

ADRIAN IONIȚĂ*
BEATRICE KELEMEN**
ALEXANDRU SIMON***

FROM THE ARGEȘ I CHURCH TO THE ARGEȘ II CHURCH:
THE TIMES OF WALLACHIA
AND OF THE PRINCELY ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH
(Summary)

Keywords: Radu Negru, Alexander Basarab, John Basarab, tombstone, A. D. Xenopol, mythical foundation.

Based on the “introduction” in Stephen Dushan’s *Zakonik* (1349), where *Basaraba Ivanko* was recalled – under the year 1330 – as the father-in-law of the Bulgarian tsar John Alexander, and due to the fact that since the 1340s the preserved contemporary records presented *Alexander Basarab* as the ruler of Wallachia, A. D. Xenopol presumed at the end of the 1880s that *Radu Negru*, the mythical founder of Wallachia (identified by Xenopol as well with Thocomerius, Basarab’s father according to Charles-Robert in 1332) had two sons, John Basarab (conventionally until 1330) and Alexander Basarab (until 1365 when the latter’s – presumed and already accepted by Xenopol’s time – son, Wladislaw I, was certainly voivode of Wallachia), who were his successors. Xenopol’s hypothesis received criticisms instead of analysis as it would have deserved, for it was – and still is – the only credible alternative (in relation to the own below) explanation for *Basaraba Ivanko* in Dushan’s glorification of his (in fact his father’s, Stephen Dečanski’s) victory over Bulgarians, Byzantines, Wallachians and Tartars at Velbujd at the end of July 1330. Dushan’s text clearly was no credible source: the Byzantines under Andronikos III did not even arrive (they focused on plundering in the south); the Bulgarian troops, led by John Alexander and his uncle, Belaur, halted their advance, did not engage in combat and rapidly negotiated an agreement with Dečanski, who had defeated Michael Sishman, Belaur’s brother fallen in battle (the son of Dečanski’s half-sister Anna Neda, Sishman’s first wife, John Stephen, was enthroned tsar of Bulgaria, with Anna and John Stephen as regents); only the Serbian sources record Basarab’s troops at Velbujd, not the Byzantine ones (it is much more likely that Basarab’s men awaited the outcome of the battle together with Basarab’s son-in-law). Hence, why

* Institutul de Arheologie „Vasile Pârvan” al Academiei Române, București.

** Institutul de Cercetări Interdisciplinare în Bio-Nano Științe, Universitatea „Babeș-Bolyai”, Cluj-Napoca.

*** Centrul de Studii Transilvane al Academiei Române – Filiala Cluj-Napoca; Centrul de Studiere a Populației, Universitatea „Babeș-Bolyai”, Cluj-Napoca.

designate Basarab, known otherwise (in Latin and Slavonic texts) only as Basarab, as John Basarab, when – furthermore – the lords involved in the Serbian-Bulgarian conflict who certainly had two names (John Alexander and Michael Sishman) were featured with only one name in Dushan’s *Zakonik*? In addition to Xenopol’s idea which – in order to avoid the mistakes he made – can be summarized into Dushan in 1349 had to distinguish between the lord of Wallachia in 1330 and Alexander Basarab, the main Wallachian authority since 1343–1345, only one explanation emerges in connection to Serbian medieval practices: *Basaraba Ivanko* stood for Basarab the son of John(nie) <Thocomerius/Tihomir>, as certainly Basarab, and probably his father too, alike Shishman, had previously been close associates of Stephen Milutin, Dushan’s grandfather.

Each explanation has its strengths and weaknesses which must be addressed in an alternative manner. Basarab was never recorded in a known preserved contemporary source as the father of Alexander/Alexander Basarab the designation used by Pope Clement VI (1345) or King Louis I (1355, 1359, as well as under 1343 by his chronicler John of Târnave) for the – *de facto* (until Basarab’s official death in 1351/1352 according to the *graffiti* discovered on the walls of the Argeş II Church in 1920, a date – 6860 – present earlier in a peculiarly “transcribed” in 1618 charter issued by Nicholas-Alexander in the memory of his deceased father Basarab for the princely church in Câmpulung) – ruler of Wallachia. Prior to the most questionable Wallachian princely and monastic documents issued in the first half of the 17th century for the monastery of Câmpulung, Basarab was designated as the father of Nicholas-Alexander only in the text of – rather early modern – tombstone (in essence a commemorative plate given its design) of Nicholas-Alexander in the princely church of Câmpulung turned prior to 1618 into a monastery. The inscription on the tombstone appears however to have been accurate since Nicholas-Alexander’s date of death, 16th of November 1364, featured also in a obviously contemporary medieval record from the Szekler Land, as well as because – unlike in 17th and 18th century chronicles and diptychs – only his name, not Basarab’s name too, was preceded by *IGD*, as ruler from God’s grace, in the inscription on the tombstone (this “specification” would have made sense chiefly under mid-14th century *Greek* rite circumstances, as Nicholas-Alexander was after 1359 and the establishment of the Metropolitanate of Wallachia, the first *Greek* rite ruler from God’s grace of Wallachia, not his father). Hence, even if the tombstone was recreated in the 1630s probably after the destructions suffered by the princely church in Câmpulung following military campaigns (in particular in 1612) and an earthquake (in 1628), the text on the plate most likely matched the original inscription on the initial tombstone.

