Culture and Spirituality

The Church in the Middle
Ages, the Role of the Metropolitan

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Abstract: This material is an introduction to a very delicate issue regarding the Romanian people: the interlacing of the role of the Church and the State as fundamental institutions of civilization. The Romanian Principalities can be presented as particular situations in this landscape just because, after they had organized themselves according to the Byzantine model, after 1453 they were the first ones to carry on these traditions, obviously with specific traits illustrated as such: coronations, donations, legislations. The role of the Church does not overlap totally the one of the laic state. Each one keeps a certain level of clear autonomy and identity.

Keywords: Christianity; Church; Bishop; Rule; state; political power; crusade

Once consolidated as a religion, Christianity, which had become over time dominant and preponderant, imposes itself during the Middle Ages as a shaping force, participating to the social and political life. The relationship between the representative of the secular power - the ruler or the sovereign prince - and the Church representative - the Bishop – is getting tighter. The prestige of a feudal capital is gained only together with the presence of a high-rank prelate next to the ruler. Higher the episcopal rank, stronger the political power, the influence and the prestige of the country and its ruler.

The image of a church sharing its authority with the ruler upon which it has a moral and symbolic influence has been familiar for a long time. It still represents one of the elements inherited from the old empire of Constantine the Great.

The fact that over the centuries of Byzantium existence the relations between the two institutions did not remain unchanged, but they faced many crises, among which the most severe concerned the iconoclasm, is not of interest here. It is important only the role of the Church in ideological and political matters, its

cooperation with the state authority, characteristic traits of any medieval society, but which are met predominantly in Byzantium, Russia and the Romanian Principalities.

In the past, there was a long and partly unnecessary discussion regarding the importance of Orthodoxy for the fate of the Romanian people. Harmful superstition which contributed to the isolation of our country from Western Europe and would have stopped the development of a civilization that had its roots and coordinating principles in there, according to some persons (Lovinescu); element of originality which allowed the continuity of the Byzantine tradition, strengthened the unity of the three provinces and saved them from the cultural annexation that would have threatened them from their neighbors, the Catholics or the Muslims, according to other persons (old theory, exaggerated by the school of "Thought"); in any case, the religious faith imposes itself as an essential trace of the historic process and at its end, Moldavia, Walachia and Transylvania arrived to unification. The only explanation is that Orthodoxy represented one of the defence forms of the Romanian national people against the foreign reigns, and the Church under the ruler's monitoring control was a powerful support to the medieval Moldavian and Walachian states, and at the same time it maintained across the mountains the consciousness of the joint ethnic origin. (Iorga, 1940)

During the period studied here, the association between the State and the Church can lead to their fusion into one and the same ecclesiastic state body. (Ostrogorsky, 1936, p. 56) These can be different and parallel: the church rules (canonic law) and the imperial laws (Byzantine civil law) have at the same time an universal application, compared to the original nature of the common law in which they coexisted.

We should mention again that the legislative and judicial activity of the Ruler, limited by the acknowledgment of a church jurisdiction, needed intermittently a ratification from the higher ecclesiastic authorities (the metropolitan, the Holy Synod of Constantinople, the patriarchs or, in the case of Catholic influence areas, the Papal Curia of Rome).

In their turn, the metropolitans and the Romanian bishops were appointed by choice or even imposed by the ruler. The conditions of this cooperation were described many times in the Romanian historiography; so much the rulers were presented as founders of holy establishments, giving them bells, books, jewels, watching over the growth of their fortune, sometimes imposing them rules of life,

prayer, similar to the old Byzantine typika, that only one thing can be done: to analyze how the State and the Church behaved in the moments of crisis. Thus, we will notice reactions whose deep Byzantine spirit is sometimes even construed in idioms translated from Greek writings of spirited polemic.

In Moldavia, the fight for independence, the shaping of the feudal state and the state consolidation go hand in hand. The defence area organized at Baia is followed naturally by the construction of a holy church. In the following stage, at Siret, the birth of the Musatin dynasty gives rise to the fight for confessional domination. That is why it is organized a Catholic episcopacy in Siret aiming to convert the ruling families who in their turn would bring on the migration of noble families and then of the whole population.

