



Zabolotnaia Lilia, *The Moldovan leaders' ethno-confessional policies from the XIV<sup>th</sup>–XVII<sup>th</sup> centuries*, „Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et Studia” 2011, vol. 18, p. 101–108.

<https://doi.org/10.14746/bp.2011.18.9>

<https://pressto.amu.edu.pl/index.php/bp/article/view/54646>

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The institution storing the source materials is the Library of the Collegium Historicum of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

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The task was carried out within the framework of the competition “Social Responsibility of Science II – Support for Scientific Libraries”. The project entitled “Digitization of archival editions of scientific journals collected by the Library of the Coll. Historicum of Adam Mickiewicz University”. The project was co-financed from state budget funds granted by the Minister of Science within the framework of the Programme Social Responsibility of Science II. Support for Scientific Libraries (agreement no. BIBL/SP/0092/2024/02 of 05.12.2024). Total value of the project: PLN 247,236.00. Amount of co-financing: PLN 220,836.00.



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Społeczna  
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Nauki II

## THE MOLDOVAN LEADERS' ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL POLICIES FROM THE XIV-XVII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

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ABSTRACT. Lilia Zabolotnaia, *The Moldovan Leaders' ethno-confessional policies from the XIV-XVIIth centuries*.

Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia, XVIII, Poznań 2011, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, pp. 101-107, ISBN 978-83-7177-857-5, ISSN 0239-4278. Text in English.

Lilia Zabolotnaia, The Institute of History, State and Law of the Moldovan Science Academy, 31 August 1989, nr. 82, MD-2012, Chişinău, Moldova.

Moldovan urban civilization was quite diverse especially with regards to its ethno-social composition. The percentage of the Catholic population within the Medieval Moldovan urban areas has always been quite high and varied according to the internal or external factors of the political situation. The geographic location of the country was on the crossroad of the greatest trade routes – from West to East, and from South to North, it passed through the edges of Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy and on the boundaries of Europe and the Muslim world, which was represented by the Ottoman Empire. Ab initio, when Moldovan cities were at their starting point, the urban population faced the active infringement of Catholics from the neighbour-kingdoms like Hungary and Poland, who mastered the new territories and spheres of influence in the commercial, industrial and crafting activities. According to the researches of C. Giurescu<sup>1</sup> and P.P. Bârnea<sup>2</sup>, the largest ethno-alien group represented the Hungarians from Transylvania. Primarily, they came from 7 large cities: to a large extent from the foothills of the Carpathians (Baia, Piatra, Roman, Suceava, Trotuş, Bacău) and from areas of southern Siret-Prut interfluves Iaşi, Bârlad, Vaslui, Tecuci. There were particularly a lot of Hungarians living in Hârlău, where they held numerous world-class vineyards and in Trotuş. Also, besides Hungarians from the West and from Transylvania, the Moldovan cities were also an encounter point for the Germans/the Saxons as well. Another infiltration point for them to settle in to the

<sup>1</sup> C. Giurescu, *Târguri sau oraşe şi cetăţi Moldovene din secolul al X-lea până mijlocul al XVI-lea*, Ediția a II-a, Bucureşti, Editura Enciclopedica, 1997, p. 88-89.

<sup>2</sup> П.П. Бырня, *Молдавский средневековый город в Днестровско-Прутском междуречье (XV-начало XVI вв.)*, Кишинев, „Штиинца”, 1984, p. 71-78.

Moldovan cities was Poland. Among the cities with a large number of German population encounters Trotuş, Târgul Neamţ, Roman, Baia, Suceava and particularly Siret<sup>3</sup>.

