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THESIS
SUMMARY

**Despot-Vodă and his potential Protestant
prerogatives: a historical-theological study**

**SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR,
PROF. UNIV. DR. HABIL.
IOAN GHEORGHE ROTARU**

**Candidate,
EMANUEL JURCOI**

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Summary of the doctoral thesis

The fact that Despot-Voda was Protestant is difficult, if not impossible to establish with scientific certainty. However, there is the possibility of analyzing some of the aspects specific to his reign that constitute potential Protestant prerogatives, and this study analyzes precisely these issues, since it is possible to discuss the potentially Protestant character of the personal beliefs nurtured by the Moldavian ruler, as they are reflected in the decisions taken throughout his reign. The present work is entitled „Despot-Voda's potential Protestant prerogatives: a historical-theological study”, therefore the trajectory pursued in the thesis concerns Despot's actions that highlight aspects that can be considered Protestant impulses, although they cannot be firmly catalogued as such.

Likewise, Daniel Benga believed that the question of whether Despot-Voda's embrace of Lutheran ideas was out of interest or sincere conviction could not be easily answered, although the author was convinced that he had tried to convert the Orthodox to Protestantism. Whether or not Benga is right, this thesis does not consider the precise location of Despot in the Protestant camp - precisely because such an approach is impossible from the point of view of church history - but only the selection of some actions that he exercised as lord of Moldavia and which could indicate

their Protestant origin by comparison with similar steps initiated by other European monarchs whose territories they passed on the side of Protestantism.

1.1.1 Actuality of doctoral research

The relevance of the research consists both in connecting an extra-Carpathian Romanian space to western culture. Through Romania's accession to the European Union, a fact that happened in 2007, more and more solutions are being sought to encourage European cultural projects in this space. Starting from 2014, a president was elected in Romania who is a representative of the PNL but also a Protestant in religious beliefs. Every Christian denomination has related with diverse expectations of this president. Reform in the education of schools in Romania is one of the most important and tense topics. The Schola Latina project in Cotnari represented a real reform in education. The unitary and coherent political vision of a foreign gentleman, Greek by birth but Western by education can represent a paradigm for the development of a country project. Also, 2017 was one of celebrating the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation of 1517, started in Wittenberg by the monk and teacher Martin Luther. The mentioned anniversary provides topicality to the research of this subject which is part of the history of Protestantism in South-Eastern Europe.

1.1.2 Purpose of the research

„Despot-Voda and its potential Protestant prerogatives: a historical-theological study” is a research topic that aims to resume an image of the exotic character on the throne of Moldova for a short period of time, namely 1561-1563. In the summer of 2014, I defended my bachelor's thesis entitled „Despot-Vodă and Protestantism in Moldova”, at the Faculty of History of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iași, and in the summer of 2017, I advocated my master's thesis entitled „Building the legitimacy of power at Despot-Vodă” at the same prestigious University. The present work also represents a continuity of research. The year 2017 was also one of celebrating the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation of 1517, started in Wittenberg by the monk and teacher Martin Luther. The character from the Renaissance period remained a controversial one, and some aspects unsolved. Regarding the reforms during his reign, they were analyzed only separately and

not integrated into a single work. The integration of these specialized studies into individual research provides a more complete presentation on the reign of this voivode.

Researching the life and reign of Despot-Vodă is an arduous approach because after his reign the Orthodox Church firmly spoke out against Protestantism in the 17th century through the Councils of Iasi. The character was denigrated for political reasons by Ștefan Tomșa and the avenger Alexandru Lăpușneanu. Despot-Voda can be found in dozens of biographies, chronicles, diaries and hundreds of documents in Latin, Greek, French, German, Italian, Polish, Turkish and Slavonic that have been collected and published but little translated and analyzed. This practice of „damnatio memori” known since antiquity by which formally a predecessor king was „condemned to oblivion” is also found in the historiography of the character studied.