This episcopacy existed since 1370 and was independent from the Milcovia one. In the South of Moldavia, an episcopacy of the Cumans had been established in 1227, under the subordination of a Catholic bishop who had the mission to convert to Catholicism the local population across a geographic area as extended as possible, up to the Northern parts. "In a letter of 1234, The Pope Gregory X advised Bela IV, the son and co-regent of Andrew II, king of Hungary, to bring the Romanians from the episcopacy of Cumans back under the obedience of the Catholic bishop, showing his worry that some inhabitants, both Hungarians and Tetons, together with other believers from the Kingdom of Hungary, went over the mountains to live in the episcopacy of Cumans, thus forming a single people with the said Romanians." (Ştefănescu, 1980, p. 13)

Petru I Muşat makes a fundamental option, whose consequence has been the orthodoxy of the whole Moldavia. Moving the capital and the whole administration from Siret to Suceava signifies a brutal separation from the influences of the very active and insistent missionary Catholic episcopacy. Only the Catholic supporters remain at Siret. At Suceava, it is not organized an ecclesiastic administrative unit of Western orientation, but one which takes into account the traditional confession of the people – the Orthodoxy. Among the first decisions made by Petru I is the one to build Mirauţi church (Matei, M. D,1988, 114), next to the Throne Citadel, the Royal Court, the West Citadel (Şcheia). It becomes quickly the center of gravity of the power, an assertion of independence – a metropolitan church. The preexistent ecclesial organization is used to increase the country's prestige. The abbot of Neamţ, Iosif I Musat, is sent to Halici, where he is ordained as a bishop. Year 1375 may be considered the post quem term when Iosif was vested as the

metropolitan bishop of Moldavia by Antonios of Halici. As Iosif's vesting as the metropolitan bishop of Moldavia meant at the same time the birth of the Moldavian Metropolitan Church, I also state that year 1375 may be considered the post quem term of establishing this eparchy" (Mărculeţ, 2008, pp. 233-247) Besides, a Clerical Manual belonging to the Constantinople Patriarchy mentions a metropolitan church of Moldavia around year 1386. (Zaharia, 1987, pp. 328-33)

However, in there it in not mentioned any titular bishop, as we mentioned before, Iosif was vested as bishop of Asprokastron (White Citadel), but there do not appear any clear and explicit mentions regarding his activity in that place.

The present research does not aim to establish the chronological order of founding the Romanian metropolitan churches or to decode the historical triggers regarding them, but to underline the fact that "once with the establishment of the independent states Walachia and Moldavia it is entered into a new stage, being created the necessity to reorganize the clerical and religious life depending on the political and spiritual realities resulting from the new state of things. The reorganization of the Church under the direct aegis of the state created by Romanians and for Romanians is one of the compulsory symbols of independence and the stamp for the official entrance of the respective state into the family of European states with a well-defined identity.

Therefore, the simple existence of bishops and clergy able to satisfy the religious needs of the people and the ruling class did not correspond to the new situation. A religious-ecclesiastic act with a precise political signification was needed, as it had been the case with the other European states which, one by one, established their political existence on the map of Europe by obtaining either from Rome or from Byzantium (the unique sources of legitimacy in the Middle Ages) their acknowledgment and an ecclesiastic hierarchy, at least during the first stage, subordinated to the two centers." (Marinescu, 1924; Elian, 1972, pp. 144-145; Giurescu, 1959, pp. 673-697)

