

THE SLAVONIC EPISTLES OF BASARAB THE ELDER TO THE TRANSYLVANIAN SAXONS (1474–1476)

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The Slavonic letters dispatched by the voivodes of Wallachia to Braşov, where they remain preserved to this day, constitute a major and invaluable source for the fifteenth-century history of Wallachia. In this article, our primary objective is to readdress the undated Slavonic epistolary corpus attributed to Basarab the Elder, who ruled Wallachia with several interruptions between 1473 and 1477. These epistles were addressed by the Wallachian voivode to the Saxon town of Braşov, while the answers of the Saxon authorities to the Wallachian lord did not generally survive. A diligent analysis of the clerks' handwriting habits alongside a comparative investigation with other types of documentary evidence, such as charters, might not only suggest new reasoned dates for these Slavonic letters, but also could enlarge other research horizons, such as the Romanian-Ottoman relations, the history of audiences and of medieval political discourse, the political thought of the Wallachian lords, the careers of the scribes working in the chancellery, or the functional dynamics of the princely chancellery. Our essay aims to revisit this epistolary corpus through several analytical methods highlighting the usefulness and the potential of such approaches for future research.

Keywords: Basarab the Elder, Wallachia, Slavonic letters, chancellery, Braşov, the Romanian-Ottoman relations, medieval handwriting.

The steadfast interest in the Slavonic letters sent by the voivodes of Wallachia to the Saxon towns of southern Transylvania was enhanced in recent years by a growing research interest in the reign of Basarab the Elder.¹ This lord governed Wallachia intermittently from 1473 to 1477. The paper is centred on the letters of Basarab the Elder as a case study, considering that his reign coincides with notable events in South-Eastern Europe, especially the Ottoman military campaigns during the mid-1470s. The significance of these letters lies in the crucial insights they offer into the events unfolding in the region during this time. These

* In this paper we refer to “doc.” when citing a document from a published edition, but we refer to “no.” when indicating a document from the archives.

¹ Daniela Monica Mitea, “Basarab III cel Bătrân (Laiotă)’s relations with Transylvania during his Wallachian Reigns and his Transylvanian pretendance,” *Apulum* 45, 2008, p. 133–52; Liviu Cimpeanu, “Basarab Laiotă, domn al Țării Românești: preliminarii la o monografie,” *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 32, 2014, p. 145–72; idem, “Basarab Laiotă, Ștefan cel Mare și Matia Corvinul la 1477,” *Analele Putnei* 12, no. 2, 2017, p. 7–16.

Slavonic epistles that represent a significant portion of the preserved fifteenth-century documentary corpus have been used until now in various ways by the historians. The analysis of the mercantile and political relations between Wallachia and the Saxon towns² and the investigation of the rhetorical and persuasive dimension of the medieval political discourse³ are only two of the most vigorous approaches. Nonetheless, there is also a major drawback in using these Slavonic epistles – most of them have no date. Writing in an age of historical positivism, Ioan Bogdan, the first Romanian editor of these Slavonic letters,⁴ did not cease to draw attention to the interpretive complexities posed by hundreds of dateless sources.⁵ As for the voivode whose letters we are examining in the following pages, it must be said that all the Slavonic epistles of Basarab the Elder either were partially dated by their penmen (with month and day, but without year), or were left completely undated. In this context, a pertinent question may arise: Can such a state of affairs impede scholarly investigation? We dare to assert that indeed, it can. There are various examples we can briefly mention to substantiate our assertion concerning the reign of Basarab the Elder.⁶

² Șerban Papacostea, “Trade Routes and State-Building. The Early Commercial Policy of Medieval Wallachia and Moldavia,” *Revista Istorică* 29, nos. 5–6, 2018, p. 417–73 (translated into English by Marian Coman).

³ Ovidiu Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor. Știri și război în sec. XV–XVI*, Târgoviște, Ed. Cetatea de Scaun, 2014, p. 11–129.

⁴ The Bulgarian linguist Lyubomir Miletich was the first to publish a portion – namely 121 documents – of the Slavonic documents newly found in Brașov at the end of the nineteenth century (Lyubomir Miletich, “Dako-românite i tehata slavjanska pismenost”. Čast’ II. Novi vlaho-bălgarski gramoti ot Brașov,” *Sbornik za Narodni Umotvorenija, Nauka i Knjižnina* 13, 1896, p. 3–152). On this occasion, two documents from Basarab the Elder were published (nos. 115 & 769).

⁵ Ioan Bogdan, ed., *Documente privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Brașovul și cu Țara Ungurească în secolele XV și XVI*, vol. I, 1413–1508 (Bucharest, Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Göbl, 1905), p. XII, XIV–XV, XVII, XX–XXI, XXXIX, XLIII, XLV–XLVIII, LXXIX.

⁶ For instance, in his seminal work *Puterea cuvintelor*, following the traditional dating proposed by Bogdan, Ovidiu Cristea seeks to compare the manner in which the Ottoman factor appears in the Slavonic correspondence sent to Brașov by both Basarab the Elder and Basarab the Young. But this comparison quickly becomes misleading for the reader as Cristea confidently cites doc. 101 from Bogdan’s edition, assuming similarly to its editor that it was issued by Basarab the Elder (Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor*, p. 109, fn. 246; a few pages below, at p. 114, fn. 256, it is referenced again Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 101). The fact that this letter was actually issued by Basarab the Young was well known since the interwar years (Gr. G. Tocilescu, ed., *534 documente istorice slavo-române din Țara Românească și Moldova privitoare la legăturile cu Ardealul 1346–1603 din arhivele orașelor Brașov și Bistrița. Text original slav însoțit de traducere românească tipărite la Viena în 1905–1906* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1931), doc. 133), and the arguments brought forward by *Urkundenbuch* edition in the 1990s clearly demonstrated this point (*Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, vol. VII, 1474–1486, eds. Gustav Gündisch, † Herta Gündisch, Konrad G. Gündisch, and Gernot Nussbächer (Bucharest, Editura Academiei Române, 1991), doc. 4389). Thus, in Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor*, p. 109–110, Basarab the Young was not only compared to Basarab the Elder, but also to himself. Elsewhere, another author aims to “reevaluate, analyse and clarify certain aspects of the political and economic relations” between Transylvania and Wallachia during the reign of Basarab the Elder, but the obvious chronological inaccuracies inherited from Bogdan were not very helpful in this endeavour (Daniela Monica Mitea, “Basarab III cel Bătrân (Laiotă)’s relations with Transylvania,” p. 133–52).

The discernible inclination among historians to uphold the dates proposed a century ago by Bogdan – probably due to Bogdan’s scholarly authority – is difficult to explicate nowadays, since the amount of published sources, the possible alternative approaches and the links that could be established between sources have all substantially multiplied by now. After postponing for several years the publication of his first edition of the Wallachian letters owing to dating uncertainties,⁷ Bogdan complains in the second edition that in the meantime very few historians have suggested alternative dates to his own, hoping that much more will be accomplished in the future.⁸ Apart from some documents appearing also at the hands of other subsequent editors, there were generally few attempts to redate the letters published by Bogdan.⁹

It is the principal aim of this article to discuss the methods of dating the Slavonic epistolary corpus that may be attributed to Basarab the Elder. The urban municipal archives of the Saxon towns still house only a portion of the letters sent by the Wallachian lords during the Middle Ages, while the responses from the Saxons to the Wallachian voivodes have, for the most part, not been preserved. We shall argue that dating anew these letters must take heed of the scribes’ handwriting patterns and of other corpora of medieval documents. From this point forward, we shall embark on a traditional approach with the specific objective of assigning new dates to old documents. We tried to systematically incorporate every reliable historical fact into a rigorous endeavour of contextualising anew the Slavonic epistles of Basarab the Elder. This paper is structured as follows: 1) a brief discussion on the formation of the considered corpus of documents; 2) the dating possibilities available to the researcher; 3) the benefits and the pitfalls of the handwriting argument; 4) a case study regarding the epistle of June 26; 5) an appendix proposing reasoned dates for all these letters, with seven Panels displaying what we consider being similar handwriting patterns.

THE CORPUS

From the discovery of the first portion of these letters in the Braşov’s archives back in 1886 until the present day, an additional challenge when counting the letters issued by the chancellery of Basarab the Elder, apart from the absence of dates in most instances, lies in the confusion generated by the homonymy of Basarab’s princely name, which can easily be mistaken for either Basarab the

⁷ Ioan Bogdan, ed., *Documente şi regeste privitoare la relaţiile Ţării Rumâneşti cu Braşovul şi Ungaria în secolul XV şi XVI* (Bucharest: Atelierul Grafic I.V. Socecu, 1902), p. 4.

⁸ Bogdan, *Documente*, p. XIV, LXXIX–LXXX; cf. idem, *Documente moldoveneşti din sec. XV şi XVI în arhivul Braşovului* (Bucharest: Socec, 1905), p. I.

⁹ See, e.g., C.A. Stoide, “Legăturile dintre Moldova şi Ţara Românească în a doua jumătate a secolului al XV-lea,” *Studii şi Cercetări Ştiinţifice. Seria Istorie* 7, no. 1, 1956, p. 59–73; Matei Cazacu, “La Valachie et la bataille de Kossovo (1448),” *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes* 9, no. 1, 1971, p. 131–9.

Young (who ruled, albeit without continuity, between 1478 and 1482)¹⁰ or Neagoe Basarab (1512–1521). In certain cases, the *intitulatio* formula alone is insufficient to unequivocally attribute the document to one of the many lords referred to as “Basarab voivode.” In overcoming this hindrance, we may resort to various analytical methods, succinctly discussed in the next section, but firstly let us here consider chronologically the formation of the documentary corpus.