The image of the gentleman who could have been a Protestant, at the court of Suceava, although it was also mentioned in historiography, it was often subjected to an investigation with exaggerated suspicions. A distinct note is made through the 1927 publication of Hans Petri, a Protestant priest who titles his research Relations of Jakobus Basilicus Heraclides called Despot-Voda with the heads of the reformation both in Germany and in Poland as well as his own reforming activity in the principality of Moldavia. Also, his image as a possible Protestant was illustrated through other writings, such as that of Mrs. Maria Crăciun (1996) and Mr. Hancock Ștefan (2003).

The present research aims to clarify its potential theological beliefs from documentary, biographical, epistolary sources and to pursue a religious framing through the perspective of its relationships and the analysis of the character's words. Also, the image of a potential reformer in Moldova is intended to be approached by observing his reforming activities from the perspective of a brilliant military strategist and one who claimed to domesticate Moldova. All his reforming actions in the religious, political, economic and educational fields must be examined from the perspective of a plan that had a coherence even if the character faced many serious urgent and pragmatic problems from the first day he took the throne. In other words, we want to find out if Despot-Vodă was a Protestant out of conviction or if he can only be framed conjuncturally, institutionally as a Protestant, and if his reforming actions are part of a program of a reformer or just a protector of the Reformation. The questioning of his tragic death is in the same direction.

The working hypothesis is that Despot-Voda was allegedly a Protestant and a denigrated reformer in the historiography that has established itself over the years. Today, 500 years after the

Protestant Reformation, information about Despot-Vodă's personality creates a lot of confusion and controversy because it is based rather on rumors, circumstantial situations, tendentious biographies that have been accepted in a simplistic and mediocre way, and the sources by far the most reliable were investigated with exaggerated suspicion because it agreed with the religious context in Moldova. „Despot-Voda and its potential Protestant prerogatives: a historical-theological study” is a relevant topic because in 2017 the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation was celebrated and its impact on Moldova is not yet sufficiently clarified. The way in which this political figure from Eastern Europe was treated even deciphers a pattern of reporting on Protestantism. Converting a Greek to Protestantism would be an interesting case for the 16th century. The theme is marginalized including in the research of Protestants who are content to mention a few lines about this character, but deal more with the Reformation in Poland and Transylvania. This concludes the approach to Protestant reform in Eastern Europe, which requires research on the principle of „sine ira et studio” and from a Protestant-evangelical perspective.

The introduction boils down to the outline of the theme found in the object of the research, then to the presentation of the methodology and to the bibliographic horizon where the main documentary, narrative, epistolary and archaeological sources will be presented. After this report on the historiography of the researched subject, we will realize instead of a conclusion through a stage of the research that has been reached today.

The second chapter addresses the character's origin, education, and possible religious conversion. Its noble origin that has always been contested will be approached from the perspective of narrative and documentary sources. Education is a topic that has been addressed both in the dissertation thesis and even in an article published in „Annales Aradului”, Year II, no. 2 – 2016. Also, the structure will not follow the chronology of the subject as much as the main skills acquired in the various schools where he was educated. The religious conversion will interrogate the causes presented or suggested in the historiography for which Despot-Vodă took this step, then we will try the confessional framing embraced by him and his relationship with the various Protestant leaders.

The third chapter analyzes the strategy treatise published by Despot-Vodă and dedicated to Philip II, as well as the preparations at Kezmark for the expedition to Moldova. The relations developed in Braşov-Kronstadt, the friendship of Albert Lasky from Kezmark and the support obtained from Francisc Zay from Kosice are found in abundance in the documentary sources of

the time. The death scene surprises both by the ingenuity of the act and by its effectiveness after another failure to obtain the throne. The taking of the throne through the Battle of Verbia will be presented chronologically and sketched through eight scenes. Despot-Vodă's skill in battles deserves a special chapter because it was an area in which the character excelled and reveals part of his intelligence and thought structure. A strategic mind in military affairs certainly characterizes the character also in the field of reforms undertaken when he became lord of Moldavia.