The intertwining between the religious aspect and the political-administrative one becomes now even more significant. "To make politics through the church is a trait specific to the Middle Ages, both in the East and the West, but no one surpassed Byzantium in this respect." (Zaharia, 1987, pp. 115). The ruler is "God's anointed and it is truly legitimate only if he is vested by the hand of the most important hierarch of the respective state. Feudalism is based on a well-defined system of lord-vassal relations". The medieval political society was not based on freedom but

on allegiance, not on equal rights but on hierarchy. Not on the coexistence of unique sovereignties, but on community of destiny. Not on pacific emulation and joint development, but on dynastic, warrior and predatory expansion. Basileus himself, declares himself committed to the True and Great Heaven Emperor, to God, whom he pretended to represent on earth, imitating him through the imperial virtues. With all its independence, the emperor's power was derived, considering that it came from God: omnisauctoritas a Deo. Or, as Grigore Ureche said later, because all powers come from God. (Georgescu, p. 211)

In our case, namely the Romanian Principalities, along a line inherited from the Byzantines, it is obviously about the metropolitans. In most of the official diplomatic documents that the ruling or ecclesial chancelleries issue, the name of the ruler appears, according to a good Byzantine tradition, immediately after the name of the metropolitan. This proves the respect priority that the cleric enjoys over the layman, irrespective of the rank occupied on the ladder of laic administration. They cooperate tightly for the prosperity and the growth in prestige and the common wellness of the collectivity entrusted to them. Thus there are explained the approaches that Alexandrucel Bun (1400-1432) makes to obtain the acknowledgment of the appointment of Iosif I as a metropolitan of Moldavia, which took place through the Book of 26 July 1401 of the Constantinople Patriarchy. The prestige increases even more when the relics of St. John the New are brought to Suceava and placed in the metropolitan cathedral (Mirauti church). The date continues to be uncertain, according to some sources it is 1402 (Documena Romanae Historica, A. Moldova, I, 23), and according to others it is 1415. (Zaharia, 1987, p. 115)

In all the names of the rulers of the Romanian states, since the beginnings of the pre-state formations and since the stage of foundation, the ruler is a leader "by God's will". "It is known that the doctrine of the divine origin of political power dominated the East and the West (...). It is a Romanian particularity to keep the specification Ruler by God's mercy, up to the 19th century, even during the most painful periods of Ottoman sovereignty. The political power solemnly and fundamentally declared in the ruler's name, as coming from God, excluded any other immediate or mediated source of sovereignty type. During the Ottoman domination, sometimes it was added in the document contents, in a secondary place, the stipulation that the domination was given by God and the emperor (namely the sultan, the Porte), sometimes with the mention that the rule comes

from God, and from the emperor only the scepter, as in the document of 1615 from Radu Mihnea in Wallachia" (Georgescu, p. 225) In Moldavia, a strong personality, such as the Ruler Stephen the Great and the Saint, at the moment when he took the oath before King Cazimir, did not hesitate to remind that he was "Ruler of Moldavia by God's will", therefore not by the mercy or intervention of any foreign sovereign. (Georgescu, p. 227)

The coronation moment and ceremony imply the mandatory presence and service of the diocesan bishop who acknowledges by his presence and gives full legitimacy to the investiture of the new ruler. It is a very special church ceremony. The matter used is the Saint and Great Chrism, namely the one used in the administration of the Holy Chrismation, and its signification is clearly that through the anointment with chrism it is transmitted to the sovereign the gift and wisdom of secular rule under the care and in respect to God and His laws. "God is not present only as a direct source of imperial power, allowing thereafter to derive from it, at a sacral and political level, the other secondary powers. (...) God is both Emperor of the emperors multiplied in time, and Ruler of the rulers, in a generic way, from king to ruler, duke and despot. Coronation, as vocation to autocracy, is made directly from God-Emperor to basileus and from God-Ruler to the ruler of various people. (Georgescu, p. 230)

In an old copy of bishop ritual kept at "Mihai Eminescu" Central University Library of Iasi, it is found in a quite rough form a translation of a vesting prayer: "Our Lord, Emperor of emperors and Ruler of rulers, who by Samuel the Prophet chose David as Your servant and anointed him to be emperor over the people of Israel … and you invested Your servant as a ruler for Your holy people ..." (Georgescu, V. Al., 230). This text proves clearly the interdependence between power and secular and spiritual authority. They work well only in complete cooperation.