Under unknown circumstances, several dozen documents from the Municipal Archives of Braşov arrived, possibly in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, in Central Europe, where a portion came into possession of Freiherr von Reden,¹¹ whence, through an antiquarian from the German town of Wiesbaden, 19 documents were bought in 1881 by Dimitrie A. Sturdza, interested in seeking there old coinage,¹² who published and donated them to the Romanian Academy on May 7, 1882.¹³ One of these letters was on the same occasion attributed to Neagoe Basarab.¹⁴ Later on, in 1902, Bogdan correctly assigned it to Basarab the Elder,¹⁵ a fact further substantiated by our analysis.¹⁶

When reorganising the collections of the Municipal Archives of Braşov in 1886, the archivist Friedrich Stenner¹⁷ came by chance upon several hundred Cyrillic documents “in a corner of the archives.”¹⁸ Only eight years later, in 1894, news of

¹⁰ Cf. Constantin Rezachevici, *Cronologia critică a domnilor din Țara Românească și Moldova*, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, 2001, p. 801–2.

¹¹ Bogdan, *Documente*, p. X, fn. 3, although this information needs to be further verified.

¹² [Ioan] B[ianu], foreword to Tocilescu, *534 documente*, p. III.

¹³ Dimitrie A. Sturdza, “Dare de seamă despre colecțiunea de documente istorice române aflate la Wiesbaden,” *Analele Academiei Române. Discursuri, Memorii și Notițe*, series II, vol. VIII, section II (1885–1886), p. 242. Probably out of politeness D.A. Sturdza omits to provide any details on the context of the letters’ purchase in Wiesbaden.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 242, 247–8, doc. 5, and stamp I.

¹⁵ Bogdan, *Doc. și regest.*, p. VI, XXIV, fn. 1.

¹⁶ See Panel II.

¹⁷ For Friedrich Stenner, see a brief biographical note here: <http://cautare-bv.arhivelenationale.ro/cautare-bv/deskriptordetail.aspx?ID=61787>, accessed August 13, 2021.

¹⁸ For the discussions surrounding this moment and the precise number of the documents found then – in the midst of the controversy being seemingly Gr. G. Tocilescu –, see Bogdan, *Documente*, p. IX, XII–XIV; [Ioan] B[ianu], foreword to Tocilescu, *534 documente*, p. III–IV, and also Damian P. Bogdan, “O ediție de documente slavo-muntene din arhivele Sibiului și Braşovului a lui Sărcu necunoscută la noi,” *Hrisovul* 2, 1942, p. 41–5. Here is only a glimpse into this controversy: in 1894, returning to Bucharest from a journey in Braşov, where he went looking for Latin documents about the history of the Romanians, Tocilescu declared to the Romanian Academy that “in April 1894, he discovered in the municipal archives of Braşov almost 1,000 Slavonic and Romanian documents, issued by the voivodes of Wallachia and Moldavia, by various towns and individuals in the realm, who have been in frequent correspondence with Braşov in the past centuries” (*Analele Academiei Române. Partea Administrativă și Dezbaterile*, series II, vol. XVII (1894–1895), p. 88). But later on, during a public gathering of the Academy on December 10, 1904, when the situation had already become quite tense, Tocilescu stepped in saying “in April 1894, says Mr. Tocilescu, I discovered in the Saxon archives of Braşov 866 Slavonic and Romanian documents, regarding our national history. They were brought to me in a large bag (*bocceă*), all thrown one upon the other, as they had been lying for a long time” (*Analele Academiei Române. Partea Administrativă și Dezbaterile*, series II, vol. XXVII, 1904–1905, p. 102–6; cf. Nicolae Iorga, “Îndreptări și întregiri la istoria românilor după acte descoperite în arhivele săsești,” *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, series II, vol. XXVII, 1904–1905, p. 102–3).

this discovery reached Bucharest.¹⁹ Starting his study of the Slavonic epistles in Braşov in the summer of 1895, Bogdan published in 1902 a first edition of his work comprising a part of the studied material, of which, for the reign of Basarab the Elder, he considered the following seventeen letters: 1) no. 34; 2) no. 35; 3) no. 37; 4) no. 46; 5) no. 47; 6) no. 53; 7) no. 54; 8) no. 56; 9) no. 57; 10) no. 60; 11) no. 64; 12) no. 69; 13) no. 70; 14) no. 115; 15) no. 122; 16) no. 123; 17) no. 769.²⁰ Thereby immense progress has been already made, and the second edition of Bogdan's monumental work, published in 1905, brings likewise significant revisions to this corpus. Compared to the first edition, the following three letters have been now tacitly removed from Basarab the Elder's corpus: 1) no. 34 (not included anymore);²¹ 2) no. 47 (not included anymore);²² 3) no. 122 (ascribed to Basarab the Young),²³ and there were added the following four letters to Basarab the Elder's corpus: 1) no. 43 (previously attributed to Neagoe Basarab); 2) no. 61 (previously assigned to Neagoe Basarab); 3) no. 62 (previously ascribed to Neagoe Basarab); 4) no. 204/XXI (the one donated by D.A. Sturdza to the Romanian Academy, mentioned already by Bogdan in his introduction to the first edition,²⁴ but only republished in the second one).²⁵ In Bogdan's collection, certain letters may pass from one Basarab to another without any prior notification or discussion.

As regards the Slavonic letters of Basarab the Elder, the next significant moment was the publication in 1931 of a volume partially prepared by Gr. G. Tocilescu already since 1909.²⁶ In the creation of this edition, Tocilescu relied upon substantial help received from many scholars, such as Stoica Nicolaescu, Polihron Sârcu, and Eugen Kozak.²⁷ This collection does not propose dates at all. In spite of this, compared to the second edition of Bogdan's collection, the following two changes appear here in the analysed corpus: 1) no. 37 (ascribed now to Basarab the Young);²⁸ 2) no. 46 (attributed now to Basarab the Young).²⁹ We deem this final classification to be accurate, and a more thorough examination of these two letters was subsequently presented in the *Urkundenbuch* edition.³⁰

In the mid-1920s, Ioan Lupaş discovered in the archives of Baron Samuel von Brukenthal from Sibiu, other 70 Slavonic letters, which he communicated to

¹⁹ *Analele Academiei Române. Partea Administrativă şi Dezbaterile*, series II, vol. XVII, 1894–1895, p. 88.

²⁰ Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, doc. 77–88, and for regests, see p. 243–4.

²¹ Due to the fact that, most probably, Bogdan ascribed now this document to Neagoe Basarab, considering it for his second volume, the one envisaged for the sixteenth century, which, however, was never published.

²² See previous footnote.

²³ Idem, *Documente*, doc. 111, see also p. 397–9.

²⁴ Idem, *Doc. şi regest.*, p. VI, XXIV, fn. 1.

²⁵ Idem, *Documente*, doc. 102.

²⁶ Tocilescu, *534 documente*. See fn. 7 above.

²⁷ [Ioan] B[ianu], foreword to Tocilescu, *534 documente*, p. IV; cf. Damian P. Bogdan, "O ediţie de documente slavo-muntene," p. 43.

²⁸ Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 133.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, doc. 131.

³⁰ *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4389, and doc. 4362.

Silviu Dragomir for publication.³¹ In this collection, doc. 5 is assigned to Basarab the Elder. With regard to this one Slavonic epistle, its attribution to Basarab the Elder or to Basarab the Young does not seem at all clear to us. Arguments can be made for both identifications. This brief discussion is also relevant to highlight how challenging may be the task of dating and contextualising some of these epistles. The letter under scrutiny is the only preserved Slavonic missive sent – presumably – by Basarab the Elder to the town of Sibiu.³² The catalogues and the editions of documents generally present Basarab the Elder as the issuer of this letter.³³ Its first editor, Silviu Dragomir, firmly stated that “the seal is undoubtedly that of Basarab the Elder,”³⁴ which can still be verified as being a valid assertion. We can also confirm that the seal’s legend begins with **ІОНЬ**,³⁵ as the legends of this voivode’s seals generally begin,³⁶ although we found some exceptions even regarding these sealing practices.³⁷ However, the general layout of this missive and its handwriting patterns do match both a letter certainly assigned to Basarab the Elder and another one surely issued on behalf of Basarab the Young. Even though it is demonstrable that the scrivener who drafted this epistle also wrote a letter of Basarab the Young addressed to Sibiu,³⁸ that would not constitute substantial evidence, as even antagonised lords occasionally employed the services of the same scribes (this point can be proved for both Wallachia³⁹ and Moldavia⁴⁰). But the problem assumes new dimensions upon observing that both letters – nos. 651 and 652 – discuss missions of Wallachian envoys dispatched to the royal court of King Matthias in Buda.⁴¹

Furthermore, there exists an additional facet to be taken into account. The letter no. 651 – the one traditionally ascribed to Basarab the Elder – contains the following passage: “to anyone of your men wanting to come [to Wallachia], let

³¹ Silviu Dragomir, ed., “Documente nouă privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Sibiu în secolele XV și XVI,” *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Națională* 4, 1926–1927, p. 3–79.

³² *Ibid.*, doc. 5, p. 14–5.

³³ *Ibid.*; Marta Andronescu, ed., “Repertoriul documentelor Țării Românești publicate până azi, vol. I (1290–1508),” *Buletinul Comisiei Istorice a României* 16 (1937–1938): doc. 358; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4088. Ion-Radu Mircea’s catalogue considers only the internal Wallachian documents, although this option is not explained, see Ion-Radu Mircea, ed., *Catalogul documentelor Țării Românești*, vol. I (1369–1600) (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1946).

³⁴ Dragomir, “Documente,” p. 15.

³⁵ National Archives of Romania – Sibiu, Brukenthal Collection, RS 1–10 Series, no. 651.

³⁶ Cf. the seals of Basarab the Young (Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 87, 89, 90, 91, 93, 94, 95, 96, 98, 100, 102, 104, 106, 109, 111, 114, 119, 125, 135, 136, 137).

³⁷ For Basarab the Young, see *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4179.