The fourth chapter focuses on innovative ideas and some reforms made by him during the short period in which he reigned on the throne of Moldova. The gestures of intention, innovation and even some reforms of the lord of Moldavia from the period 1561-1563 point both to his self-appointment as king of Moldavia, his coronation as king of Moldavia, obtaining an autonomy of the reign by hiring mercenaries who also contributed to the conquest of the throne as well as to the introduction of new jobs and servants, not only loyal but also competent in the Royal Council. The reform of education as well as the monetary reform are the main actions of the reign that may contribute to the creation of a context, a fund for the implementation of forms even in the field of the Protestant Reformation. We consider the calendar that was used in Moldova, after 1572, a means of moving the country away from the non-Pravoslav West and getting closer to Constantinople.

The fifth chapter analyzes the reasons for Despot-Voda's death as they emerge from documents, chronicles and literature. The first reason addressed in this section will be related to divine justice then the second reason is that of the fear of the boyars and the last reason is identified as that of tragedy. This is also most often found in Protestant writings.

1.2 Methodology

The general approach of the thesis is one specific to historical theology, and the main research method being an indirect descriptive-observational one, with the help of which the primary, published sources were examined, some translated others not being translated, trying to present the results both from a diachronic point of view, as well as synchronic. The author presents the fact that primary sources are mainly published, in volumes of known documents, in articles from journals and periodicals, as well as from books. The author also used the synthetic method,

a method specific to the historical study, a method that consists in consulting the reference syntheses regarding the character, the period and the regions that showed interest in the research, as well as in the subsequent synthesis of the documents resulting from this research. The results of the doctoral research placed the author in the position in which to also use the interpretative-evaluative method.

The thesis approach is generally a diachronic one, presenting the life of Despot-Voda, but also thematic with the nuance of biography. The focus of the theme is both on life before the possible conversion and after it, but in a special way on his reign in Moldova. In other words, we will deal with both the morally negative aspects of the character, but also the support he received from Protestants. Subjects such as his origin, education and military ability lead to his meeting with the most influential Europeans and Protestants who smooth him a stay at all the important courts on the continent, and then to the throne of Moldova. „Protestant” becomes a supporter of the Reformation in Moldova, for what reasons, how seriously does it do this? Theologically, the work focuses on identifying some potential Protestant prerogatives that could arise from Despot's activity, especially compared to the steps initiated by other European monarchs in order to transfer their territories to Protestantism: historically, questions about his motivations and methods will be answered, but especially to those about the possible preparation of the context for the spread of the Reformation in Moldova. The mentioned aspects make the approach a unique one through the sources used, their analysis and the connection with other information that reveals the complexity of this character in the history of Moldova.

The present work is diachronically structured in chapters and subchapters that descriptively address the life and reign of the character Despot-Voda. In general, each subchapter and chapter is concluded by a preliminary conclusion that is required according to the data presented.

CONCLUSIONS

Following the research carried out in the thesis entitled „The potential Protestant prerogatives of Despot Vodă: a historical-theological study” it could be observed that the figure of the lord of Moldavia, Despot-Vodă, we cannot say with certainty that he fully adopted Protestant

principles, historical evidence and theological indicates a series of prerogatives and attitudes that betray affinities with religious reforms in Europe of his time.

In conclusion, in relation to the origin of Despot-Voda we can consider the following: the modest or lower origin is not necessarily as certain as the theory is widespread since the common denominator of the sources is reduced to a poor Greek named Jacob. On the other hand, in relation to its noble origin, it is supported not only on the testimony and family tree assumed by Despot-Vodă himself, but also confirmed by the chancellery of Carol Vintul. However, the validity of this information may be the subject of discussion.

What is certain is that a humanistic education from Hermodor Lestarchus, then in the imperial school of Charles the Fifth and the University of Montpellier, laid a foundation for his dialogue, research and openness to Protestant ideas while he was around the University of Wittenberg. The principle of return to sources „ad fontes” was applied by Protestantism to Scripture in the original languages.