One of the primary concerns attesting the goodwill and authority, as well as the care for the people, is to build a representative church. It is in itself a symbol of secular power traditionally interwoven with the religious one. Macarie of Antohia, traveler through these areas, wrote: "The first to conquer Walachia was Ruler Ankoro (ankoro meant black in the Romanian language, as he was black, that is why in Turkish it was called country Kara Falakh, or Black Walachia, after his name). He came from the Hungarian Land namely Al-Magar (Transylvania) and went down river Dambovița and started to conquer Walachia. And he built up a

great and very high and very beautiful church in Câmpulung town. And he ruled for 24 years then he died." (Cândea, 1970, p. 681, apud Papacostea, pp. 102-103)

After the colonization stage and the consolidation of the feudal states, the Romanian rulers, almost without exception, make important donations to churches, monasteries and metropolitan churches. Initially the gifts are only for the local communities. Later, the Holy Places will also benefit from the Romanian generosity. It is worth mentioning here that almost all establishments at Mount Athos received various gifts from the Romanian rulers and later large properties were owned by the establishments from the Holy Places especially on the territory of Moldavia and Walachia. (Witnesses to the Romanian presence in Mount Athos, 1979)

Returning to the local church, the gifts are so numerous, that their simple citation would gather several volumes. We give only a few examples: "On 13 November 1618, reminding a document from 1351-1352, Gavriil Movila strengthens in favour of Câmpulung Monastery the control over Badesti village, given by the late Ruler Io Neculai Alexandru, the son of the old Ruler Io Basarab the grandson of the late Ruler NegruRadul whose body is buried and rests in this Holy church" (Stoicescu, pp. 150-151) and on 30 October 1654 it is attested in favour of Câmpulung Monastery the control over Grosani village that it had from its founder, Nicolae Alexandru, since year 6873 (1364-1365) when it was a princely church". (Stoicescu, p. 151)

The ecclesiastic institution also assumed at that time a binding role for the forces which fought for independence and national freedom. The tradition of Byzantine origin initiated by Emperor Constantine the Great himself will fit perfectly the national needs of Romanians, the state and the Church going hand in hand in pursuing these ideals. At the same time, there were confessional nuances that unfortunately gave rise to some conflicts, that echoed in the political and diplomatic relations and gave rise to state orientations towards one or another power of the time. The whole medieval period was influenced by the domineering desires of the Christian confessions. Nevertheless, "the organizational strength of Orthodoxy and the people's stability in their relation with the inherited and traditional church represented factors that defined an identity which was the base for the efforts of defense and independence during the 14th to the 15th century and of keeping the national individuality during the Ottoman dominance, which did not leave at the North of Danube the impact known in other Southern regions.

(Georgescu, p. 247) This aspect should also be analyzed in terms of the crusade concept which, in the case of the Romanian principalities gains deeper significations, of national and even survival order. While in the West the crusade takes the aspect of conquest and domination extension over some new territories and even personal prestige for seniors and noblemen, in the South-East of Europe the accent falls on the political and religious conflict between the Christian countries seriously threatened by the military and administrative expansion of the Ottoman Empire of Islamic religious nature.

It is no wonder that great political personalities will emphasize the religious aspect when joining the efforts for the defense of the people and faith, and thus they will generate alliances meant to gather together nations interested in forming a united front to stand against the Turks. Unfortunately, in this case too there are felt the confessional differences and interests, with disastrous results for the whole Europe. "When Prince Lazar of the Serbs, after the victory at Plocnik, wants to continue the fight, he thinks at a crusade against the godless, without finding the expected echo; the Hungarians do not answer to the call, and other Balkan states do not make considerable efforts. According to Seadedin, a Turkish historian, Walachia and Moldavia participated, too. According to Leunclavius, only the former. The battle of Kossovoplje, on 15 July 1389, ends with the defeat of Christians and the death of Lazar. The crusade of 1396, maybe the last to resemble the classic crusades, and which ends in the disaster of Nicopole, was initiated by Sigismund, king of Hungary, mainly with Western support, although the Byzantium and Walachia were present in the coalition." (Georgescu, p. 248)

