. An answer has been attempted to an apparently simple question: what was his mother's ethnic origin, an essential question towards shedding light on the roots of the great Ruler.

For many years it was believed that Mircea the Great's father, Ruler Radu I, surnamed Negru vodă (1377-1383), had just one wife, with the double name Ana-Calinichia<sup>2</sup>. However it has lately been proved that in reality he had two wives. The first of them was named Ana, mother of Ruler Dan I (1383-1386), step brother after his father of Mircea the Great<sup>3</sup>. From Dan I descendants there will be

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<sup>1</sup> Mircea the Great, Ruler of Wallachia, died on 31 January, 1418 and was buried on 4 February, 1418 at Cozia Monastery, which he had founded. A piece of the grave slab, now exposed in the museum within the Monastery, was rediscovered and returned into the scientific circuit by Dr. Florin Epure, Director of the Culture and Patrimony Direction in Vâlcea county.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ilie Minea, *Urmașii lui Vladislav I și politica orientală a Ungariei*, in "Convorbiri Literare", L, 1916, p. 857; Sergiu Iosipescu, Balica, Dobrotiță, Ioancu, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 1985, p. 124-125.

<sup>3</sup> "Sfântăpărintele părinte al domniei mele, Io Radul voievod (...) și sfântăpărintele fratele domniei mele, Io Dan voievod" (*Documenta Romaniae Historica*, B, Țara Românească, vol. I, 1247-1500.

born the "Dănești", who throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century will fight the descendants of one of Mircea the Great's sons, Vlad Dracul – with the "Drăculești" – to occupy Wallachia's throne.

Radu I - Negru vodă's second wife was named Calinichia. Starting from the name of Greek origin, encountered in the monastic life<sup>4</sup>, there were issued various fancy hypotheses. In Axinte Uricariul's chronicle it was written that Mircea the Great Ruler was the nephew of "dispot (despot) Lazăr", meaning that he was the son of one of the despot's daughters<sup>5</sup>. However, Lazăr was not a despot. On the other hand, the old Serbian chronicle contains the names of the five sons in law of Lazăr's and none of them was Romanian<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, prince Lazăr's age was too close to Mircea the Great's age for the former to be the grandfather of the latter. Consequently, there is no possibility for a generation to have existed between the Romanian Ruler and his contemporary, the Kossovopolje hero. It is just a late Serbian chronicle saying that the fourth daughter of Lazăr was married to Radu I Negru vodă<sup>7</sup>. B. P. Hasdeu started from there and constructed a complicated genealogy, wrongly concluding that Radu I was married to the fourth daughter of the Serbian prince Lazăr<sup>8</sup>. The information from the late chronicle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is contradicted by the old Serbian chronicles, as I have shown before.

The same erroneous point of view as B. P. Hasdeu's was shared by St. Nicolaescu, who also thought that Radu I was married to prince Lazăr's fourth daughter<sup>9</sup>.

Ilie Minea, a Professor from Iași, considers Calinichia a daughter of the Dobrudja despot Dobrotici. Therefrom, he believes, Mircea the Great would have reached to inherit Dobrudja<sup>10</sup>.

Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 1966, doc. nr. 8, p. 22-25, doc.nr. 14, p. 34-36, doc. nr. 16, p. 39-41, doc.nr. 22, p. 52-55, further cited as DRH, B).

<sup>4</sup> Damian P. Bogdan, *Pomelnicul Mănăstirii Bistrița*, King Charles I Foundation, Bucharest, 1941, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Axinte Uricariul, *Cronica paralelă a Țării Românești și Moldovei*, critical edition by Gabriel Ștrempel, vol. I, Minerva Publishing House, Bucharest, 1993, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Serbian prince Lazăr had five daughters. The eldest, Mara, was married since 1371 to Vuk Brancovici, the second eldest, Despina, to the Bulgarian Tzar Șişman of Târnovo, the third, Elena, was married since 1386 to Stracimir Balšić of Zeta, the fourth daughter (the one that Axinte Uricariul wrongly believed to be the mother of Mircea the Great) was married in 1388 to Nicolae of Gara, not to the Ruler of Wallachia, Radu I. The fifth and youngest daughter of the Serbian prince Lazăr, Olivera, was married to Baiazid, the Otoman sultan, after the battle of Kossovopolje (cf. Ilarion Ruvaraț, *O knezu Lazaru (About prince Lazăr)*, Novi Sad, 1887, p. 2, 23, 39, apud P. P. Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân*, ed. I, Casa Școalelor, Bucharest, 1944, p. 37, N. 42).