It is therefore even more intriguing why the inscription on the tombstone, obviously posterior to the death of Nicholas-Alexander (because the exact date was mentioned), made no reference to Nicholas-Alexander’s – “known” certainly by the 17th century – son, Wladislaw I (1364–1377), who had succeeded him and – normally – would have taken medieval pride in placing the tombstone upon his father’s grave. In none of his preserved charters, whether in Latin, Slavonic or in Greek, Wladislaw I ever mentioned his father by name, though he recalled his father’s memory and his deeds. Not even Louis I in January 1365 (as well as later), when he prepared for war against Wladislaw, mentioned his father by name, albeit the fact that he emphasized that Wladislaw had learnt his late father’s “bad habits” and refused to acknowledge Louis as his rightful suzerain. The only one to mention Wladislaw’s father by name, as well as – equally important – the only one to call prior to the 17th century Nicholas-Alexander

by both names (not only as Alexander), was Chariton of Kutlumus, the future protos of Athos (1375 – c. 1380), and metropolite of Wallachia (1372 – c. 1380), in the 1370 versions of his testament (noteworthy enough, Nicholas-Alexander's name was omitted from the last version of the testament, drafted in 1378; there Chariton only recorded the pious and generous deeds of the late Wladislaw I and of his wife, Anna). These most peculiar circumstances redraw attention upon a tombstone unearthed under highly unclear conditions (during a "state visit" in the church) in the same summer of 1920, when the famed Grave 10 was discovered, as well as the *graffiti* mentioning the death of Voivode Basarab in Câmpulung in 6860.

The tombstone, found alike Grave 10 underneath the successive pavements of the extant church, belonged to [...] *Voislav, the son of the Grand Alexander Voivode, <who> passed away in the month of January [...]*. The partially preserved inscription is also the only coherent inscription on any of the tombstones found in the Princely St. Nicholas Church in Curtea Argeş. Additionally, the tombstone of Voislav, inscribed in Slavonic but created in Western knightly fashion, with a coat of arms in its centre (unfortunately, the coat of arms was badly deteriorated by the time of the discovery in 1920), is the – alongside the two massive tombstones (one depicting a "ruling knight") deposited "one up the other" in the pronaos of the church in 1920 – the only medieval tombstone preserved in the church (all three were totally different in terms of style and shape from Nicholas-Alexander's tombstone in Câmpulung). The tombstone either belonged to Grave 6 (near the altar of the extant – Argeş II – church) or to Grave 11 (next to Grave 10, within the perimeter of the first – Argeş I – church). In the absence of any further evidence, we can only presume that Voislav was the – at least teenager – son (the remains associated either with Grave 6 or with Grave 11 were male humans, aged between 15 and 30) of the deceased in Grave 10 (had he been the son of Nicholas-Alexander, he should have been buried in Câmpulung) and was either allowed to be buried next to his "doomed" father (in case he was buried in Grave 6) or was "hidden" (and his grave desecrated unlike that of his father) together with him (in case he was buried in Grave 11, as suggested by the preservation of his tombstone underneath certainly the new pavements of the extant church from around 1750 and 1827 when the other two preserved tombstones were moved – the latest – to the pronaos). Irrespective of the exact date of his death, Voislav's case redraws attention upon the highly militant pro-Greek and anti-Latin context in Wallachia in the 1360s, chiefly around 1369–1370, as well as – because of his name – upon Serbian-Wallachian relations in the mid-1300s.

At the end of 1369, Clara *de Ungaria, Wayoudissa Vlachie* in 1360, the widow of Alexander *Weyda in Vlachie*, the mother of Anna of Bulgaria and *Ancha* of Serbia, as well as the noverca of Wladislaw I *Wayuoda Vlachie*, feared for her life following the anti-Latin massacres in Vidin that Wladislaw had – reluctantly approved – and the completion of the triumphant Orthodox Princely St. Nicholas Church in Curtea de Argeş. In January 1370, Pope Urban VI urged her to carry on and to ensure also the return of Ancha to the true faith (to which Anna had recently returned together with her husband, John Stratsimir of Vidin, after more than four years in Hungarian captivity). Urban VI – accurately at first – believed that Wallachian matters would improve, but after failing to convince Wladislaw to fully convert (April 1370), the Pope entrusted in July the Wallachian mission to Ladislas-Laţcu, whom he created Duke of Moldavia under the direct authority of the Holy See. These aspects focus our attention on the frescos in Princely St. Nicholas' Church. Entitled also ruler of Vidin, Wladislaw I appeared as the Solomon who had built the Temple his father, David, had not been