The only ones that still keep alive the idea of crusade-like fights are Walachia and Moldavia, with isolated allies such as Hungary and Poland, so that we may speak about a regionalization of the conflict, with vast national-religious accents supported by the local ecclesiastic institution. The most important exponents of this trend remain Mircea the Old and Stephen the Great who succeed in stopping the direct Ottoman expansion towards the heart of Europe. "To all these approaches and attempts, with the known results, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the political representatives and the people did not show any opposition, on the contrary, they were favourable to the cooperation against the Ottomans with any other European state, unlike the Occident where, except for the humanist reaction, "it was no hesitation in considering that the fall of Constantinople was a deserved punishment applied to the Byzantine schismatic people by God himself who, in his mysterious

judgment, had chosen the Turks as executors of the punishments chosen by Him. Without any confessional accent, the idea can also be found at GrigoreUreche: "the Turks are sent by God to punish the Christians and to frighten all the neighbours". (Teodorescu, p. 249)

Once with the consolidation of the Romanian feudal states, we witness a rise in the influence that the rulers, as legitimate representatives of the political power, have in the area of ecclesiastic art. Most of the rulers will involve along centuries in building, adorning and garnishing the religious establishments. They only continue an older tradition, coming from the first Byzantine emperors who were great founders themselves. The Oriental Christianity gets its strength permanently from the care of the great laymen for the spiritual things.

The peak is obviously represented by the glorious period of Ruler Stephen the Great, who build an impressive number of churches and monasteries that he fitted with everything necessary, and even more, he put to their disposal through gifts, estates, villages, income from customs, all the resources for carrying out the missionary activity.

On the other side, the moments of maximum tension between the ruler and the church, practically between the Church and the state, lead to the passage to Islam of Ilias Rares in 1551 and Mihnea II in 1591. While the later may be considered just a simple personal episode, no matter how traumatizing it was for the Romanian society of those times, the former renouncement mirrors the tendency of the Porte to subordinate Moldavia completely. In this case, sultan Suleiman II found the obedient tool in the eldest son of Petru Rares, brought up in Constantinople, as a hostage for his father, in an environment which had alienated him completely from the realities as well as dreams of his country. (Iorga, 1933)

The abjuration was preceded by a series of measures against the clergy, the movable and fixed Episcopal and monastery assets were taken away completely, the priests were ravished ruthlessly, said the Annals of Macarie of Roman, the writer himself being one of the victims of this oppression. (The Slavic-Romanian Annals, 1956, 104)

Reading the story of Eftimie, it seems that all the iconoclastic fanatic excesses of the 7th century come back to life: the holy icons … he called them idols … he hated the priests and the deacons, he called the monks enemies. (The Slavic-Roumanian Annals, 1956, p. 119) In reality, besides the unquestionable sympathy

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for the Turks, the ruler could have hyad another reason to act in this way: the increase in the yearly tribute made him lay under contribution the tax-free income of boyars and clergy, until then protected by various tax exemptions.

The conflict between the Moldavian boyars and their ruler, who governed since 1548 with a group of hominesnovi and even with two Ottoman advisers (Haidir and Hamza) is mentioned by Macarie in connection with the beheading of hetman Vartic (and some of the noblemen were blinded by him, to others he cut their nose, others ran away and wandered about in foreign countries).

But the reason for the mentioned opposition is revealed only by Eftimie, who states that Ilias registered all the boyars and all the assemblies to contribute to the great tribute …. and he also registered the metropolitan and the bishops and all the monasteries in Moldavia to contribute to the great tribute.

The fact that it was not a theological dispute, but a political fight where the accusation of heresy – probably prior to the renouncement – was used as a weapon, is proven by the fact that Ilias' successor, Stephen, who remarked himself during his short rule by an excessive religious ardor to erase the disgraceful effect of his brother's sympathy, led a grim fight with the ecclesiastic opposition – both with the external one, that tried to oppose him a candidate who was in Poland, and with the internal one, who saw its lines thinning through a new series of executions, until the moment when they succeeded in assassinating the ruler.