The inflow of the Catholics was also due to the government policies of the Moldovan leaders, which in effect contributed to its development to an enormous extent. Noteworthy are numerous ordinances, grant benefits and privileges (exemption from taxes and duties, the right of free trade and movement across the country) for the foreign artisans, in particular. Notably, in the charter of February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1453, Alexander II (1448, 1449, 1451-1455) gives his authorisation for the Iaşco monastery, near the village of Suceava, to build within its monastic estates and indicates that „they who are from another/foreign country will be free to plough and sow wheat and mow hay on the ground of Suceava city. Just as the residents of the castle, they will be free from all the taxes and the duties of the Lord”<sup>4</sup>. A remarkable point would be that after 163 years later, the ruler Radu Mihnea (1616-1619) would still uphold the privileges given by the previous leaders to the residents of the monastic estates of the Iaşco monastery. The document states that: „the monastic estate is entitled to host on its grounds both inlanders and outlanders – may they be Polish, Russians, Serbs, Greeks or other nations” and the fact that „the artisans and the merchants have the right to free trade in the towns and the villages around, as well as being exempt from duties and taxes”<sup>5</sup>. An appealing paper is the one written by Peter the Hobbler, in 1589, where he depicted the Catholics „To our subjects – the Hungarians, the Germans, the Polish and the rest who lives according to the laws of the Pope within the stronghold of Iaşi, Cotnari Hârlău, Vaslui, Huşi”<sup>6</sup>.

One can also encounter cases where leaders would resort to the temporary provision of benefits and privileges as means of attracting foreign skilled craftsmen and merchants. For instance, Eremia Movilă (1595-1606) with the Charter of 19<sup>th</sup> May exempts the ones wishing to settle in Selishche Pobratskogo monastery Dobrechina and in Iaşi from all taxes and duties for a period of 3 years<sup>7</sup>. However, all these measures had a dual puncture. On one hand, the leaders of the country saw a certain political support within the monastic grounds, on the other hand they would stimulate commercial and craft activities in the country.

Above all, foreign merchants were creditors of the Moldovan leaders. There are several well-known cases where Moldovan rulers would resort to financial borrowing from the merchants, especially when it came to matters like the acquisition of the throne. Often, this money would not be returned but offset with privileges and benefits. However, recurrent fluctuations of power and leaders, led to the ruin of merchants. Thus, in the first third of the XVII-th century, the throne has been subject to substitutions 15 times. In 1631, the leader Moise Movilă (1630-1632) received a formal complaint written by the foreign merchants in a letter, explaining their discontent with the regards to their plight

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup> *Documente privind istoria României. A. Moldova, veac. XIV, XV, vol. I.*, Bucureşti, 1954, p. 260-261.

<sup>5</sup> I. Bogdan, *Documente lui Ştefan cel Mare*, vol. II., Bucureşti, 1914, p. 73-74; L. Zabolotnaia, *Formarea și stabilirea pieței orășenești în Moldova*, Teza de doctor în științe istorice, Chișinău, 1997, p. 104-105.

<sup>6</sup> E. Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. XI., Bucureşti, 1884, p. LXIV.

<sup>7</sup> *Documente privind istoria României. A. Moldova, Veac XVII, vol. II*, Bucureşti, 1953, p. 43-44.

and insolvency, stating thus the reason for their departure from the country. Moses Movila, had instantly convoked the Council, as he realized the great economic impact that the foreign merchants had on the country, and issued a decree protecting the interests of the foreign entrepreneurs: „We learned the burdens of foreign merchants, that have led to the fact that the capital city of Iași has been deprived of merchants and I thereby command to forgive all debts of all the merchants, and that they will not have any more debts and to give them money from the treasury, so that they would multiply their fortune”<sup>8</sup>.

Nevertheless, the provision of such measures, notably free trade for foreign merchants led to a rather more suitable commercial situation for them in comparison with the local traders, which in effect led to the monopolization of certain domestic produced goods, such as: furs, jewelry, expensive fabrics, luxury goods, spices etc.

A particular emphasis on the study of this matter has been made by the medieval foreign missionaries. A considerable amount of attention has been drawn on the substantial number of the Catholics, within the depiction of numerous foreign missionaries, mainly due to the fact that it was primarily part of their responsibilities. It was absolutely necessary to be aware of the exact number of parishioners in a particular village.

According to the first Jesuit Mission in 1588, there were 15 cities in Moldova, all of them being inhabited by Catholics<sup>9</sup>. The same data has been given in the Bater description in 1596<sup>10</sup>.

The Roman Catholic Bishop of Moldova Bernardo Quirinni in 1599 also noted that in 15 out of 16 cities in the surrounding rural area, a substantial number of Catholics live, to be more precise, 1691 families or 10774<sup>11</sup>. According to our estimates for each city separately, the figures are as follows: 1378 families or 7700 souls. A Dominican Monk name A. Bobby confirmed in his works that in the principality, in 1601, lived 10600 Catholics coming from Saxony and Hungary<sup>12</sup>.