³⁸ See Panel VII in the appendix. The document no. 652 (National Archives of Romania – Sibiu, Brukenthal Collection, RS 1–10 Series, no. 652), to which we have compared no. 651 discussed here, certainly belongs to Basarab the Young, as makes clear his title: “† **М(Н)А(О)СТІОМ БОЖІОМ Іо МЛАДІ БАСАРА(Б) ВОЕВОДА И Г(ОСПО)Д(Н)Ь**”. These two documents were first edited by Dragomir, “Documente,” doc. 5, and doc. 6.

³⁹ See below.

⁴⁰ *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, A. Moldova, vol. I (1384–1448), eds. C. Cihodaru, I. Caproșu, and L. Șimanschi (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1975), doc. 114, 128.

⁴¹ A similar content exists in addition in terms of the utilised addresses.

them come freely, being also free to leave [from Wallachia]; and likewise of our people, whoever wants to go there [to Sibiu], let them go freely and return freely, as for this matter we also asked our friend Stephen Báthory, for letting the people circulate [freely], until the messengers will reach the King [Matthias], our lord, and then it will happen just as the God and the King, our lord, will desire to regulate.”⁴² In which year of Basarab the Elder’s reign – that is, with interruptions, from 1473 to 1477 –, does Stephen Báthory, later voivode of Transylvania and royal judge of the Hungarian Kingdom, act as his confidant and take charge of the merchant circulation between southern Transylvania and Wallachia? The years 1474 and 1475 are of no interest in this context, because Báthory was at that time far from Transylvania, either in Hungary or even further north, in Slovakia region.⁴³ Also, in the first part of 1476, Báthory is not present in Transylvania.⁴⁴ The middle part of the year 1476 marked a notably unfortunate period for Basarab the Elder, as his engagement in the Ottoman campaign against Moldavia alongside Sultan Mehmed II precluded the possibility of sending any friendly messengers to Báthory or to King Matthias.⁴⁵ Finally, in 1477, Báthory is present either in northern Hungary or in the royal court of Buda.⁴⁶ Following a comprehensive analysis, which is only briefly summarised here, it becomes abundantly evident that the cited excerpt does not align with the broader historical context associated with any period of Basarab the Elder’s reign.

Shifting our focus to the reign of Basarab the Young, it is an established fact that he made earnest efforts to foster favourable relations with Báthory, and it is well-documented that this Wallachian lord engaged in the exchange of numerous messengers with Báthory, whom Basarab the Young also frequently referred to rhetorically as “our father.”⁴⁷ Moreover, during his interrupted reign in Wallachia, in the years 1478–1482,⁴⁸ Basarab the Young had to be aware of Báthory’s almost continuous presence in Transylvania. For instance, subsequent to his appointment as voivode of Transylvania in the spring of 1479, Stephen Báthory resided continuously in Transylvania during the periods May 1479 – June 1481 and once

⁴² Dragomir, “Documente,” doc. 5.

⁴³ Richárd Horváth, Tibor Neumann, *Ecsedi Bátori István. Egy katonabáró életpályája 1458–1493*, Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2012, p. 142–3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 90; *Războieni. Cinci sute de ani de la campania din 1476. Monografie și culegere de texte*, eds. Manole Neagoe et alii (Bucharest: Direcția Generală a Arhivelor Statului, 1977), doc. 33; *Documente privitoare la Istoria Românilor culese de Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki*, vol. II/2 (1451–1510), ed. Nicolae Densusianu (Bucharest: Academia Română și Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice, 1891), doc. 217; *Documente privitoare la Istoria Românilor culese de Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki*, vol. VIII (1376–1650) (Bucharest: Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice și Academia Română, 1894), doc. 26.

⁴⁶ Horváth, Neumann, *Ecsedi Bátori István*, p. 143–4.

⁴⁷ Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 101 (the letter of Basarab the Young), 118, 121, 127, 128, 132, 133, 134; Dragomir, “Documente,” doc. 7, and doc. 8; *Documenta Romaniae Historica. B. Țara Românească*, vol. I (1247–1500), eds. P.P. Panaitescu and Damaschin Mioc (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1966), doc. 156, 169, 174 (hereafter, *DRH*, B., I).

⁴⁸ Rezachevici, *Cronologia*, p. 111–27.

more from October 1481 to February 1483.⁴⁹ Only during this specific period does the role played by Báthory in the aforementioned epistle align coherently. In a word, this letter depicts Báthory in his capacity as voivode of Transylvania. To sum up, although the form **ЮНЬ** used in the legend of the seal suggests that the letter at issue dates from the reign of Basarab the Elder, the political context points conclusively to the reign of Basarab the Young. In this particular case, the argument centred around the handwriting practices did not yield significant utility. In light of these considerations, we shall not include this letter in the appendix, wherein we date anew and contextualise all the extant Slavonic epistles that we believe can certainly be attributed to Basarab the Elder. Thus, our appendix attentively considers 15 Slavonic letters (excluding the commercial privilege of July 11, 1475), which we posit were issued by Basarab the Elder's chancellery. All these Slavonic epistles were sent to Braşov.

DATING THE UNDATED EPISTLES

We previously suggested that redating these letters could be deemed worthy of thoughtful consideration.⁵⁰ In 1905, in his outstanding introduction to the critical edition of the Wallachian epistles, Bogdan reckoned the following criteria generally used when dealing with letters lacking a date: 1) the factual content of the document;⁵¹ 2) the seal analysis; 3) the handwriting analysis; 4) the identification of the mentioned boyars, especially those holding an office in the princely court.⁵² Needless to say, these criteria remain the principal points of reference in attempting to correlate a historical event with an undated medieval document.

Nevertheless, in the case of Basarab the Elder's letters, the second criterion may sometimes prove quite useful in reducing the chronological imprecision caused by the homonymy of the voivodes' Basarab name. Except for the document no. 651 – discussed above –, a detail from the legend of the seals may suggest a fairly certain connection to Basarab the Elder's reign. The theophoric name **Ю**,

⁴⁹ Horváth, Neumann, *Ecsedi Bátori István*, p. 144–7, 178.

⁵⁰ From a postmodern view, it may seem odd, futile, or useless to even try anew to date these epistles, since dating was an old fixation of the positivist historiography. Although new approaches may find dating discussions quite superfluous, when contending with a corpus containing hundreds of undated letters we believe that the dating issues must be properly addressed (see also Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor*, p. 39, 69–71, 90).

⁵¹ With regard to the content of Basarab the Elder's Slavonic letters, which must invariably be contextualised within a broader historical framework, the following sources and secondary works have significantly helped us in the process of redating the epistles: Horváth, Neumann, *Ecsedi Bátori István*; DRH, B., I; *Documenta ad historiam familiae Bátori de Ecsed spectantia I. Diplomata 1393-1540*, eds. Richardus Horváth, Tiburtius Neumann, and Norbertus C. Tóth (Nyíregyháza: Jóna András Múzeum Kiadványai, 2011); *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV–XVI publicate de Ion Bogdan*, ed. Petre P. Panaitescu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1959); Nicolae Stoicescu, *Dicţionar al marilor dregători din Țara Românească și Moldova, sec. XIV–XVII* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică Română, 1971); Rezachevici, *Cronologia*. See the appendix.

⁵² Bogdan, *Documente*, p. XLV–XLVII.

meaning inspired by God or God-given,⁵³ is habitually written **ІОНЬ** in the case of Basarab the Elder,⁵⁴ **Іо** on the seals of Basarab the Young;⁵⁵ finally, Neagoe Basarab preferred likewise the short form **Іо**.⁵⁶ It should be noted that these general considerations are largely based upon Bogdan's reading of the seals a century ago. In very few instances, these readings can still be verified today. Currently, the majority of seals dating from Basarab the Elder's reign are severely damaged.⁵⁷ During the preparation of his second edition, published in 1905, even Bogdan encountered difficulties in re-verifying certain seals, since "for some [of the seals] any verification has now become impossible; between 1903 and 1904 some of them disappeared, and others were damaged by those who studied them before me."⁵⁸ Given the intricacies involved in the handwriting analysis, it shall be examined separately in the subsequent section.

Apart from the aforementioned criteria, we also employed the following dating methods: 5) the comparison with the Latin epistolary corpus of the same lord that contains clear dates; 6) the attention paid to the dynamics of the charters' issuance by the princely chancellery of Basarab the Elder; 7) the attempt to find any possible connections between the general tone and the rhetorical elements used in a particular letter, on the one hand, and the evolving political context in which the document was drafted, on the other hand. Two additional criteria for dating these epistles have been generally discussed in the historical literature: 8) the princely monogram, and 9) the watermark of the letters' paper. Although both criteria must always be taken into account, regarding the latter, Bogdan emphasised its inefficiency in most instances,⁵⁹ as for the princely monogram, even though considered adequate for dating in some cases,⁶⁰ it did not prove to us a conclusive argument.

⁵³ See Emil Vârtosu, *Titulatura domnilor și asocierea la domnie în Țara Românească și Moldova până în secolul al XVI-lea*, Bucharest, Editura Academiei, 1960, p. 11–101, and Marin Tadin, "L'origine et la signification de la particule **Іо** dans le titre honorifiques des Princes de Bulgarie, de Serbie (méridionale), de Valachie et de Moldavie," *Cyrrilomethodianum* 4, 1977, p. 172–96 (with previous bibliography).

⁵⁴ Bogdan, *Documente*, LX, where, however, is also admitted the form **Іо** (cf. doc. 103), based on a letter of Basarab the Young, wrongly assigned here to Basarab the Elder.

⁵⁵ With exceptions, accepting also the form **ІОНЬ**, *Ibid.*, p. LX–LXI.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. LXIII. See withal Petre P. Panaitescu, ed., *Documente slavo-române de la Sibiu (1470–1653)*, Bucharest, Imprimeria Națională, 1938, doc. 13–17.

