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## PART I

### **VLAD III VOIEVOD OF WALLACHIA A versatile legend of early Renaissance**



## A BROADER EUROPEAN CONTEXT

### 1.1. Papacy and Crusades

Since the Roman Empire was divided into West and East (285 CE), Latin-speaking Rome began to claim superiority over Greek-speaking Constantinople and disagreements evolved over the church boundaries and control. In Slavic regions rivalry developed between Latin (Roman Catholic) missionaries from the West and Byzantines (Orthodox) from the East. Religious discords (differences in doctrine, clerical practice) worsened due to political conflicts particularly regarding the power of Rome. Disputes over authority became even more intense in the 11th century as Rome proclaimed its primacy over all churches. Rome believed that the pope – the religious leader of the western church – should have authority over the patriarch – the religious authority of the eastern church. The tensions became a schism in 1054 when the uncompromising patriarch of Constantinople and the three papal legates excommunicated each other. However, this was not the final break between the Churches of East and West. Rather the breach between the two should be dated to after 1096 when the crusades increased tension and misunderstanding between Latins and Greeks.<sup>33</sup>

#### Causes of the crusades

At the origin of the idea of the crusade rests several factors of which first is the tradition of pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the center of the spiritual world of Christians. A road whose difficulties and perils turned the journey to the Holy Places into the penitence that could bring the medieval man absolution of sins.

On the other hand, the Islamic conquests ensouled by the spirit of *jihād*, the holy Muslim war, created a response in the Christian world and contributed to the idea of the legitimacy of the war against the infidels. The idea of the crusade emerged from these two backgrounds, but the success of Pope Urban II's (r.1088–99) sermon at Clermont, which led to the outbreak of the first crusade in 1095 must be viewed through the lenses of change, manifested itself very strongly at the time of the First Crusade, and that had been developing long before as a result of the broadly disseminated propaganda dedicated to reforming papacy.<sup>34</sup>

Deep religiosity, even if sometimes imbued with superstitions, of the majority of the Western population, is to be taken into account when looking for the causes of the Crusades. The Orient had for Western Christians the appearance of a world of wonder and luxury. The West went through a 'Dark Age', with Rome ravaged by barbarians and its classical civilization knowledge almost completely lost. But in the East, the Roman Empire flourished and came to be known as the Byzantine Empire. It expanded its power and influence across the Eastern Mediterranean and reached also Italy. The much superior level of material and spiritual culture of the Byzantine or Islamic Orient as compared to the West constituted an appeal to conquer and take over these lands. In the West, the economic momentum underlying its later development had already begun, but its immediate consequence was a certain increase in population at all levels of society while the resources remained insufficient and could not meet all demands. So, leading the excess of the population towards the Orient, for an expansionist reason, could have been a solution.

The hierarchical structure of Western society not only consented but made compulsory such a crusade. The large category of knights, professionals of weapon handling, many of whom were, however, removed from the inheritance of parental wealth, which belonged to the firstborn, saw themselves obliged to make a living by the force of their sword. For them, the war was the daily way of life, but the Church's efforts to establish a climate of peace in the West tended to restrict their possibilities of manifestation. By proclaiming God's peace and truces, during which fighting was forbidden, and Christianizing the ideal of chivalry, the Church of Rome sought to direct these warriors' military potential to goals that would serve its interests. The Church was empowered to do so, and as a result of its internal reform, the papacy had strengthened, and held supreme moral authority in the West, by taking over many commands and insignia of secular power. A disciplined and obedient clergy to the pope of Rome had helped raise the religious level of the people, turning Christendom into a living and secure reality. This clergy carried the message of the call to the fight against the infidels across Western Europe, triggering a movement of an unexpected adhesion even for the initiators of the project.

In terms of particular events, the interests of the Byzantine Empire to benefit from the help of Western knights in the fight against the pagans (the Seljuk Turks who penetrated Asia Minor in 1067 and the Arabs

who ruled the Holy Places) should also be considered. There was even a tradition of the Byzantine emperor in recruiting Norman mercenaries, only that they had proved unstable: ready at any time to revolt and rather eager to realize for their own benefit (and to the detriment not only of the Arabs but also of the Byzantines) a Mediterranean empire. Towards the end of the 11th century, the Emperor of Constantinople chose to ask help from the pope, and to plead his case throughout Christendom, thus allowing him to benefit from the military force of Western knights.

The increasing power of Venice and other Italian republics and their interest in supporting, for commercial reasons, Christian expansion in the Arab-ruled space, is another factor to consider when trying to explain the success of the idea of the crusade.