However, during the first half of the XIIth century a sharp decline of the Catholic population has been observed. Bogoslavich (1623) has generalized the results in figures, which are as follows: Catholics – 1010 households<sup>13</sup>, Bonnichi (1632) – 361<sup>14</sup>, Bakshich (1641) – 450<sup>15</sup>, Baseti (1643) – 440<sup>16</sup>, Bandini – 552<sup>17</sup>. This process can be explained in various ways. A large majority of scientists support the view that the gradual decline of the Catholics in the urban areas has been caused by the fact that the Moldovan core urban population had constantly and successfully assimilated foreigners, which subsequently

<sup>8</sup> L. Zabolotnaia, *Formarea și stabilirea pieței orășenești în Moldova*, Teza de doctor în istorie, Chișinău, 1998, p. 114, 142.

<sup>9</sup> *Călători Străini despre Țările Române*, vol. III, vol. îngrijit de M.M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu, Editura Științifică, București, 1971, p. 284.

<sup>10</sup> *Călători Străini despre Țările Române*, vol. IV, București, 1972, p. 575.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 193.

<sup>13</sup> *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. V, vol. îngrijit de Maria Holban, M.M. Alexandrescu - Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu, Editura Științifică, București, 1973, p. 618-619.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18-28.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 195-251.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 175-187.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 293-343.

led to a certain transfiguration of the ethnic look of the city<sup>18</sup>. This perception is quite accurate and fairly justified, but full assimilation has never been the case in history and has never been known in any of the cities. This is evidenced by numerous facts. Firstly, the names of streets and neighbourhoods (known for centuries), that were densely populated by certain ethnic groups (the Armenian, Russian, Bulgarian, Hungarian street) in Suceava, Iași and other cities.

Secondly, Moldovan cities have never been known for being ethnically homogenous, but rather polyethnic. This fact is confirmed by the documents of the epoch, as well as the testimonies of the foreign missionaries. Furthermore, the foreign colonies in the Moldovan cities (which is also valid for the rest of Europe) lived separately, had quite conservative customs and traditions and they even built their own church, conserving their own religion.

In the middle of the XVI-XVII-th centuries, the ethno-confessional composition of the urban population, like in the previous century, was very uneven and quite „colorful”. There were Germans, Hungarians, Poles, Czechs, Serbs, Greeks, Russians, Jews, Armenians (in cities such as Suceava, Roman, Iași or Vaslui, they accounted for a significant ethno social layer of the local population.

A German inhabitant, Johannes Wilden, when describing the city of Iași in 1611 noted that there were a lot of „Russians, Ukrainians and Poles”<sup>19</sup>. The head of Polish Embassy in 1636, Krasinski, has highlighted the unevenness of the Moldovan population namely featuring the „Turks and Greeks, Armenians and Poles”<sup>20</sup>. Bartholomeo Basseti, in summarizing his observations has pointed that one can more frequently see Hungarians and Germans, but much less the Poles<sup>21</sup>.

It is noteworthy to state the fact the concentration of the Catholic population in the urban areas corresponds to the regional and geographical location of the cities. Cities like Bacău, or Huși were mainly inhabited by Hungarians, whereas Baia and Cotnari, mostly by Germans. All cities, without exception, that hosted a considerable amount of Hungarian, German or Armenian colonies, were chiefly located between Siret and the Carpathian area. In between the rivers Dniester and Prut, there were no such cities<sup>22</sup>.

According to statistic data derived from the reports of the foreign missionaries at the end of the XVIth beginning of XVIIth century, the cities with the largest Catholic population were as follows: **Huși** – Bonnichich (1631) – 40%, Bakshich (1641) – 89,2%, Basseti (1643) – 42%; **Bacău**: Quirinni (1599) – 5,4%, Bakshichi – 43%, Basseti – 46%; **Baia** – Quirinni – 10,5%, Bonnichich – 13%, Bakshichi – 21%, Basseti – 20%; **Bârlad** Bonnichich – 12%, Bakshichi – 17%, Basseti – 14%; **Cotnari**: Quirinni – 6%, Bakshichi – 57%, Basseti – 21%; **Târgul Neamț**: Quirinni – 30%, Bonnichich – 17%, Bakshichi – 18%, Basseti – 15%; **Trotuș**: Bakshichi – 43%, Basseti – 33% (см. таблицы и диаграммы № 2-5).