⁵⁷ There are, fortunately enough, some exceptions, see National Archives of Romania – Brașov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 60.

⁵⁸ Bogdan, *Documente*, p. LXXIX. See also fn. 18 above.

⁵⁹ Bogdan, *Documente*, p. XVII–XXI. Although Ioan Bogdan's opinion was later criticised (cf. Damian P. Bogdan, "Din paleografia slavo-română," in *Documente privind istoria României. Introducere*, vol. I, Bucharest, Editura Academiei, 1956, p. 93), it is perhaps worth recalling that the fifteenth-century paper used in the chancellery of Wallachia is imported mainly from Italy and Germany (*Ibid.*, p. 127–8), and because of time differences between the production of this paper in Central Europe, its trading through intermediaries until arriving in Wallachia, its storage, and then its usage when needed in the princely chancellery, the role of watermarks in dating these letters is substantially dwindled, since we are concerned here in establishing narrow dates, within a very short period of time, of 2 to 3 years, for instance. Nevertheless, this state of affairs changes considerably in the succeeding century, see Alexandru Mareș, *Filigranele hârtiei întrebuințate în Țările Române în secolul al XVI-lea*, Bucharest, Editura Academiei, 1987.

⁶⁰ Cf. Damian P. Bogdan, "O ediție de documente slavo-muntene," p. 45, fn. 1.

These are the criteria that we currently encompass in order to provide substantiated dates to these previously suggested.

The underlying reason for the abundance of dateless medieval Slavonic epistles issued by the Wallachian chancellery warrants further exploration. Bogdan does not offer any explanation for this phenomenon.⁶¹ The sole comprehensive work on the Wallachian chancellery, despite noting the absence of dates for numerous documents, does not provide any explanatory insights.⁶² Nonetheless, a suggestion considered satisfactory asserts that these epistles, serving as “instruments” to address immediate and transient situations, do not bear a date as they were not intended for future reference and utilization.⁶³ While this argument appears self-evident in the majority of cases, it does not fully explain the phenomenon. The “immediate interest” argument does not take into consideration the Latin epistles issued by the same Wallachian lord, which were also written around similar momentaneous affairs but were more often accurately dated by the scribes. Additionally, several solemn Wallachian charters penned to last over time – some of which clearly intended to maintain a long-lasting written memory – were intentionally left undated or have only been partially dated.⁶⁴ In the absence of a coherent analysis, even a tentative conclusion seems rather hazardous for now. Among the various suppositions, the most compelling explanation appears to be the predominant influence of South-Slavic diplomatics in shaping the dating practices adopted at the Wallachian court.⁶⁵ Be that as it may, this subject remains a matter for further reflection.

WRITING THE EPISTLES OF BASARAB THE ELDER. THE SCRIBES

In this section, our contention is that the process of redating these epistles necessitates not only identifying their authors but also carefully situating these scribes within their specific historical milieu. Accordingly, we may seek to conduct a comparative examination of the handwriting styles present in this epistolary

⁶¹ See the introductory survey from Bogdan, *Documente*, *passim*.

⁶² Damian P. Bogdan, *Diplomatica slavo-română din secolele XIV și XV*, Bucharest, Imprimeria Națională, 1938, p. 131–40.

⁶³ See the full argument: Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor*, p. 41.

⁶⁴ E.g., *DRH*, B., I, doc. 6, 11, 12, 16, 21, 22, 27, 28, 30, 33, 34, 40, 49, 50, 54, 55, 66, 69, 155, 182, 202, 260, 265.

⁶⁵ The examination of diplomas from medieval Serbia has revealed the absence of a consistent dating system, resulting in a considerable number of documents remaining undated, see Ljubomir Maksimović, “Das Kanzleiwesen der serbischen Herrscher,” in Christian Hannick, ed., *Kanzleiwesen und Kanzleisprachen im östlichen Europa*, Köln-Weimar-Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 1999, p. 39, who noted that “die Datierungsweise der Urkunden ist nicht festgelegt,” and Dragić Živojinović, Žarko Vujošević, Porčić Nebojša, “Das serbische Kanzleiwesen. Die Herausforderung der digitalen Diplomatie,” in Antonella Ambrosio, Sébastien Barret, Georg Vogeler, eds., *Digital Diplomats. The Computer as a Tool for the Diplomatist?*, Köln-Weimar-Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2014, p. 146 (“die Datierung in den serbischen Urkunden übrigens nicht die Regel war”).

corpus with those displayed in the contemporaneous internal Wallachian charters granted to monasteries and to the laity, which, unlike most external epistles, typically provide the scribe's name at the end of the text. In the Romanian médiévistique, and particularly in relation to Slavonic texts, it appears that this particular type of investigation remained relatively unexplored. The school of Slavo-Romanian Studies no longer exists, as the dominant scholarly interest shifted from older epochs to more recent historical periods. The relative dearth of case studies and thorough analyses leaves limited guidance through this path of inquiry.⁶⁶ A study that served as a model for our research is that conducted by W. Kuraszkiewicz, who meticulously analysed the handwriting of several Slavonic diplomas issued for the region of Galicia-Volhynia during the late Middle Ages, with a special emphasis on the identification of the scribes responsible for writing these documents.⁶⁷ The progressive digitization of internal archives pertaining to the medieval era in recent years,⁶⁸ a process that still requires further improvement, has facilitated us greater accessibility to the original documents.

With reference to Basarab the Elder's epistles, Bogdan pioneered once again. While proposing a date for letter no. 35, Bogdan states – this opinion being repeated unchanged in both editions – that “the handwriting is very similar to that of nos. 53, 57, 64, 69, 70, 115, 123.”⁶⁹ On another occasion, when comparing the handwriting of no. 61 to that of no. 62, Bogdan notes in his first edition that “the handwriting is identical,”⁷⁰ only to swiftly correct himself in the second edition, where he postulates that “the handwriting is, if not identical, in any case contemporaneous.”⁷¹ The manner in which Bogdan arrived at these conclusions remains shrouded in mystery. Let us briefly examine his first purported “very similar” handwriting comparison, that between nos. 35 & 53.⁷² One could hardly have found more different writing features within this documentary corpus. There are graphemes made constantly dissimilar, such as **а**, **б**, **Ѧ**, **Ѹ**, or **з**. Both the space between the rows and between the graphemes of the same line is distributed quite different. Furthermore, a conspicuous difference in the overall layout becomes

⁶⁶ The significant works are still those by Emil Țiriac, *Paleografia româno-chirilică*, Bucharest, Editura Științifică, 1968; Damian P. Bogdan, *Paleografia româno-slavă. Tratat și album*, Bucharest, Direcția Generală a Arhivelor Statului, 1978. For Latin, e.g., see the analysis recently carried out by Adinel C. Dincă, “Manuscrisul cronicii moldo-germane din anul 1502: o analiză paleografică,” *Analele Putnei* 14, no. 2, 2018, p. 277–96. The Romanian medievalist scholars operate palaeographical analysis mainly when dealing with forgeries. Nevertheless, some stimulating articles may be found scattered throughout the old nos. of *Hrisovul* and *Revista Arhivelor*. For context, see Robert-Henri Bautier, “L’activité historique et archivistique de la Roumanie depuis 1939,” *Bibliothèque de l’École des Chartes* 104, 1943, p. 286–92.

⁶⁷ Władysław Kuraszkiewicz, “Gramoty halicko-wołyńskie XIV–XV wieku. Studium filologiczne,” *Byzantinoslavica* 4, no. 2, 1932, p. 335–64.

⁶⁸ See <http://arhivamedievala.ro/webcenter/portal/ArhivaMedievala>, accessed on August 16, 2021.

⁶⁹ Bogdan, *Doc. și regist.*, p. 77; idem, *Documente*, p. 115.

⁷⁰ Idem, *Doc. și regist.*, p. 154.

⁷¹ Idem, *Documente*, p. 124.

⁷² See additional details in the appendix.

readily apparent. While no. 35 has a distinctive lineament made by displaying graphemes with elongate upper and lower *hastae* exceeding the rows,⁷³ as in the case of graphemes **A**, **Δ**, **Χ**, or **З**, the scrivener of letter no. 53 does not have this writing habit in any way. Recognising the immense scholarly contributions of Bogdan and without dwelling on his minor limitations, we shall proceed to consider our own taxonomy and its results.

The main research approach used was to compare the patterns of handwritings displayed in the preserved internal charters with these of the Slavonic letters sent to Braşov. With regard to Basarab's reign, five scribes have been identified from the preserved charters where their names are explicitly mentioned at the end of the text: Bârsiian (September 4, 1474),⁷⁴ Tudor (June 1, 1475),⁷⁵ Caloiana (July 15, 1475),⁷⁶ Milco (May 8, 1476),⁷⁷ and Iova the grammarian (July 4, 1476).⁷⁸ Of these scribes, only about Milco and Caloiana we can assuredly state that, in addition to charters, they also wrote letters.⁷⁹ Besides these five Slavonic-language clerks with known names, in the chancellery of Basarab the Elder, Slavonic documents were written by at least other six or seven anonymous scribes;⁸⁰ counting them all, it seems that in Basarab's Slavonic chancellery there was an active personnel of at least 10 to 12 scribes, with around three-quarters of them having an attested activity longer than a year. Notwithstanding, the fragmentary corpus of preserved charters urges caution.

A noteworthy observation is that, while certain scribes seem closer to this voivode's entourage, many of them appear to have already an institutionalised office in the princely chancellery, thus passing their scribal services, regardless of the animosities between reigning lords, from one Wallachian voivode to the subsequent. Among such instances, the following are known: Milco (writing since

⁷³ The word "hasta" is missing from the Romanian dictionary of auxiliary sciences of history (*Dicţionar al ştiinţelor speciale ale istoriei: arhivistică, cronologie, diplomatică, genealogie, heraldică, paleografie, sigilografie*. ed. Ionel Gal et alii, Bucharest, Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, 1982, p. 129–33). For a definition, see Bogdan, *Paleografia româno-slavă*, p. 12, fn. 13. Cf. Bradley Hudson McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great Down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C.–A.D. 337)*, Michigan, University of Michigan Press, 2002, p. 41.