The aspect of Despot-Vodă's conversion could be proven primarily conjuncturally or by association with various personalities. However, what is remarkable is that these personalities are not just any Protestants, but the leaders of the religious reform in Europe of that time. The second aspect in the anatomy of Despot-Voda's conversion is related to the personal beliefs that he does not express in writing, but only Antonio Maria Graziani reveals some of his antitrinitarian religious beliefs. We also know of some sympathies he has with the theology of Andreas Osiander. Even more than that, the evidence of his conversion to the ideas of reform could be his actions in support of Protestantism when he was on the throne of Moldavia. The interpretation of these actions remains open to various options for understanding.

The staging of Despot-Vodă's death at Kezmark aimed to gain a decisive advantage in the fight with Lăpuşneanu. The conquest of Moldavia by Despot-Vodă's mercenaries gave him an extraordinary advantage over the boyars. Thus, the basis for reforming the institution of the lordship in relation to the Royal Council was achieved through this unequal ratio of forces. Despot-Vodă's mercenaries remained to guard Despot-Vodă and thus he could rule at his own pleasure.

Despot-Vodă considered himself the conqueror of the Moldavian throne even if at least some of the boyars and clergy supported him even earlier, and others went over to his side immediately after the flight of Alexandru Lăpuşneanu. Despot-Vodă used this sympathy in his relationship with Ferdinand I and Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, but in domestic politics we

discover his independence from the power of the boyars. So Despot-Vodă has the attitude of a conqueror in Suceava based on his army of mercenaries whom he did not demobilize after the expulsion of voivode Alexandru Lăpuşneanu. Jacob Heraclide reformed the institution of the reign by inscribing the throne of Moldavia in Western typology, but with some Byzantine nuances as expected.

Calling itself „Pater Patriae”, a title of glory of the Caesars and Romano-German emperors benevolent reformers is another sign of both self-image and resounding and important acts of reform in Moldova. He also reformed the institution of the reign by assuming the right of sovereign king in Moldova by distancing himself from the Ottoman Empire. It seems that Jacob Heraclides did not pay the harac to the sultan, although he at first obtained the confirmation of the Porte, also by assuming the right of sovereign of Moldavia by issuing several coins and by holding the scepter, an insignia of Moldavian sovereignty. His pro-Western policy can be inferred from the fact that it was from there that his recognition came to him, and the Byzantine affinities are due to his Greek origin.

In other words, the idea of the king of Moldavia is supported both by the repeated coronation of Despot-Vodă as king of Moldavia and by his title as king, as we will see even through the crucifix scepter a sign of power that is rendered on the monetary issues of the period his reign. Including the minting of currency is a sign of the sovereignty of Moldova, especially the issuance of five types of currency both in the period of 1562 and 1563.

In relation to the Cotnari school, we can say that it had more of a humanistic purpose than a religious one. The formation of a clergy for the Protestant churches in Moldova could be an indirect goal of the school. The goal of spreading Protestantism was certainly an important one, but not necessarily a priority one. By educating the children and learning the Latin language, the students would have been able to interact with Western religious texts, which would have exposed the Moldovans more to Protestant ideas. However, we believe that the basic goal of the school was also a humanistic one for the formation of the future administration of Moldova. How can we interpret such an idea? Cotnari, the place where the school was located is not a strong enough reason to explain the purpose of this school. There were several Protestant communities in Moldova, not just one. If the purpose of the school was a strict one for the formation of the clergy this school would certainly have been under the leadership of Bishop Johann Lusinsky and not under Johann Sommer. At least the bishop would have taught at this school, but Sommer does not

mention anything about the bishop's presence at the Schola Latina de la Cotnari. Even more so if it is considered that both the Great Library and that plan of a higher school would have wanted Despot-Vodă to develop it also in Cotnari. No one can consider that Despot-Vodă would have invited Gaspar Peucer and Rhaeticus Johann to Moldova to leave some university positions in Wittenberg and Krakow and give them the opportunity to teach some students who were just learning Latin. Both were teachers of mathematics, not theology as far as we know. Even if these were Protestants, Despot-Vodă certainly wanted a more chosen education. Hermodor Lestarchus of Chios was not a Protestant even though he could sympathize with Protestants like his brilliant pupils at Constantinople. The teacher from Greece was most likely invited to teach Latin to Cotnari students. But certainly not in a strictly denominational school. The refusal of the offer by Gaspar Peucer is a subject that can also be explored from the perspective of distrust in Mr. Moldova.

