

RADU THE GREAT – OUSTANDING PERSONALITY IN ROMANIAN HISTORY

Ioan SCURTU*

The History and Archaeology Section of Academy of Romanian Scientists, in its new structure under provisions of 31/2007 Act, opens its national activities by this scientific event dedicated to Radu the Great. Targoviste Municipality was chosen as venue not only because the hospitality of our hosts at the “Valahia” University, but the historical significance of this city: Romanian capital during the reign of Radu the Great, where there still are the Prince’s Court, the Church, Chindia Tower, precious monuments of the Romanian people. In 2008, five centuries since his death, we decided to pay homage to Radu the Great, a leading figure in Romanian history.

I am not a specialist in medieval history, yet allow me to do some considerations of the great ruler reign, based on works and studies I went through without claim of issuing judgments. Moreover, we found that there is some controversy among specialists on aspects of Radu the Great reign, which may be manifested in our symposium as well.

Radu the Great ruled for 12 years, in 1496-1508. He was contemporary with another emblematic figure of our history: Steven the Great, prince of Moldavia. In some respects, their reigns are alike, and the name “The Great” fits them both well.

As the Moldavian prince, Radu the Great was concerned with strengthening his reign. To this end he reorganized the Prince’s Council, composed solely of the boyars with state functions and duties. It was a method to secure support and even control over this extremely important institution in the Middle Ages. The prince sought to establish clear relations with the Church, and due difficult times of Ottoman expansion he supported Orthodoxy. He called Nifon the Constantinople ex patriarch removed from the seat by the Turks in Wallachia. The ex patriarch held an important role in shaping church life, but also came into conflict with the prince in a religious matter, yet with obvious political connotation. It was about Radu the Great housing in Wallachia more Moldavian boyars in conflict with Stephen the Great. By marrying prince’s sister Caplea, one of them, Bogdan, become high chancellor and Radu the Great brother-in-law. On

*Professor, Ph.D., President of History and Archaeology Section, Academy of Romanian Scientists.

the grounds that Bogdan had a wife in Moldova, patriarch Nifon rejected the new marriage.

There was not just a religious matter in stake, but rather political. Prince promoted high dignitary Bogdan, who become his close kinship, also his political supporter. Nifon's refusal was considered an affront to the Prince, to his authority; therefore he sought to clarify his relationship with Church: "I should reign, and you turn us to learn God's law". Since Nifon maintained views, ruler resorted to extreme measure: the expulsion of Wallachia. His commandment left no chance of reconciliation: "Get out of our country, for we can not endure your life and living and teaching, which are spoiling our habits". Therefore, Nifon had to leave Wallachia, retreating to Mount Athos, dying there in August 1508. In this confrontation the reign emerged stronger, and in the period to come church leaders will not dare to face the prince.

Radu the Great took care of the church; two bishops emerged during his time in Ramnicu-Valcea and Buzau. He raised and supported churches in the Orthodox area. One of his most important foundations was nearby Targoviste capital, Dealu church, the same place where the first printing press of Wallachia will work. His portrait is painted in Govora monastery (Valcea county), and Kremincovici church (Bulgaria). The Romanian prince built the Lopushnia church (Bulgaria). These are clear evidence that our lord was the Orthodoxy protector, not only in his country, but also in the Balkan area occupied by a Muslim power.

Radu the Great conducted a sustained diplomatic activity to strengthen international situation of Wallachia. Since the Ottoman Empire was at the height of his power, and surrounding states were transformed into provinces (Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia), Romanian prince has avoided conflicts with this empire. A document of 1503 indicates that Radu the Great paid 8000 ducats tribute to the Porte and come every year to "kiss the sultan's hand". Recorded in the West vassalage relations as well, such gesture came into time practice.

Radu has cultivated close relations with Poland, one of the powers of the time. In October 1504 a Polish embassy came to Targoviste proposing him to raise against Bogdan the Third, unrecognized by the king of Poland as Prince of Moldavia after the death of Steven the Great. Following up this request in the fall of 1507, Radu the Great's army accompanied to Putna region Roman the pretender to the throne of Moldavia. In response, Bogdan the Third's army robbed and burned Ramnic area. Eventually, the conflict between the two rulers was solved by Metropolitan Maxim Brancovici, which convinced Bogdan the Third that it would be a shame to fight with Radu the Great, being "Christians and one people". Metropolitan words make it clear that Moldavians and Wallachians belong together of the same people (nation) and religion in public awareness.

Disputes and military conflicts aimed at some political issues which held the balance of power, but also some personal ambitions. Like other rulers of Wallachia and Moldova, Radu the Great sought to hold areas in Transylvania, not by force but cultivating close relations with the king of Hungary. In his early years of reign 1497-1497 he had problems with the merchants of Sibiu who sheltered the Walachia throne claimant Mihnea. In response he decided to close Carpathians straits, so that merchants could no longer sell their goods in South.

Radu cel Mare wrote in 1504 to Alexander king of Poland asking him to intervene on his behalf on Vladislav the Second king of Hungary to return him Amlas and Fagaras, his lands “estates of his ancestors”. On December 3, 1507, a peace and alliance treaty between Vladislav the Second and Radu the Great was signed in Targoviste. Romanian prince promised to be faithful to Hungarian king, to maintain good relations with Sibiu and to protect it from Turks. In return he was to be housed in Transylvania in case of emergency. On this basis, on January 6, 1508, Vladislav the Second entrusted Geoagiu and 19 villages in Transylvania to Radu the Great.

Radu the Great name is linked to typography introduction and to the first book ever printed in Wallachia. He called Macarie the Monk who had typography in Cetinie (Montenegro) to come in Targoviste. Even Radu being already dead (April 1508), on November 10, 1508 came out the Liturgy “Liturghierul”, printed in Slavonic language. Macarie stated: “This holy book called Liturgy started from prince Radu Io Voyvoda command, should be his remembrance eternal”.

Thus, in 2008 we celebrate 500 years of Radu the Great’s death and the apparition of the first printed book in Wallachia.

I only gave a few aspects of this outstanding personality in Romanian history and I am sure the experts present at this scientific event will bring new and substantial contribution, which will materialize in a first book published by History and Archaeology Section of Academy of Romanian Scientists.