⁷⁴ Petronel Zahariuc, "Patru documente inedite din secolul al XV-lea privitoare la istoria Țării Româneşti," *Studii şi Materiale de Istorie Medie* 26, 2008, p. 166, 170–1.

⁷⁵ *DRH*, B., I, doc. 148.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, doc. 150.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, doc. 152, but also doc. 151. For a facsimile of a charter from the time of Radu the Fair written by Milco, see *Documente privind istoria României*, B. Țara Românească, Centuries XIII, XIV and XV (1247–1500), eds. Ion Ionaşcu et alii, Bucharest, Editura Academiei, 1953, p. 353.

⁷⁸ *DRH*, B., I, doc. 153.

⁷⁹ Cf. Panels I (Milco); III, and V (Caloiana). We could not check the originals of *DRH*, B., I, doc. 149, and doc. 152. As for *ibid.*, doc. 154, its handwriting did not seem to us similar to other documents issued by Basarab's chancellery.

⁸⁰ These penmen being identified by: 1 (Panel II); 2 (Panel IV); 3 (Panel VI); 4 (Panel VII); 5 (*DRH*, B., I, doc. 154); 6 (no. 61 – whose writing we could not identify); 7 (no. 115 – whose writing we could not identify).

the time of Radu the Fair),⁸¹ Tudor the logothete (attested between 1475 and 1480),⁸² Caloiana (active in the Wallachian chancellery between 1475 and 1482),⁸³ to whom we may add Bârsian (**Бръсиан**), or Bârseanul (**Бръсѣнѡл**), most likely the same individual, mentioned in 1474 and in 1478.⁸⁴ Considering other scribes who worked in the chancellery of Basarab the Elder and later in that of his successor, Basarab the Young, there are two more well-grounded cases,⁸⁵ and a further possible one.⁸⁶ These seven attested cases of this kind conclusively prove that, despite the hefty bitterness between Radu the Fair, Basarab the Elder and Basarab the Young, the princely chancellery's staff experienced a certain stability, although shifts may be also noticeable.

Besides potentially aiding in the redating of these epistles, an additional benefit of this type of analysis, which will necessitate further refinements in the future, lies in the possibility to outline the often obscure careers of several medieval clerks. Milco's walk of life offers a promising case study. All four surviving charters written by him were issued in Bucharest,⁸⁷ the activity of this scribe being apparently related to the princely fort of this town, unlike Caloiana for instance, a more itinerant scribe of the princely chancellery, who is attested travelling with the lord's court in Târgoviște, Argeș, and Gherghița.⁸⁸ In the chancellery of Radu the Fair, Milco drafted at least two charters, on January 17, 1469, and on December 12, 1471;⁸⁹ but, it is important to observe, in the summer of 1474, when his lord Radu helplessly withdrew to the fortress of Giurgiu in the face of the military attack launched by Basarab the Elder,⁹⁰ Milco placidly remained in the burg of Bucharest, where he wrote an epistle for Basarab, now also present in Bucharest,⁹¹ dated July–October 1474 and addressed to Brașov.⁹² During the reign of Basarab the Elder, Milco retained his status and office in Bucharest. Sometime in 1475–1476, he wrote a solemn charter for Koutloumousiou Monastery of Mount Athos, and on May 8, 1476, another document in favour of some boyars.⁹³ Afterwards, his status visibly changes during the reign of Basarab the Young, when Milco most likely falls into disfavour. No preserved princely diplomas are written

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, doc. 133, 139.

⁸² *Ibid.*, doc. 148, 152, 153, 175.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, doc. 150, 160, 179.

⁸⁴ Zahariuc, "Documente," p. 166, 170–1; *DRH*, B., I, doc. 161.

⁸⁵ See Panel VII. For the second case, cf. Panel II with National Archives of Romania – Brașov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 81.

⁸⁶ Panel VI with no. 90 (although there are also differences), stored in the same depository as no. 81.

⁸⁷ *DRH*, B., I, doc. 133, 139, 151, 152.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, doc. 150, 160, 179. See also Panel III, no. 769 (cf. Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 91), also written by Caloiana, it was issued in Târgoviște.

⁸⁹ *DRH*, B., I, doc. 133, 139.

⁹⁰ Stoide, "Legăturile," p. 63–4, 71–2.

⁹¹ Zahariuc, "Documente," p. 166, 170–1.

⁹² See additional details in the appendix.

⁹³ *DRH*, B., I, doc. 151, 152.

by him any longer. We may indirectly infer that Milco leaves the town of Bucharest, and that he will write, sometime around 1481, a letter of the pretender Mircea,⁹⁴ a moment after which we completely lose track of Milco.

Secondly, we have identified a discernible pattern in the distribution of the scribes' services: for the years 1474–1476 Milco is especially active (Panel I), others (Panel IV), such as Caloiana (Panels III, V), chiefly write in 1475 and 1476, another one in the first part of 1476 (Panel II). One penman is quite operative in 1476 (Panel VI), and finally another clerk writes in 1475–1476 (Panel VII) and later on, during the reign of Basarab the Young.⁹⁵ Once again, it is imperative to underscore the fragmentary nature of the preserved sources, as this factor could significantly impact our conclusions.

Turning now to the difficulties encountered, Bogdan already remarked the “multifaceted” quality of the medieval handwriting in Wallachia.⁹⁶ When seeking similar handwriting patterns in a relatively consistent corpus of documents, one may bear in mind the subsequent issues. In the same document, a medieval clerk may draw a grapheme in various and irregular ways, to the agony of the modern scholar painstakingly seeking means to order and regulate everything. At these moments, we are prompted to search for several new details, sometimes quite elusive, in order to distinguish certain handwritings from others. Some graphemes may be more reliable than others in ascertaining the identity of the scrivener. By assembling the most relevant handwriting traits and by acknowledging a certain degree of inevitable human variability, we set up those seven Panels in the appendix. Besides, some letters, being very short, may not always contain exactly the same graphemes or a goodly number of them for the sake of building a sound comparison with the handwriting displayed in other letters. Eventually, the variability or the consistency of medieval handwriting may be influenced by numerous factors, such as the writing tool and the fashions it was sharpened, the degree of solemnity exhibited by the document,⁹⁷ the changeable level of adhesion on various surfaces, the writing support,⁹⁸ the evolution over time of the personal writing style, or even the clerk's emotional state while writing.

⁹⁴ Milco's long-lived experience in the Wallachian princely chancellery is obvious from the layout of this document (National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 20; cf. Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 147).

⁹⁵ See the appendix.

⁹⁶ Bogdan, *Documente*, p. XXVIII.

⁹⁷ See also Henri Stahl, Damian P. Bogdan, *Manual de paleografie slavo-română*, Bucharest: Fundația pentru Literatură și Artă “Regele Carol II”, 1936, p. 25–7.

⁹⁸ See examples of scribes who write on both paper and parchment (Panels I, and III). For context, see Damian P. Bogdan, “Din paleografia slavo-română,” p. 120–34; idem, *Paleografia româno-slavă*, p. 285–313, and also Gheorghe T. Ionescu, “Contribuțiuni la studiul începuturilor întrebuințării hârtiei în cancelariile Valahiei (Țării Românești) și Moldovei,” *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Medie* 2, 1951, p. 77–90, republished in idem, *Contribuții la istoria românilor: studii și materiale*, ed. Ionel Căndea, Brăila, Editura Istros, 2004, p. 1–20.

A CASE STUDY. DATING THE EPISTLE OF JUNE 26

This case study on a Slavonic letter of Basarab only partially dated by its scribe (the year is missing) stresses once more the importance of comparing the epistolary corpus to other types of evidence, especially to the Wallachian internal charters. One of the most fascinating Slavonic letter issued by Basarab the Elder's chancellery is a brief seven-line text in its original form, sent sometime on June 26 to Braşov, in which the voivode of Wallachia announces that "without this [submission] it is not possible, as I went to the great Sultan of the Turks, and made peace and welfare (МИР И ДОБРОДЕТЕЛ), and I also strove for your well-being. So you shall feel gladly too."⁹⁹ By advancing the argument that Basarab the Elder went joined by a Wallachian expeditionary force to Asia and fought alongside Sultan Mehmed II against Uzun Hasan, Bogdan dates this missive to 1474.¹⁰⁰ However, it has been recently recalled that "it is impossible that Basarab from the two Italian sources [speaking of Wallachian participation in the battle of Bashkent] to be identified as Basarab the Elder,"¹⁰¹ since the Sultan's war with Uzun Hasan takes place a year earlier, in 1473.¹⁰² Subsequently, C.A. Stoide puts also forward his arguments against the traditional date of 1474, and then simply arrives, without any further elaboration, at the following conclusion: "In the spring of 1475, Basarab the Elder, already strengthened in his rule, is approaching the [Ottoman] military chiefs at the borders [of the Ottoman Empire] to be recognised by the Sultan. During the month of May, the trip to the Sultan's court will happen, from where, before June 1, 1475, he returns with the investiture symbols."¹⁰³ Despite convincingly rejecting the year 1474, Stoide does not adduce evidence in favour of this powerful final statement. Furthermore, the manner in which Stoide perceives this political submission to the Turks, as merely a trip to obtain the insignia from the Sultan, may easily overlook a momentous chapter of the submission's process.