So, Pope Urban II moved by the appeal for aid from Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (r.1081–1118) at Constantinople, realized the necessity of protecting Europe most practically by carrying the war into the enemy's country. And with the broad view of a statesman probably that he foresaw the gain in authority that would accrue to the papacy from the leadership in a universal movement that would arouse religious enthusiasm and be conducted under the guidance of the Church of Rome.<sup>35</sup> The Crusaders managed to liberate vast territories in the Near East (Edessa, Antioch, Tripoli) including Jerusalem, which was conquered in 1099.

These conquests would establish the foundations of the Latin principalities of the Holy Land (the kingdom of Jerusalem, the principality of Antioch, the county of Tripoli, the county of Edessa), where models of Western feudalism previously unknown to the Orient, were applied. Confronted with the lack of coordination among the feudalists settled in the Orient, the land's protection was mainly assured by the military monk orders (The Knights Hospitaller, the Templars, and the Teutonic Knights). But Latin dominion was soon contested by Muslims, who would achieve in the coming centuries successes that led to the organization of new crusades.

A special mention deserves the Fourth Crusade (1202–04), which was turned by the Venetians from its original goals, and ended with the conquest of Constantinople: on its throne until 1261 ruled Latin emperors (Western and Catholic).

The loss of Western possessions in Syria continued during the 13th century, and in 1291, the last point of Latin resistance, Acra was

conquered. The Crusade, however, remains a permanence of Western history, extending its scope to the struggle with any kind of infidels, not just those who ruled the Holy Places. Thus, the battles with the Arabs in Spain, with the pagans of the Baltic Sea, later with the Ottoman Turks in Eastern and Central Europe went under the sign of the Crusade.

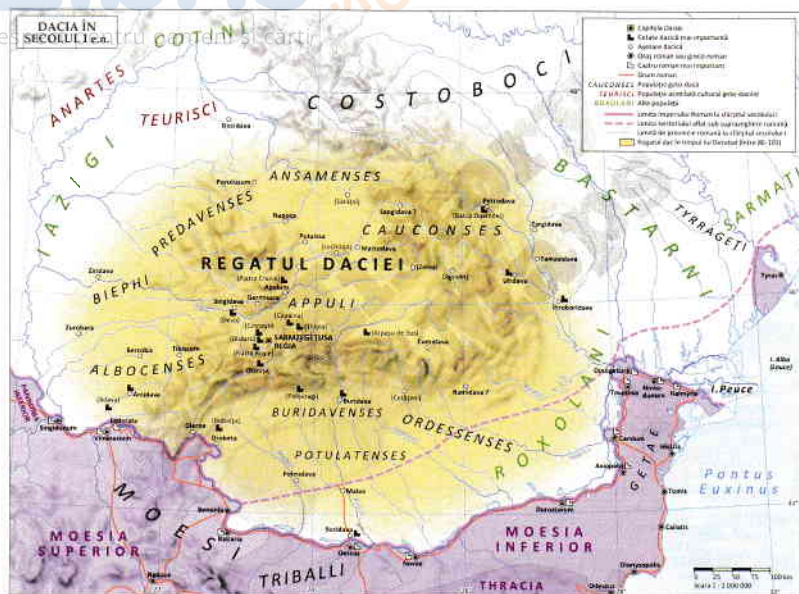
The Crusade turned into an instrument at the disposal of the papacy, which used it also in fighting against heretics and political opponents. The Crusades, and especially the Fourth one with the Latin capture of Constantinople in 1204 have contributed to the decisive split between the West and East; the Greeks would permanently hold resentment against the Latins, and refused religious union with Rome (Councils of Lyon (1274) and Ferrara-Florence (1439)) even when the Turks were at the walls of Constantinople.

## **1.2. The land of Transylvania Geopolitical and economical context**

Transylvania is situated in the center of the ancient Dacian kingdom, which was conquered by the Romans in 106 CE and called Dacia. The inhabitants – consisting of Dacians, Celts, and Germans – adopted soon the Latin language and merged into the Daco-Romans, who, then, by assimilating the migratory peoples, predominantly the Slavs, created the Romanian people and language.

In the late 896 CE, the Hungarians arrived in Pannonia and settled –whether easy-going or by force of arms – along the course of the rivers originating in the central plateau of Transylvania and flowing into the Tisza river. On these rivers, westward and southward, the riches of Transylvania: salt, wood, gold, and silver were transported. For the Hungarians, who were doing stock raising in the grassy plain which forms their country – this region appeared like a land beyond the forests (in Latin *trans silvas*), wherefrom the name Transylvania. The name of Dacia vanished from memory till the Renaissance times when it appeared again on the map due to humanists' writings.