<sup>7</sup> To correct the error in the chronicle, consult P. P. Panaitescu, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. B. P. Hasdeu, *Negru vodă*, in *Etymologicum magnum Romaniae*, Tome 4, Socecu Publishing House, Bucharest, 1898, p. CCXL and foll. However, B. P. Hasdeu strangely considered Lady Calinichia to be of Greek origin, from an imperial family (ibidem, p. CCIX).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Stoica Nicolaescu, *Noui amănunte istorice cu privire la Doamna Calinichia și Radul-Vodă, 1374-1384*, in "Universul", 16 January 1933, p. 9.

The same theory was supported by Researcher Mircea Dogaru, who asserted that Radu I had just one wife, Ana, who, after becoming a nun took the monastic name Calinichia<sup>11</sup>.

In turn, researcher Sergiu Iosipescu, undertaking Ilie Minea's theses, joined those who made one only wife, Ana-Calinichia, out of the two actual wives of Radu I, that only wife a supposed daughter of Dobrotici<sup>12</sup>.

Sometime in the past, Nicolae Iorga considered Lady Calinichia a Byzantine princess from whom Mircea the Great supposedly inherited the title of despot<sup>13</sup>.

All these hypotheses connected to the ethnic origin of Mircea the Great's mother, Lady Calinichia, are not documentary substantiated. A pretended onomastic analysis was mostly used, that could not lead to a convincing conclusion on the ethnic and social origin of the Lady of Wallachia. Any baby is given a name depending on parental preference.

That name may change during the life time of its beholder, of a Ruler, as interests dictate. Thus, Ruler Mircea Ciobanu (1545-1552;1553-1554; 1558-1559) initially took the name Dumitru; his brother Radu Paisie (1535-1545) was initially named Petru etc.

Having in view the mentions from documents pertaining to his followers to the throne, Radu I, better known as Negru vodă, had two wives, Ana and Calinichia.

The first wife, Ana, was the mother of Ruler Dan I (1383-1386), step brother, after his father, of Mircea the Great.

Radu I second wife was Lady Calinichia, Mircea the Great's mother.

Lady Calinichia appears together with her husband in a Tismana Monastery diptych, updated in 1798<sup>14</sup>. In a Câmpulung Monastery diptych, renovated in 1711, in the second version, there is mention about the other wife of "I, Radu V (=voivode) Negru gszda (=gospoda) ego Anna (= his Lady Ana, A/N)"<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ilie Minea, *op.cit.*, loc.cit., p. 857.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Mircea Dogaru, *Mircea cel Mare – domnitor al dragostei de glie*, in "Scânteia Tineretului", year XLII, nr. 11557/29 July, 1986, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. S. Iosipescu, Balica, Dobrotiță, Ioancu, ed. cit., p. 125; without showing the means, S. Iosipescu revives the idea that Mircea the Great took over Dobruđa as inheritance from Dobrotici (idem, *De la Cruciada a III-a până la mijlocul celui de-al XVI-lea secol*, in S. Iosipescu, A. Madgearu, M. Soreanu, *Marea Neagră. Stat și frontiere. De la sfârșitul Antichității la Pacea de la Paris (1856)*, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 2013, p. 120.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. N. Iorga, *Istoria Românilor*, III. Ctitorii, Bucharest, 1937, p. 271; idem, *La survivance byzantine dans les Pays Roumains*, Bucharest, 1913, p. 37; idem, *Rostul lui Mircea Vodă I-ii – Cuvinte rostite la Mănăstirea Cozia, cu prilejul reînhumării rămășițelor domnului Țării Românești, la 15 mai 1938*, în idem, *Scrieri istorice*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1971, p. 147.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Virgil Drăghiceanu, *Curtea domnească din Argeș, Note istorice și arheologice*, in "Buletinul Comisiunii Monumentelor Istorice", year X-XVI, 1917-1923, p. 25 (further cited as BCMI).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 25.