We shall cite one more view expressed upon this letter before considering our own argumentation. In a paper published in 2014, Liviu Cîmpeanu reasoned that the aforementioned epistle dates from 1476.¹⁰⁴ His arguments go as follows: 1) one epistle of Dominic *prepositus*, dated June 1475 and addressed to the Christian princes of Europe, mentions the oath of faithfulness taken by Stephen the Great and

⁹⁹ Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 89.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116. See also Andronescu, "Repertoriul," doc. 351; *Relațiile Țării Românești și Moldovei cu Braşovul: 1369–1803. Inventar arhivistic*, eds. Ştefan Suciu, Gernot Nussbächer, Monica Cincu, Bucharest, Direcția Generală a Arhivelor Statului, 1986, doc. 101.

¹⁰¹ Nagy Pienaru, Ovidiu Cristea, "Țara Românească, Moldova și bătălia de la Başkent," *Analele Putnei* 8, no. 1, 2012, p. 25, containing a careful analysis of the period.

¹⁰² Cf. the introductory study by Ioan Ursu to *Historia Turchesca (1300–1514)*, Bucharest, Institutul de Arte Grafice "Carol Göbl", 1910, p. XLI–XLII, fn. 1.

¹⁰³ Stoide, "Legăturile," p. 68–9, 71.

¹⁰⁴ Cîmpeanu, "Basarab Laiotă," p. 161–4.

Basarab the Elder to the King Matthias of Hungary,¹⁰⁵ a context in which it would have been impossible for Basarab the Elder to obey the Sultan; 2) a letter of the voivode of Transylvania, Johannes Pongracz, dated January 16, 1476, also speaks of the alliance concluded between Basarab the Elder and the King of Hungary;¹⁰⁶ 3) the fact that Cârștian *portar*, mentioned in the letter of June 26, is presumably one and the same person as *Kerstgion Porcolab*, who in 1476 announces to Brașov the victory of Vlad the Impaler over Basarab the Elder in Wallachia.¹⁰⁷

Turning back to the sources, it must be noted further that there have been preserved not one but two letters written by Dominic *prepositus*, and surprisingly dating both from June 1475. The first one, already mentioned, is written after the first week of June 1475, and is addressed to *omnibus potentatibus et principibus Christianis*,¹⁰⁸ and the second one is penned down by Dominic *prepositus* and Gaspar of Hathwan, on June 25, 1475, in Bistrița, and is conveyed to King Matthias, *Rex et Princeps gratiose*.¹⁰⁹ We shall briefly refer here to these two documents only in order to prove that they are utterly useless for dating the Slavonic epistle of June 26, but they are quite valuable for something else – namely for the analysis of medieval audiences. A positivist historian would rightly observe that, with respect to the international status of Wallachia, these two contemporaneous

¹⁰⁵ This source is published in *Documente privitoare la Istoria Românilor culese de Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki*, vol. II/1, 1451–1575; Bucharest, Ministerul Cultelor și Instrucțiunii Publice și Academia Română, 1891, doc. 15.

¹⁰⁶ *Urkundenbuch*, p. VII, doc. 4089.

¹⁰⁷ This identification was firstly proposed by Bogdan, *Documente*, 116. But the argument is not at all a decisive one, since both Basarab the Elder and Vlad the Impaler had in their retinue a distinct servant named Cârștian. Basarab the Elder's Cârștian *portar* (Крстѣиан портар) is mentioned only in the Slavonic epistle of June 26 (Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 89). However, Vlad the Impaler's Cârștian is referred by two Latin sources from 1475, and 1476 respectively. On August 4, 1475, Vlad the Impaler sent to Sibiu his boyar, *Christian Porkolob noster boyar specialis accedet vestras amicitias* (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4062). Also, on November 17, 1476, *Kerstgion Porcolab in Tergowistia* announces to Brașov that the fortress of Bucharest was captured by Vlad the Impaler (*Ibid.*, doc. 4159). Therefore, this argument falls down. Furthermore, as this argumentation brings forward several fallacious points, further clarification is needed. For Cîmpeanu, who also intended to write a monograph on Basarab the Elder, there is apparently no middle ground between the Romantic epoch image of a chivalrous voivode of the late anti-Ottoman crusade and the image of a feeble and obedient lord to the almighty Sultan. Basarab the Elder must therefore, argues Cîmpeanu, be either in the camp of the Christians or on the side of the Sultan, but nothing in between. However, on the question of the skilful double interplay practised by some Wallachian voivodes in-between the Ottoman and Hungarian nexus of interests, see Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor*, 25 and *passim*. For context, see also Liviu Pilat, Ovidiu Cristea, *The Ottoman Threat and Crusading on the Eastern Border of Christendom during the 15th Century*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2017, and Tamás Pálosfalvi, *From Nicopolis to Mohács. A History of Ottoman-Hungarian Warfare, 1389–1526*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2018.

¹⁰⁸ *Hurmuzaki*, II/1, doc. 15.

¹⁰⁹ The main editions that contain this document: *Monumenta Hungariae Historica*, IV Series, *Acta Extera*, VII, eds. Nagy Iván, and B. Nyáry Albert, Budapest, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Könyvtár- és Levéltári Intézet, 1878, doc. 12, p. 306–7; Ioan Bogdan, ed., *Documentele lui Ștefan cel Mare*, vol. II, Bucharest: Atelierele Grafice Socer & Co., 1913, p. 327–9; Andreas Veress, ed., *Acta et Epistolae relationum Transylvaniae Hungariaeque cum Moldavia et Valachia*, vol. I, (1468–1540), Budapest, Typis Societatis Stephaneum Typographicae, 1914, doc. 11; *Războieni*, doc. 10.

letters contradict flagrantly. In the letter intended for a Western audience, Dominic announces the fall of Caffa fortress into the hands of the Ottoman Turks, but quickly compensates with the successful initiatives of the Christian crusade project against the heathen Ottoman Empire by adverting the alliance between Stephen the Great, Basarab the Elder, and King Matthias.¹¹⁰ As regards the epistle planned for an internal audience – namely the royal court of Matthias in Buda –, the state of affairs is completely opposite to the one just mentioned. We read instead about the manner in which Stephen of Moldavia perceives Basarab the Elder as both his opponent and that of the Kingdom of Hungary; in this letter was likewise stipulated the desire of King Matthias to enthrone Vlad the Impaler in Wallachia.¹¹¹

The Slavonic letter dated June 26 offers a glimpse into one of those obscure yet profoundly intriguing moments in the history of medieval Wallachia. In the fortress of Bucharest, conquered on November 16, 1476,¹¹² the three military commanders – Stephen Báthory, Vlad the Impaler, and Stephen the Great – also found the gifts that the Sultan Mehmed II gave Basarab the Elder back when this Wallachian lord was submitting to the Sublime Porte: tents adorned with fine Oriental-style motifs, beautiful Turkish horses, some camels, and valuable clothes.¹¹³ When did this submission occur, and in what manner did it happen?

¹¹⁰ *Hurmuzaki*, II/1, doc. 15: “de rebus vero illarum partium sciat vestra magnificentia, quod uterque Princeps tam Stephanus Moldaviensis, quam Bozorad Transalpinus medio nostri, et Reverendi Domini Tiniensis, una cum tota Patria iuramentum fidelitatis ad perpetua obsequia Regiae Majestatis ejusque Sacrae Coronae Solemniter praestiterunt, et propria eorum in persona simul cum tota gente utrisque Patriae armantur nunc in obsequium Principis nostri contra Turcum, et credimus indubie, quod ad numerum sexaginta millium armatorum ex utraque Patria in obsequium Regiae Majestatis conducentur ad expeditionem praesentem contra Turcum instauratam”.

¹¹¹ Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan cel Mare*, II, 328: “Nunc, serenissime princeps, ex quo ipse Stefanus vajvoda intelligit sibi iminere periculum, petit nos medio horum bojarorum suorum, quatenus literas nostras ad Majestatem Vestram velocissime daremus, ut Majestas Vestra dignaretur convertere facies suas ad partes regni sui inferiores, et in dies festinaret discedendo; quoniam sperat idem vajvoda, quod postquam Majestas Vestra moverit se, Turcus ipse non ita facile proficiscetur vel contra regnum Moldaviae vel Majestatis Vestre; et sine dubio nos advisat et certos facit, quod postquam venerit Turcus ipse, qui jam dudum iter suum arripuit, Transalpinenses contra Majestatem Vestram et ipsum vajvodam insurgent, quia paratos jam se contra Majestatem Vestram retulerunt. Turcus ipse cum maxima potentia personaliter per terram, et alias gentes per aquas misisse fertur. Hec Majestati Vestre scripsimus, ut intelligat Majestas Vestra novitates harum partium. Recepimus nudiustertius literas, quas Majestas Vestra miserat ad me Dominicum prepositum in facto inmissionis vajvode Dracula, quas post earum lectionem communicavi cum bojaronibus...”. For lat. *inmissionis*, see *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, p. 836. For context, see also *Războieni*, doc. 9; *Documente privitoare la Istoria Românilor culese de Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki*. vol. XV/1 (1358–1600). *Acte și Scrisori din Arhivele orașelor ardelen (Bistrița, Brașov, Sibiu)*, ed. Nicolae Iorga, Bucharest, Ministerul Cultelor și al Instrucțiunii și Academia Română, 1911, doc. 147, 148; Ștefan S. Gorovei, Maria Magdalena Székely, *Princeps omni laude maior. O Istorie a lui Ștefan cel Mare*, Sfânta Mănăstire Putna: n.p., 2005, p. 124–6; Ștefan Andreescu, *Vlad Țepeș (Dracula)*, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedică, 2015, p. 155–60. Dominic’s two Latin letters may be worth considering from the perspective of the medieval political vocabulary changing according to different audiences.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 162–3.

¹¹³ For the letter of Giustiniano Cavitello (December 4, 1476), see Nicolae Iorga, ed., *Acte și fragmente cu privire la istoria românilor*, vol. III, Bucharest, Imprimeria Statului, 1897, p. 58–9. For the comparable case of Vlad the Impaler, see Konstantin Mihailović, *Memoirs of a Janissary*, eds. Svat Soucek and Benjamin Stolz,

There are only two possible options left: the letter of June 26 was written either in 1475 or in 1476.