Therefore, the explanation that we suggest here, as a simple hypothesis and subject to future discovery of new data, is that the politics of Ilias had in fact two stages: the first one taking the form of PetruRareş's approaches to reinforce the governing authority and to establish a compromise with the Porte, whereas the second one, caused by the violent opposition to the centralizing measures, was a personal vendetta with the boyars, even at the cost of the definitive liquidation of country's autonomy.

By making this irremediable mistake, as it is proven by the documents where it may be noticed an attempt of the ruler in June July 1551 - therefore after the religious renouncement date (Papacostea, 1969, pp. 459-463) - to return to Moldavia with Turkish support, Ilias Rareş could have had the impression that he could repeat his father's fate, who was banished by boyars in 1538 and thereafter he returned with the Sultan's help. The only difference was that by his humiliating sacrifice, he gave boyars the possibility to identify their interests with the cause of

the fight against the Ottomans. Despite this, the politics of Ilas seems to have found a certain echo with the people, although the deductions allowed by the note on The Gospel Book of Voronet cannot go too far. (Bogdan, 1907)

In general, the difficulty in recognizing the aims of various actions and even their chronologic succession is due to the fact that most sources are not strictly contemporary, and between them and the events there are the two years of Stefan Rares' rule, period which afforded for contradictory interpretation.

After the threat of the Islamic influence, which to the South of Danube had gained here and there whole masses of Christian population and which had threatened for a moment with the dissolution of the feudal society in Moldavia, it had to face other two foreign religious propagandas, with political implications. The Lutheran proselytism was hiding the expansionist plans of the Habsburgs, whose presence in Transylvania allowed to be seen clearly that Moldavia and Walachia were considered at Vienna as a future stage of advancing towards the East, and Catholicism, nonetheless, served the intention of the Polish kingdom to possess Moldavia, over which the past ties would have given it historical rights.

Consequently, the new ruler ordered all his men to be always ready, all over the country, with weapons and others. (Corfus, 1979, pp. 153 – 154)

The military victory that rejected the attempt of the exiled boyars from Poland to install a candidate, and the diplomatic one by which it was avoided the return of Ilias (temporarily compensated with a vast territory in the South-East of Moldavia and in Dobrogea), both were followed by an internal plan to counter-reform the state and the church, jointly this time. (Papacostea, 1959, pp. 67-71)

All the non-orthodox minorities in Moldavia were persecuted, without distinction, leaving behind more than a century of tragic memories. (Buicliu, 1895, pp. 3-29; Giurescu, 1963, pp. 91 -94) (It is interesting to notice how this fierce fight is reflected in the annals of the epoch, which questioned the essence the Moldavian state itself. Unlike Macarie, who writes only praise words about Stephen, as he defeated the heretics – he brought them all to the God of wisdom and to the light of the true baptism, some of them willfully, others not so willfully – his successor, Eftimie, who wrote at the court of Alexandru Lăpuşneanu, could only denigrate his ruler's predecessor. Many of them were left blinded, to many of them he cut their noses or ears and he threw them in deep waters – he writes down, forgetting to add

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that these bloody abuses were either the proof of his commitment to the state religion, either the climax of the fight for centralization.

In Walachia, the series of princely ecclesiastic establishments is opened by legendary NegruVoda who lays the foundation of the church of Argeş, and in Moldavia with the churches of Mirauţi, Bogdana, Neamţ or Bistriţa belonging to Bogdan, Peter I Muşat or Alexander the Great.

Conclusion

The Romanian Principalities are known in the European history as the first states to succeed in conserving the religious spirit of Byzantium and to transfer it successfully to the political-administrative part. The association of the two institutions, with large independent accents, had a catalyst role with respect to the evolution and making of our people and in maintaining our national essence. Both in Moldavia and in Walachia, the foundation of metropolitan churches marked not only the political-administrative organization and crystallization but also the subsequent great decisions. The ruler, as "God's anointed", had supreme authority.

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