Thus, in the Câmpulung diptych mention is made about Mircea's first wife, Ana, whereas in the Tismana diptych – about his second wife, Calinichia<sup>16</sup>.

Besides the Tismana Monastery diptych Calinichia is mentioned in documents issued by the country's Rulers, who mention her as a **mother, grandmother, grand-grandmother** and donor.

In a document of the year 6900 (1 September, 1391-31 August, 1392), thus bearing just approximate dating, Mircea the Great acknowledges Tismana Monastery previous donations: "*Besides these My Highness I have also gifted the above mentioned Monastery of the holy Mother of God (...) with the mill donated to the Monastery by the mother of My Highness, Lady Calinichia, at Bistrița (...)*"<sup>17</sup>.

In another undated document, very likely issued in 1392, Mircea the Great recalls his mother's donation to Tismana Monastery: "*Also the mill that My Highness' mother donated at Bistrița*"<sup>18</sup>

In a document probably issued sometime between 1400-1418, Ruler Mircea the Great again pointed at his mother's name, stressing that not only the mill on Bistrița river but also Pesticevo village had been donated by her mother: "*and besides that, My Highness donates: (...) at Blatnița, Pesticevo village, that My Highness' mother, Lady Calinichia, had donated (...) together with the Bistrița mill, that My Highness' mother had donated*"<sup>19</sup>.

The king-emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg (1386-1437) acknowledged monasteries Vodița and Tismana all the previous donations, including those made by Lady Calinichia. Among them was also Pesticevo village, which is underlined to be located in Blatnița, i.e. in an area close to the Danube bank<sup>20</sup>. Thus, there is a positioning error dating back to P. P. Panaitescu<sup>21</sup>, continued by N. Stoicescu and N. Șerbănescu, who consider it identical to the Peștișani from Gorj<sup>22</sup>. Dinu C. Giurescu corrects that and identifies Pesticevo village to be Măceșul de Jos village, on the eastern side of Cârna Lake, in Dolj county<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> V. Drăghiceanu also makes a confusion between the two Ladies of Wallachia, wrongly considering Ana and Calinichia to be one person, writing: "An his wife Ana, named in the diptyches of Argeș and Câmpulung and on the paintings of the former Argeș Monastery is mentioned under the monastic name of Calinichia in his descendants' documents" (idem, p. 26).

<sup>17</sup> DRH B, I, doc. 14, p. 33-36, here 34, 35. In Oltenia there are more rivers named Bistrița, the one in this document flew through Peștișani village, close to Tismana Monastery.

<sup>18</sup> DRH B, I, doc. nr. 16, p. 41.

<sup>19</sup> Dating is made by the volumes' editors. DRH B, I, doc.nr. 22, p. 53, 54.

<sup>20</sup> DRH B, I, doc.nr. 62, of 28 October (1428), Bratislava, p. 118-122.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. P. P. Panaitescu, *op.cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Nicolae Șerbănescu, *Nicolae Stoicescu, Mircea cel Mare (1386-1418), 600 years since his coronation in Wallachia*, IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1987, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> D. C. Giurescu, *Țara Românească în secolele XIV-XV*, Scientific Publishing House, Bucharest, 1973, p. 29, n. 80. The author notes that Pesticevo village was about 5 km from the Danube's

On 2 August, 6947 (1439), being in Argeş, copyist Coca wrote a document, as ordered by Ruler Vlad Dracul (1436-1442; 1443-1447), one of the natural sons of Ruler Mircea the Great. The document acknowledges the donations made to monasteries Vodiţa and Tismana by his ancestors. Among them is also the donation made by Lady Calinichia, the paternal grandmother of Vlad Dracul. The Lady is mentioned as a land owner and wife of a Ruler, who endowed Monastery Tismana with "*Pesticovo village, donated by Lady Calinichia, grandmother of My Highness*"<sup>24</sup>.

Ruler Vlad Dracul, educated at the court of Sigismund of Luxemburg in the spirit of the well-structured western civilization, felt the need to give details about his grandmother, Lady Calinichia, because not long before, she had not been considered a blood relative to other Rulers that had issued documents.