During three centuries of pressure, the Hungarians took over the largest part of the region but their insufficient workforce constrained the kings of the Arpad dynasty (896–1301) to appeal to foreign populations to assure the development of the underground riches



Dacia in the 1st century CE (historymaps.ro)



Map of the middle Danube basin by Johannes Honterus (1498-1549) - the territories of Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia under the name DACIA - published in „Rudimenta Cosmographiae”, Braşov, (1541) ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Johann\\_Honterus\\_Septemcastrensis\\_de\\_Corona.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Johann_Honterus_Septemcastrensis_de_Corona.jpg))

and protection of the borders. Thus, on the eastern frontier (eastern Carpathians) were settled the Szeklers, a population of the same Finno-Ugric origin as the Hungarians, who were actually 'Magyarized' after their conversion to Catholicism. For both to exploit the gold and silver mines and defend the southern frontier (the southern Carpathians), colonists from the Rhine, Moselle, and Luxemburg zones, were settled and established the first cities in the region. Following the Saxon law of Magdeburg, which became the model for all German settlements in eastern Europe, these 'Flemish guests' took the name Saxons – *Sachsen* in their language.<sup>36</sup>

The province was led by a duke, or *voievod*, (a Slavic term used by the Romanians) and incorporated various entities designated as judicial and administrative centres of each nation: Hungarian *comitats* on 'royal territory', to the west and in the center; the 'seven' Saxon *Stühle* to the south and north, as well as two Saxon districts, Braşov and Bistriţa, and eight Szekler *szék* to the east. [The *Stühle* and *szék*, mean literally 'seat, chair', here we refer to citadels]

Alongside these entities, there existed in Transylvania the Romanian *voievodates* and *knezates* [principalities], of which the most important were Făgăraş and Haţeg to the south, and Maramureş to the north, preserved up till the thirteenth century, when the kings of the new Anjou dynasty of Naples (1308–87), suppressed the privileges of the traditional Romanian nobility who did not possess royal diplomas. The Romanian nobles were downgraded to the rank of commoners or free peasants, and their ancient principalities were dispersed within the Hungarian *comitats* or the Saxon *Stühle*. While a part of the Romanian nobles was deprived of their status, another part, to keep their privileges, converted to Catholicism, or decided to emigrate over the Carpathians, to Wallachia and Moldavia.<sup>37</sup>

A special interest was in the 'seven' Saxon *Stühle* (the German name for Transylvania, was *Siebenbürgen*, even if afterwards there were at least 10 citadels) and the two Saxon districts. The most important of these in southern Transylvania were Kronstadt [Braşov], Hermannstadt [Sibiu], Broos [Orăştie], Mühlbach [Sebeş], and Schassburg [Sighişoara]. All of them but mainly Kronstadt and Hermannstadt – situated near the Wallachian border benefitted from their strategic position situated on the trade routes coming from the east and the south. In the fourteenth century, they were granted the commercial staple right privilege [*Stapelrecht* in German] stipulating that merchants exercising their trade in southern Transylvania were

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demanded to stop for at least one month in one of these cities and sell their goods with priority to Saxon burghers.<sup>38</sup> Much more, in 1358 the Kronstadt merchants received privileges of freely circulating with their goods through Wallachia on the routes directing to the lower Danube and the Black Sea. This was a direct consequence of the vassalage link between the Hungarian crown and the Wallachian princes. (a situation dating around the formation of Wallachia and following the election in 1308 of Charles Robert of the House of Anjou-Naples as King of Hungary).<sup>39</sup>

Hungary had control also over the minting of coins. The Wallachian princes could strike coins but aligned with Hungarian ones. From 1365 to 1452, this fact had serious consequences for the Wallachian economy, dependent on the devaluations of Hungarian coinage, which was a diminution of the fraction of precious metal (silver) in coins, while their exchange value remained the same. Therefore, exchanging old coins for new ones was to the detriment of Wallachians. Also, they lost when trading in the Balkans and Ottoman Empire, as the devalued coinage was not accepted at its face value but rather evaluated according to the weight of precious metal. Whenever Wallachian princes required a right exchange rate for their money, contrasting with the devalued Hungarian coinage, the Crown had threatened with penalties, such as seizing their two Transylvanian fiefs: Amlaş and Făgăraș, (situated between Brașov and Sibiu which Louis of Anjou, King of Hungary, had granted in 1365 to his Wallachian vassal – Vladislav I), or by appointing another prince from the long queue of claimants to the throne of Wallachia, who were watching for their moment, sheltered behind the walls of the Saxon cities.

This enforced devaluation of Wallachian coinage had dramatic consequences for transactions operated abroad<sup>40</sup> while the Transylvanian Saxon cities experienced unparalleled prosperity, increasing currency speculation.

The problem was even worsened by political refugees – claimants to the Wallachian throne, who found protection in Transylvania. All the efforts of the Wallachian princes to obtain the expulsion failed in front of the Saxons' spirit of freedom and hospitality. Except these demands were paired with threats or adequate bribes.



The map of Transylvania and Wallachia by Abraham Ortelius (1527–98) ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transylvania\\_by\\_Abraham\\_Ortelius\\_1612.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Transylvania_by_Abraham_Ortelius_1612.jpg))