If hitherto the historians seeking to figure out this puzzle were looking for arguments principally outside Wallachia, we suggest it may be at least equal worth looking inside the realm. A potential clue to this medieval context may be found in an echo that persisted through the premodern era. The submission of Wallachia during Basarab the Elder's reign seems to have left a lasting impression on the Wallachian boyars, as evidenced by its mention in the writings of boyar chroniclers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These chronicles inform us how Basarab voivode the Elder "submitted the realm to the Turks," "he began to obey the Turks," and "to pay tribute."¹¹⁴ Although the payment of the tribute to the Ottomans was no longer a novelty for 1470s' Wallachia,¹¹⁵ it is quite curious how these premodern chronicles remember from the fifteenth century especially the submission of Basarab the Elder, but completely forget about many others previous or subsequent ones.¹¹⁶ What distinguished this particular submission from others?

In the contemporaneous Moldavian case of the submission of 1456 is fortuitously preserved a document proving that, beforehand, a large assembly of Moldavian boyars gathered in the burg of Vaslui, at the end of May and the beginning of June 1456, in order to decide Moldavia's status in relation to the Ottoman Empire.¹¹⁷

A closer inspection of the princely charter issued by Basarab the Elder's chancellery on June 1, 1475,¹¹⁸ might suffice to prove that a large Wallachian assembly gathered at the princely court in Bucharest, in May and early June 1475, aiming to re-establish peaceful relations, by means of accepting anew the payment of tribute, with the Ottomans. To put it another way, this submission equally meant a decision assumed politically by the Wallachian boyars. Through this charter,

Princeton, Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011, p. 65: "Dracula, their father, then died; and Emperor Mahomet, having heard that their father had died, immediately gave the older brother gifts of money, horses, robes and tents, as befit a lord, and dispatched him with great honour to the Wallachian land to rule in place of his father"; Andreescu, *Vlad Țepeș*, p. 68–70.

¹¹⁴ Virgil Cândea, "Letopisețul Țării Românești (1292–1664) în versiunea arabă a lui Macarie Zaim," *Studii. Revista de Istorie* 23, no. 4, 1970, p. 681; *Cronicari munteni*, vol. I, ed. Mihail Gregorian, Bucharest, Editura pentru Literatură, 1961, p. 85 (the Anonymous Cantacuzino Chronicle), 252 (the chronicle of Radu Popescu).

¹¹⁵ Cf. Viorel Panaite, *Ottoman Law of War and Peace. The Ottoman Empire and Its Tribute-Payers from the North of the Danube*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2019, p. 108–37.

¹¹⁶ Both the Arabic version of the Wallachian chronicle (based upon a Greek text dating from about 1636–1656), and the Anonymous Cantacuzino Chronicle (composed in the late seventeenth century) remember from the fifteenth century only the submission of Basarab the Elder, but the chronicle of Radu Popescu (written in several stages at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century) also mentions, besides this event, the submission of Mircea the Old (see fn. 114).

¹¹⁷ *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, A. Moldova, vol. II (1449–1486), eds. Leon Șimanschi, Georgeta Ignat, and Dumitru Agache, Bucharest, Editura Academiei, 1976, doc. 58.

¹¹⁸ *DRH*, B., I, doc. 148. It has already been noted the resemblance of the seal used on the letter no. 60 to that applied on the epistle no. 64 (cf. *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 3992, 4004).

Basarab confirms the estates held by two Wallachian boyars, Stance, and his brother Badea. Although the content of this charter may appear commonplace, specific details within it merit careful reflection.

This charter of June 1, 1475 – although its original form is in a poor state of preservation – remains an exceptional one in many regards. Firstly, the large number of mentioned boyar witnesses is truly unprecedented. No less than 19 individuals could yet be read: 1) Dragomir, son of Manea; 2) Cazan, son of Sahac; 3) Neag; 4) Neagoe, son of Borcea; 5) Dan *vornic*; 6) Stanciul; 7) Neagoe of Craiova; 8) Balea the cupbearer; 9) ... son of ...tul; 10) Vintilo; 11) Vălcu; 12) Vintilă the cupbearer; 13) Tudor the logothete; 14) Manea *spătar*; 15) Drăghici *spătar*; 16) Dragomir *stolnic*; 17) Deatco the cupbearer; 18) ... Albul ...; 19) Dimitru stratornic.¹¹⁹ Since the torn part of this document affects the witnesses' list, it may suggest that, in addition to these individuals, there could be one or at most two more boyars' names. Hence, it is safe to estimate the witnesses' number at about 20. Among these boyars, it is worth noting Neagoe of Craiova, the father of the Craiovescu's family,¹²⁰ a truly remarkable presence, being mentioned here for the first time. Comparatively, the average number of witnesses in the princely charters issued by the chancellery of Radu the Fair is 12 to 13 boyars, with a maximum of 15 boyars in 1463.¹²¹ Accordingly, considering the reign of Basarab the Young, here the average number of witnesses is 10 to 11, and the maximum is 14, in the case of a solemn charter issued for the Snagov Monastery in 1482.¹²² The charter of June 1, 1475 is issued in favour of lay beneficiaries. The charter of June 1 stands also out amidst the other charters of Basarab the Elder, since the number of boyars mentioned in these lists at the end of the extant charters later decreases steadily to 14 boyars (July 15, 1475),¹²³ to 13 boyars (May 8, 1476),¹²⁴ and finally to 11 boyars (July 4, 1476).¹²⁵ Therefore, we may reasonably associate the making of such an eventful decision as the submission to the Ottoman Porte with the gathering of a large body of Wallachian boyars at the princely court in Bucharest in May and early June 1475.¹²⁶ And the timing fits rather well: the issuance of this charter is on June 1, 1475, and the aforesaid letter announcing to Braşov the submission is on June 26.

Secondly, concerning the charter of June 1, although taken separately almost all the component parts of the document are to be found in certain charters issued for laymen by previous Wallachian voivodes,¹²⁷ the novelty in this case lies in the

¹¹⁹ DRH, B., I, p. 243–6.

¹²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 559; Stoicescu, *Dicţionar*, p. 17–9, 23.

¹²¹ DRH, B., I, doc. 122–125, 127, 129, 130–133, 135, 136, 138–140, 142, 143, 145.

¹²² *Ibid.*, doc. 157, 158, 160, 170, 175, 177–179.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, doc. 150.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, doc. 152.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, doc. 153.

¹²⁶ On June 5, 1475, Basarab the Elder is attested in the burg of Bucharest (*Ibid.*, doc. 149).

¹²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, doc. 11, 12, 21, 24, 38, 58, 60, 99, 103–105, 108, 110, 111, 118, 121, 125, 129, 139, 143.

fact that the most elaborate formulas of this charter type were now brought together, and included all in one single document. For example, in the opening of a charter it is extremely rare to mention twice the name of the realm as a component portion of the extended princely title.¹²⁸ Yet the analysed charter adverts that Basarab the Elder is **вонвода и господи́нь вѣсен земли Ѹггровлахи́нскон**, only to put forward a row below that he **обладаетиꙋ ми и господствꙋещиꙋ ми вѣсен земли Ѹггровлахи́нскон**.¹²⁹ Moreover, the formula **въ самодръжавнои земли господства ми** has also been overstated as follows **въ самодръжавнои земли и области господства ми**,¹³⁰ which, again, happens very rarely.¹³¹

Thirdly, the charter of June 1 also contains both *poena spiritualis* and *poena temporalis*.¹³² It is important to underscore the fact that this document – having laymen as beneficiaries – is the first one preserved from fifteenth-century Wallachia that refers in his malediction to the wrath of the Virgin Mary during the Last Judgment. This passage is quite common in some solemn charters issued to monasteries, but it does not exist in any other previous known charter issued in favour of the laity. To cut a long story short, the charter of June 1 is the first known Wallachian document put out for laypeople that has such an extended malediction to even include God the Father, the Saviour Jesus Christ, as well as the Virgin Mary.¹³³ We have to await the times of Vlad the Monk, so proficiently restated lately,¹³⁴ for the malediction to embrace such a protracted form in still very few charters issued for laymen.¹³⁵

Lastly, both the symbolic invocation (*invocatio symbolica*) opening up the charter's text,¹³⁶ and the princely monogram closing it, painted in red rust-coloured ink using cinnabar, are very large and prominent.¹³⁷ All these facts conclusively suggest that the socio-political context in which this document has been drafted was a very special one, an event worth recalling. This event was most probably represented by the gathering of the Wallachian boyars at the princely court in

¹²⁸ Previously, two more instances are attested (*Ibid.*, doc. 139, 143).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, doc. 148.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Cf. *ibid.*, doc. 86, 103–4.

¹³² For a general analysis of them, see Bogdan, *Diplomatica slavo-română*, p. 111–28.

¹³³ *DRH*, B., I, doc. 148.

¹³⁴ Marian Coman, "The Reign of a Defrocked Monk. A Late Fifteenth Century Case Study in the Wallachian Political Language," in *Religious Rhetoric of Power in Byzantium and South-Eastern Europe. Proceedings of the session held at the 12th International Congress of South-East European Studies (Bucharest, 2–6 September 2019)*, eds. Ivan Biliarsky, Mihail Mitrea, and Andrei Timotin, Brăila, Istros, 2021, p. 189–221.

¹³⁵ Only in two of these charters, both written in September 1493 for Stanciu the logothete (*DRH*, B., I, doc. 243), and respectively for Neagu the grammarian (*Ibid.*, doc. 244), we find a similar enlarged malediction formula.