Thus, in 6932 (1424), on 5 August, the copyist, as commanded by Ruler Dan II the Brave (1422 - 1431, discontinuously), son of Ruler Dan I, step brother of Mircea the Great, named Lady Calinichia "**lele**", **not mother**: "*Besides these, My Highness also donates (...) village Pesticovo in Blatniţa, that lelea donated to My Highness, Lady Calinichia (...) and a mill at Bistriţa, that lelea donated to My Highness.*"<sup>25</sup>

That was the fittest expression found by the copyist or maybe by the Ruler. The word "lele" used in the Middle Age pointed at an older woman who was not a direct relative to the person in cause. In our case, Calinichia was determined as "lele" because she was the second wife of Radu I, i.e. she was not the mother of Dan I and consequently- not directly related to his son, Ruler Dan II.

Had she been Dan II grandmother, as she was to Vlad Dracul, the copyist would have used, like Vlad the term **baba – grandmother: gospojda Calinichia, baba gosposdtva mi**<sup>26</sup>.

Anyway, Calinichia was for Dan II just **his grandfather's wife**.

It is also important that this document acknowledges that she was Ruler's Radu I second wife, that she was part of the ruling family and that she was definitely someone else than Ana – the Ruler's first wife.

The use in every document where Calinichia is mentioned of the term Lady – **gospojda** – clearly shows that she was the Lady of the country, the official wife of the Ruler.

On 19 April 1614, Ruler Radu Mihnea ordered a document to be written that clarifies the legal situation of Peştişani village, taken by some as Pesticovo. The Ruler orders the inhabitants of Peştişani village and those of Tismana,

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bank. I personally believe that the term Blatniţa is close to Vlahiţa, i.e. to a region inhabited by Romanians, possibly by Vlahi arrived from the south of the Danube.

<sup>24</sup> DRH B, I, doc. nr. 89, p. 1154-156.

<sup>25</sup> DRH, B, I, doc. nr. 53, p. 105, 106.

<sup>26</sup> DRH B, I, doc. 89 of 1439 (6947), August 2, Argeş, p. 155.

Borăști, Groșani, Izvarna, Costeni, Sohodol and Masloși villages "*to group every day 50 people and go guard the Holy Monastery of Tismana, so that outlaws do not burst in an inflict damage to the Monastery and after one day and one night another group of 50 people will go and guard and if you do not ensure guarding and damage is inflicted to the Holy Monastery, be sure that you will pay with your heads*"<sup>27</sup>. Obliging villagers from the mentioned villages shows that the inhabitants were free peasants. Their situation was a long time one, maybe dating back to the moment the Monastery had been settled. Their being free peasants implied that they were exempt from paying a series of taxes. Those destined to guard the Monastery were so numerous because the estates, forests, water surfaces and not only belonging to Tismana Monastery were in turn numerous and extremely rich and the inner surface of the Monastery was huge.

Finally, Lady Calinichia was also mentioned in the year 6972 (1464), on 10 July, in Bucharest residence of the Ruler, by her direct great-grandson, Ruler Radu cel Frumos (1462-1475). The document acknowledges possession over Tismana Monastery and Pesticevo village situated in Blatnița, "*endowed by Lady Calinichia, grandmother (baba in the Slavonic document, A/N) of My Highness' parent Ruler Vlad (Dracul, A/N)*"<sup>28</sup>.

From the onomastic analysis of the names of free peasants inhabiting Peștișanii de sus village, Professor Dinică Ciobotea concluded that they might be related with the Craiovești family, socially ascending towards the rich land owners category. Taking into account the track of the medieval road leading to Transylvania Vâlcană Pass, by Runcu, to Vadul Diiu (Calafat), controlling this road of the Gorj, the connection with Strehaiia, where the ruins of Craioveștilor Palace are preserved, Prof. Dinică Ciobotea might have grasped a shadow of the truth<sup>29</sup>.

All the documents mentioned so far invalidate the thesis that there would exist identity between the two wives of Radu I, between Ana and Calinichia. Calinichia was Radu I second wife. A plea in this sense is that she is permanently named Lady in documents, no matter if we speak about her direct descendants or the descendants of her husband and his first wife's.