Another important aspect is related to the bour head with a muzzle ring on the orthot issued in 1563, being a unique representation in the entire history of the coat of arms of Moldova. The theory issued by Ilie Țabrea with several monetary craftsmen in Suceava, one of whom was influenced by the coats of arms of the cities of Kalisz and Poznan in Poland, on which a bull's head with a link was printed, is plausible up to a point. There is no difference in features to justify the bull's head. Just the fact that it has a link in its nostrils which means it represents a domesticated animal. Between the gestures of power and the heraldic innovations brought by Despot-Vodă, it should come as no surprise that through this symbol the voivode attributes his domestication to the bour, i.e. Moldova. Despot-Vodă displayed on the golden duchies his claim to be the defender and avenger of the freedom of the homeland, and attached to the head of the bour on the coat of arms of Moldavia, an open princely crown that can send again to the assumption of the title of king of Moldavia, as he asked to be crowned.

So, Despot-Vodă was a Greek, humanist and probably Protestant, but also a gentleman of Moldavia with a reforming mindset in many areas that were strongly reflected in the politics of Moldavia during the years 1561-1563. The study of title, numismatics and education reveals both his claims as a reformer and his attitude and his situation in the reports to the boyars of the country of Moldova. Jacob Heraclide Despot did not report with fear to the boyars of the country even in his possible reforming activity.

Despot-Vodă was a military strategist whose brilliance was known and a man skilled in fighting. These skills are also reflected in his reforming work. Despot-Vodă seems to have had a plan to

introduce the Reformation in Moldova. A program of effective reform that includes legislation, the founding of institutions, people, means and a strong impact. All these aspects could have been seen in the actions of the Protestant lord, protector of Protestantism, but who probably also had aspirations of a religious reformer if he had survived more than two years on the throne. These being visible both in his preaching role, the founding of a Protestant church in Suceava, but without its own building. His death was interpreted as divine justice by some, and by others as a tragedy or even as a martyr. As a result of the research, we consider that the interpretation of death as a tragedy is the most balanced and probably the most common in Protestant authors.

In conclusion, following the research undertaken for this thesis entitled „The potential Protestant prerogatives of Despot Vodă: a historical-theological study”, we state that Despot-Vodă's claim to be „domesticit” Moldova refers to the initiation of several institutional, educational, political reforms, social and even religious but which are overshadowed by its controversial character presented in specialized literature. His testimony in the public space of Moldova as a Protestant gentleman remains with lights and shadows due to the fact that the possible plan to support Protestantism did not last and due to his condemnation to oblivion „damnatio memoriae”.

New directions of research for the future could contribute to the interpretation and recontextualization of Despot-Voda's reign. First of all, it would help to translate the documents already published in the established volumes. Then another way to develop the subject is through archaeological research in Cotnari. Exploring the theme from a sociological and psychological analysis could help reassess his reign. These interdisciplinary studies would help complete his image. Returning to the contribution of this thesis regarding the Moldovan gentleman's research, we can highlight how Despot at least used his relations with Protestants to strengthen his political actions. Which also frames research in the area of political theology by legitimizing power with the help of religion or in the history of power.

So, at the moment, after carrying out the doctoral research and presenting the results in the present thesis, a firm placement of Despot Vodă within Protestantism is impossible from the perspective of church history. Therefore, it can only be stated that Despot Vodă would have undertaken a series of reforms that highlight some potential Protestant prerogatives, especially in terms of the comparison between his activity as lord of Moldavia and similar measures taken by European monarchs that, in one way or another, contributed to the spread of Protestantism on the continent.

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