<sup>18</sup> П.П. Бырня, *Молдавский средневековый город в Днестровско-Прутском междуречье*, р. 72.

<sup>19</sup> P.P. Panaitescu, *Călători poloni în Țările Române*, București, 1930, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. V, p. 116.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 175-187.

<sup>22</sup> *История народного хозяйства Молдавской ССР (с древнейших времен до 1812 г.)*, Кишинэу, „Штиинца”, 1976, р. 181; П.П. Бырня, *Молдавский средневековый город в Днестровско-Прутском междуречье*, р. 71-78.

On the account of the data suggested by the missionaries, one can conclude that the population of the earlier-mentioned cities ranged between 1/2 to 1/4-1/3 of the total residents. It was not by chance that the head of the municipal government of the cities Bacău and Huși were consequently Moldovans and Hungarian, and as for Baia and Cotnari, Moldovans and Germans<sup>23</sup>.

The stated data confirms that the presence of the Catholic population in Moldovan towns, has always been constant and stable, especially in those that were located on international transit of commercial routes, highly developed commercially. It was also well-known that the Moldovan administration has been strongly linked to the West. It was effectively with the Polish and Hungarian immigrants that first elements of urban organization have appeared. There is even a common viewpoint that the word *oraș* (town) comes from the Hungarian *varos* and has been brought by the Transylvanian Hungarians at the end of the XIIIth-beginning of the XIV-th century<sup>24</sup>.

The city administration in Moldova during the Middle Ages consisted of a small Council headed by a so-called *sholtuz/voyt*. In Poland, the municipal head was also called *wójt* (the German for *Vogt*)<sup>25</sup>. Noteworthy is the fact that *pyrgar* comes from German (*Burger* – Towner). The origin of the word *sholtuz* is dual: it has Polish *sołtys* and German *Schultheiss* roots. The *pyrgars* have always been 12, just like in all the city Councils of Transylvania, Hungary, Flanders and Germany. The municipal administration has been also elected only for a year. During the XIV-XV-th centuries one could also encounter, beside the *pyrgar* (*pârgar*) council, the City Council of *ryadtsy*. This term has Polish roots. This kind of council would correspond to the Lvov city council. Essentially, Polish cities would compile two legal German systems: the Magdeburg and the Lübeck ones.

German and Polish settlers brought German law in the Civil and Corporatist sectors in Moldova. In addition to the City Council, Moldovan towns also accounted councils representing the interest of the foreign community. They were independent and had their own head. Particularly, the well-known Armenian city-council in Suceava had its own leader, independent from the local administration body<sup>26</sup>.

When describing the legal status of the Catholic population, one would namely emphasize its security. For killing and causing material damage to the foreign merchants, the perpetrators would have been severely punished. Chiefly, the charter from 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1608 states that „The Lord Konstantin Movilă endorses the baroness Karamana Nastasia and her son Dumitru a part of the villages Kryveshti and Ganashti... received from Lukacha and his sister Nastasia”, thus paying the debt of 670 thalers for their brothers

<sup>23</sup> L. Zabolotnaia, *Corelații între populația catolică și cea ortodoxă în mediul urban din Moldova (sfârșitul secolului al XVI-lea, mijlocul secolului al XVII-lea), pe baza relațiilor misionarilor catolici*, in: *Historia Urbana*, tomul XI, nr. 1-2, București, 2003, p. 79-94; *История народного хозяйства Молдавской ССР (с древнейших времен до 1812 г.)*, s. 179; C. Giurescu, *Târguri sau orașe și cetăți Moldovene din secolul al X-lea până mijlocul al XVI-lea*, p. 88-89.

<sup>24</sup> C. Giurescu, *Târguri sau orașe și cetăți Moldovene din secolul al X-lea până mijlocul al XVI-lea*, p. 87.

<sup>25</sup> Ю. Бардах, Б. Леснодарский, М. Пиетрчак, *История государства и права Польши*, Москва, 1980, p. 123.