allowed to erect because of his sins (David's story featured prominently inside the church), while overlooking, as the khtitor of the church in the votive painting, the – by then well hidden under the pavement – deceased in Grave 10, who was most likely the voivode literally crushed by the majesty of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and St. Nicholas, in a virtually unique version of *Déisis* (St. John the Baptist was replaced by St. Nicholas). Wladislaw's unnamed father and Wladislaw's repeated twists and turns came together under the dome of the new church meant to erase any trace of the days that had brought Wallachia's first crown from the exiled Papacy (1346–1347) and to break-off the dynastic Wallachian-Hungarian bridge built between the Visegrád Group (Bohemia, Hungary, Poland) and the “Vidin – Severin – Belgrade Group” (Bulgaria, Wallachia, Serbia) through *Elisabeth* of Oppeln (her name is presumed, especially because she was buried in front of St. Elisabeth's altar in Oradea), the daughter of voivode Alexander, Anna of Bulgaria and *Ancha* of Serbia. Through their daughters, Elisabeth and Anna (*Ancha* was childless) deserve special attention.

Anna's first born was Dorothy in 6864 (1355/1356), the wife of Tvrtko I (1374), the first cousin of Louis I' second wife (since 1353) Elisabeth Kotromanić, and the first queen of Bosnia (1377–1390). Consequently, Anna, therefore married to John Stratsimir the latest since 1354/1355, had been born the latest in 1340/ 1341, as a result of Clara's marriage concluded not later than 1339/ 1340. Elisabeth's three daughters were all born between 1357 and 1360. Hence, Elisabeth, married prior to 1356 (most likely in 1355) to Wladislaw II of Oppeln, Louis' maternal nephew, had come to life by 1342/1343, as the result of Alexander's wedding celebrated the latest in 1341/1342. Two aspects become self-evident: the Wallachian-Hungarian compromise signified by Clara's Transalpine matrimony was concluded prior to Charles Robert's death (1342) less than a decade after his disastrous Wallachian campaign in the autumn of 1330; the age difference between Elisabeth (who passed away in 1367) and Anna and the Angevine utility of the former makes them – and naturally thus *Ancha* – sisters. Because *Ancha*'s Serbian marriage appears to have been negotiated already at the end of 1346 and her husband to be, Stephen Urosh V, the son of Stephen Dushan and Helena, John Alexander's sister, was aged ten at most at the time, *Ancha* was probably the eldest, being born between 1336/1337 and 1338/1339, leading to an earlier dating of the Wallachian-Hungarian arrangement that – at any rate – seems to have been sealed between the immediate aftermath of the Serbian-Hungarian-Wallachian conflicts over Belgrade and Severin (1334–1335) and of the *Turkish* raid, sponsored by Byzantium, in Bulgaria and Wallachia (1337–1338). It coincide with the establishment of the Visegrád Group (1335–1339) and with the new alliance between Bulgaria, Serbia and Wallachia (1331–1332), after John Alexander became tsar and his sister married the new Serbian king, Dushan. In that context, as John Alexander was married to Theodora (also John Stratsmir's mother), Basarab's daughter, a Serbian-Wallachian matrimony to cement the alliance would have made perfect sense, leading to the birth of Voislav, Alexander's son.

In relation to the initial question concerning *Basaraba Ivanko*, the records the chapter of Oradea (1374), where Elisabeth had been buried, might be useful, given that Basarab certainly had more than one son (according to Charles-Robert in 1335) and that two distinct rulers (Nicholas and Alexander) followed after (just) Basarab in the diptychs of Curtea de Argeş and Câmpulung. Elisabeth's father was listed as *Alexi Andri Vajvode Transalpine*. The clear unmistakable separation between *Alexi* and *Andri* (that – given also that on one occasion *Transalpine* was read *Transylvaniae* – has

caused many disputes over his identity: Alexander, voivode of Wallachia, or Andrew Lackfi, voivode of Transylvania) allows under the circumstances (supplemented by the reignited conflict between Wladislaw I of Wallachia and King Louis I) only one conclusion: her father's full name was Alexander Andrew and had to be used in order to distinguish between him and another Alexander that had ruled over/ in Wallachia, Nicholas-Alexander. Though several forgeries regarding Wallachia's beginnings accumulated – with princely approval – at Câmpulung (chiefly between the 1630s and 1650s), we have to admit that two Alexanders (Andrew and Nicholas) divided the fate of Wallachia between West (Avignon) and East (Byzantium) with – an otherwise intriguing aspect – Hungary favouring a more southern turn of Wallachia (e.g. in autumn 1330, Charles-Robert attacked Wallachia and Andronikos III Bulgaria angered by the deal sealed after Velbujd; in 1359 when the Metropolitanate of Wallachia was created by Constantinople, Louis I was much at ease with the situation and counted on John V Palaeologus' Ottoman difficulties). Xenopol's hypothesis therefore remains valid and must be re-addressed through researches on the 1330s, repeatedly neglected by numerous scholars who have focused on the genesis of the Wallachia.