During the Romanian Middle Age this quality was exclusively held by the Lady of the country. The fact that Lady Calinichia owned the mill at Bistrița, close to Peștișani village, through which Bistrița river flows close to Tismana Monastery and the donation of Pesticevo village in Blatnița proves that Lady

<sup>27</sup> *Documente privind Istoria României*, B, Țara Românească, veacul XVII, vol. II (16111615), Bucharest, 1951, doc.nr. 268 (further cited as DIR)

<sup>28</sup> DRH B, I, doc.nr. 124, p. 209-213.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Dinica Ciobotea, *Moșnenii Peștișani din Gorj*, Universitaria Publishing House, Craiova, 2017, p. 46-47. See in the text the demonstration made by Ph.D. Dinică Ciobotea of the connection to the Craiovești.

Calinichia was a great Romanian land owner. Probably she owned more bodies of land, like the Craiovești. It is only thus that she could afford to make important donations to an orthodox lordly Monastery, whose faith and confession she shared.

Hypotheses are thus denied about Lady Calinichia's foreign origin. The great land owner in Wallachia wouldn't have allowed her to own estates, especially in Oltenia, without underlining, at least in documents, that she was a foreigner. Secondly, the Rulers and their copyists would have stated her foreign origin when mentioning her. Mircea the Great's wife situation, Mara de Tomaj<sup>30</sup>, is eloquent in this sense. In the end of the document issued by order of Mircea the Great's son, Mihail, on 22 June, 1418, in the city of Târgoviște, copyist Mihai wrote: "I, Mihail, who wrote at Târgoviște, when Your Highness'mother came, the Lady from the Hungarians, in the month of Proto-June 22, in the year 6926 (1418) and indiction 11"<sup>31</sup>.

It is obvious that this copyist having the same name as the Ruler's expressed his joy at the arrival of Mircea the Great's widow, an event mentioned in the document for the collective memory to better remember the date when it was written. Finally, the copyist made it clear that the Lady of the country was Hungarian – the Lady had something special for the minds of the contemporaries that needed be disclosed immediately. This was not at all the case in the documents concerning Lady Calinichia.

In conclusion, I can assert that this Lady of Wallachia, Calinichia, mother of Mircea the Great, belonged to the group of great Wallachian land owners in Oltenia, from Jaleș (Gorj), Vâlcea and Dolj counties, where she owned bodies of land and other goods.

In this situation it can be supported that that Mircea the Great's parents were Romanians, so he was a Romanian also.

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<sup>30</sup> For Mircea the Great's wife, Mara de Tomaj, see Nagy Imre, Véghely Dezsó, Nagy Gyula, *Zala vármegye története. Kiadja Zala vármegye közönsége. Oklevéltár*, II, 1364-1498, Budapest, 1890, p. 298-306; Iosif Pataki, *Ceva despre relațiile Țării Românești cu Ungaria la sfârșitul veacului al XIV-lea*, în SMIMED, II, 1957, p. 425-428 and foll. Lady Mara owned estates in Zala county, on the bank of Balaton lake, in south-western Hungary. Tomaj family also comprised Bánffy and Dezsöfi of Losonc families, and a descendent of the latter was none other than Ladislau, Ruler of Transylvania (1376-1391) (idem, p. 427-428; the Lady of Wallachia, Mara of Tomaj, the wife of Mircea the Great owned another estate in Pest county, named Haraszti. However, this latter estate belonged to Obuda – Buda Vechi fortress and had become a possession of Lady of Tomaj (*ac domine consortis Merche voyvode*) following its being given as a pledge by king Sigismund (Hungarian Archives, File D1 8508, apud Iosif Pataki, *op.cit.*, loc.cit. p. 425-427) ; Architect Cristian Moisesescu thinks that in 1416-1417, i.e. towards the end of Mircea the Great's reign, Lady Mara of Tomaj contributed to the erection of St. Mary catholic church in Târgoviște (cf. Cristian Moisesescu, *Târgoviște. Monumente istorice și de artă*, Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1979, p. 90).

<sup>31</sup> DRH B, I, p. 88, doc.nr. 42.

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