<sup>26</sup> V. Costăcel, P. Panaitescu, A. Cazacu, *Viața feudală în Țara Românească și Moldova (sec. XIV-XVIII)*, București, 1957, p. 411-445; *Dictionarul explicativ al limbii române*, București, 1998, p. 1058.

who stole a cloth from the Armenian merchant Stetsko, from Lvov. The Lord has also indicated that in case „they would not have the money, they would be taken away their possessions... merchandise or anything that would be”<sup>27</sup>.

The charter from 16 February 1570 testifies of the charges for the murder of a foreign merchant „The Lord Bogdan Lăpușeanu has endorsed to the «logofet» Peter Albote «two seats» in the wasteland... thus calling the villages Alboteny and the Valley of the Greek for the murder of the Greel (merchant)... Peter Albot paid 158 bulls, 600 sheep, 7 horses, 13 foals”<sup>28</sup>.

Another document that draws attention is the one issued on March 18, 1602, which authorizes the purchase of real estate: „Shkyiou and his wife Maria and his brother Dan, from Hungarian lands, are commissioned permission to purchase the estate in the village Poiana, near the river Siret”<sup>29</sup>.

Generally, when talking about the advantageous status of foreigners in medieval Moldova, it is important to note that it has been notably fueled by the attitude of the local population. Moldova has been the only know in country in the South-Eastern Europe, where one would never encounter ethnic and religious conflicts<sup>30</sup>.

Moldovans were amazingly hospitable people. The Dalmatian diplomat Anton Veranchis noted that „that kind of hospitality is rare... the houses were of a magnificent clarity, the hosts showing warmth and willingness to share bread, cheese, milk and everything else that was in their house. But it would have been so only, in cases where the guest had behaved honorably; otherwise he might as well been beaten to death”<sup>31</sup>.

A particular role in the ration of local-foreign element had played the interfaith marriage, which was a common and easily adopted custom in Moldova, especially in the aristocratic circles.

If the dynastic marriage conclusion within the royal courts of Europe (in Moldova it has been mainly with Polish royal families) has been primarily driven by political interests, this being considered a contemporary norm of the marital morality, then the mixed marriages between Catholics and Orthodox, have been always perceived with reluctance by the Catholic missionaries. They believed it would lead to a more narrow sphere of influence of the Catholicism, they particularly resented remarriages.

Generally speaking about the colonization of foreign citizens in Medieval Moldovan towns, it is worth noting that they all made a vast contribution to the diversity of the ethno social structure of the local population, and to a large extent supported by the local government’s social policies, religious and national tolerance of the locals. It was this feature that distinguished Moldova from other neighbour countries and from Central or South-Eastern European countries, where ethno-confessional struggles persisted along the whole history. Moldova, for instance, has become the host country for the Hussite

<sup>27</sup> *Documente privind istoria României. A. Moldova, Veac XVII, vol. II, București, 1953, s. 169.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem, Veac XVI, vol. II, București, 1953, p. 218-220.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem, Veac XVII, vol. I, București, 1952, p. 35-36.*

<sup>30</sup> Л.П. Заболотная, *Гостеприимство молдаван глазами иностранцев (XVI-XVII вв.)*, in: *Raportul Național al Dezvoltării umane. Programul Națiunilor Unite pentru Dezvoltare*, UNDP, 2000, p. 46.

<sup>31</sup> *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. V, p. 331.

refugees after 1437, welcomed by Petru Rareș in person. They have later settled in cities like Bacău, Troțuș, Hârlău and Roman.

In general, the Catholic population prevailed upon the non-Moldovan population. In addition to the western and north-western areas, they have mainly settled in the south of Moldova, near the port cities<sup>32</sup>. According to a generalized study, 60% of Catholic population lived in the urban areas, the rest in the villages. The Catholic population was an integral part of the Moldovan one. The particularities of these cities have been configured by the mutual cultural interchange between the Catholics and the Orthodox population. This co-habitation that lasted for centuries, resulted in an outstanding symbiosis of architectural achievements (building of churches and Roman Catholic), as well as a large variety of customs and traditions.

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<sup>32</sup> П.П. Бырня, *Молдавский средневековый город в Днестровско-Прутском междуречье*, p. 71.