¹³⁶ There are beautifully rendered both the symbolic invocation in the form of the Holy Cross ("†"), and the first grapheme of the text, in this case **в**, from **въ**, meaning "in" (cf. Stahl, Bogdan, *Manual*, p. 30).

¹³⁷ National Archives of Romania – Central (Bucharest), Historical Section Collection, no. 55. For cinnabar, see *Dicționar al științelor speciale ale istoriei*, p. 69.

Bucharest to stabilise the relations with the Ottoman Empire by accepting anew the payment of tribute. The case analysed here, to which it may be added the Moldavian one of 1456, also seems to prove that the acceptance of the payment of the tribute by submitting to the Sublime Porte did not simply mean a recognition of the voivode by the Sultan in exchange for symbols of power or gifts, but originally involved an internal negotiation set up in an assembly in which the most influential local political chiefs actively participated.¹³⁸ Based upon these arguments, we believe that the Slavonic epistle of June 26 must be linked up with the princely charter of June 1, 1475, and thus dated to the year 1475. Moreover, we have garnered further supporting arguments in favour of 1475.

In this case, the handwriting argument could not prove decisive since the scribe who most probably wrote the epistle of June 26 was Caloiana – a scrivener active in the chancellery of Wallachia between 1475 and 1482.¹³⁹ We have stated our argument about the international context above. We shall resume it here briefly. In the summer of 1475, the King Matthias of Hungary already supported the ascent of Vlad the Impaler as voivode on the throne of Wallachia,¹⁴⁰ and the attitude of Stephen the Great convincingly suggests that already in late June 1475 the Moldavian princely court knew about the submission of Wallachia to the Ottoman Empire. From a Latin written report destined to King Matthias, and entrusted to the Moldavian envoys on June 20, 1475, we find out that for Stephen the Great *Valachi sunt nobis veluti Turci*, meaning “the Wallachians are for us just as the Turks.” Stephen feared that the Sultan would then invade Moldavia with the aid of Basarab the Elder (*cum tota sua potentia et cum omni suo exercitu et cum tota potentia terre Valachie*).¹⁴¹

Ultimately, after June 1475, Basarab leaves the court in Bucharest and goes with his retinue to Târgoviște, where, on July 11, his chancellery issues the commercial privilege for Brașov merchants,¹⁴² and in mid-July, the monks of Cozia Monastery demand the issuance of a charter for the monastery’s estates, this solemn deed being penned on July 15 in Târgoviște.¹⁴³ Both these documents were written by Caloiana’s hand using a vivid black ink.¹⁴⁴ A detail in the Slavonic text of the trade privilege granted to Brașov attracts our attention. Here, Basarab the Elder states “as for the affair of the Turks, I shall likewise keep you at a just peace

¹³⁸ On medieval gatherings in the Danubian Principalities, see Gheorghe I. Brătianu, “Les assemblées d’États en Europe orientale au Moyen Âge et l’influence du régime politique byzantin,” in *Actes du VI^e Congrès international d’études byzantines, Paris, 27 juillet – 2 août, 1948*, Paris, École des Hautes Études, Sorbonne, 1950, p. 35–56; Petre P. Panaitescu, “La grande assemblée du pays, institution du régime féodal en Moldavie et en Valachie,” *Nouvelles Études d’Histoire* 3, 1965, p. 117–23.

¹³⁹ Cf. *DRH*, B., I, p. 250, 265, 292. See also Panel V.

¹⁴⁰ *Războieni*, doc. 9, 10; cf. *Hurmuzaki*, II/2, doc. 210; *Hurmuzaki*, XV/1, doc. 146, 147, 148.

¹⁴¹ *Războieni*, doc. 9.

¹⁴² Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 91.

¹⁴³ *DRH*, B., I, doc. 150.

¹⁴⁴ See Panel III.

(МИР ВЪ ПРАВДѢ).¹⁴⁵ We hence observe the usage of the same term in a similar context as in the epistle of June 26 quoted at the beginning of this section: мир, meaning “peace.”¹⁴⁶ In the latter part of 1475, a wealthy Turkish merchant was greeted by Basarab in the burg of Bucharest. The merchant was “a very good friend” of Basarab, as himself said when sending a joyful letter to Braşov inviting the Saxons to securely trade with him.¹⁴⁷

The discussion of the dates ascribed to these documents assumes paramount importance due to the fact that much of the fifteenth-century Wallachian history heavily depends on a corpus of dateless epistles. In summary, 15 letters were redated in the appendix following the criteria we briefly covered above, with special attention to the analysis of handwriting patterns and to the comparison with other documentary evidence. A thorough knowledge of the sources of that epoch may reveal to us a more intricate world embedded in a shifting socio-political context. Basarab’s political career might easily prove this point. In less than two years, from 1474 to 1476, Basarab became from a pawn in the anti-Ottoman crusade of Stephen the Great a loyal associate in the army of Mehmed II marching against Stephen’s Moldavia and a good connoisseur of Balkans’ realities. At the end of 1476, writing to the Pope, King Matthias stated about the composite army of Basarab the Elder the following passage: *Bozorad Vayvodam Transalpinum cum praesidiis Thurcorum et multis aliis circiter decem et octo milia hominum expeditorum, quos ipse Bozorad tam de reliquiis ipsius Imperatoris, quam etiam de Bulgaria sibi astiverat.*¹⁴⁸ The subsequent discussion in the appendix shall further substantiate this point. Basarab the Elder’s ability to negotiate and to frequently adjust anew, his ways of persuasion, his gestures of power, his continuous struggle to maintain sound relations with both the Sultan’s Empire and the Christian world, are still awaiting to be unearthed, and redating his Slavonic epistles may be one of the steps through this path.

¹⁴⁵ Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 91.

¹⁴⁶ For this word, see Franz von Miklosich, *Lexicon Palaeoslovenico-Graeco-Latinum emendatum auctum*, Vienna, Scientia-Verlag Aalen, 1977, p. 370; Robert Auty, *Handbook of Old Church Slavonic*, vol. II, *Texts and Glossary*, London, The Athlone Press, 1977, p. 122; S.C. Gardiner, *Old Church Slavonic. An Elementary Grammar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 162; Alypy Gamanovich, *Grammar of the Church Slavonic Language*, translated from the Russian original by Archpriest John Shaw, New York, Printshop of St. Job of Pochaev, 2001, p. 76, 245, 255, 258, 267, 279, 304, 364; Ivan Biliarsky, *Word and Power in Mediaeval Bulgaria*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2011, p. 92.

¹⁴⁷ Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 98.

¹⁴⁸ *Hurmuzaki*, VIII, doc. 26.

APPENDIX¹⁴⁹THE SLAVONIC EPISTLES OF BASARAB THE ELDER
TO THE TRANSYLVANIAN SAXONS (1474–1476)

1. [July – October 1474]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, making known his intention to confirm the commercial privileges had by Braşov merchants in Wallachia.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 64.

Scrivener identification: [Milco], see Panel I.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, doc. 77: “[October – November 1473]”; Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 87: “[January 1474]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 84.

Inventories: Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 349: “[January 1474]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 99: “[January 1474]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 3992: “[after March 1474]”.

Until now considered as the first princely letter sent to Braşov during the reign of Basarab the Elder – whereof Papacostea, “Trade Routes,” p. 427, 445, stated that Basarab “likewise began his reign by granting the Braşov merchants an extensive assurance (...) he began his reign by making large concessions to the Braşov merchants” – the epistle under consideration was more plausibly written when Basarab was still only a pretender among others to the throne of Wallachia. As Basarab puts forward in his letter, in a belated attempt at *captatio benevolentiae*, the commercial privileges of Braşov would be confirmed only “if God will desire” (ако даст Богъ). The same spellbinding expression is used for the fights against “our enemies” – including very likely Radu the Fair – and “the Turks,” who will be defeated “if God will desire” (ако даст Богъ). We cannot fail to notice that Basarab’s rhetorical reference to the freedom one may enjoy even having a “golden crown on his head” (златен вѣнец на главѣ си) while travelling throughout Wallachia has copious biblical parallels in the golden crowns, a favourite metal of the Holy Scripture, which often appear, in different contexts, in the Old Testament (cf. 2 Samuel, 12:30; 1 Chronicles, 20:2; Esther, 8:15; see also Exodus, 25:11, 30:3, 37:26; Leviticus, 8:9). Our proposed dating is supported on the analogies drawn from another Slavonic letter sent to Braşov, this time by Radu the Fair, pulled back in the fortress of Giurgiu due to Basarab’s military attack. The aforesaid letter, dated on August 10 [1474] (Stoide, “Legăturile,” p. 63–4, 71–2), mentions the Basarab’s assault with the support of Stephen the Great, and begs the citizens of Braşov to remain faithful to Radu and not to sell any sort of weapons to

¹⁴⁹ The abbreviations and the shortened notes used in this appendix are the same as in the footnotes of the article, hence the kind reader who has beforehand carefully read the paper should have no difficulty.

Basarab, who had also asked in his letter for fighters and weapons. Basarab is present in the burg of Bucharest in August – September 1474 (Zahariuc, “Documente,” p. 171). Additionally, both letters hint that the attack was firstly launched by Basarab the Elder, and that Stephen was going to join him sometime later along the way. Or, only in the summer of 1474 Basarab leaves Moldavia separately and attacks Radu the Fair before Stephen. This fact also explains why the summer campaign of 1474 is not even recorded in the chronicle of Stephen’s reign. Hence, Basarab’s missive must be connected with the military engagements in Wallachia between Basarab the Elder and Radu the Fair that took place in the summer of 1474 prior to the campaign of Stephen the Great from October 1474 (*Cronicile slavo-române*, p. 31–2).

2. [around August – September 1474 or during 1475]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, accrediting Horga as his messenger. National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 56.

Scrivener identification: this short missive was written by the same scribe, namely [Milco], as the previous one (no. 64); this clerk also drafts another letter in 1475 (no. 53), see Panel I.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 96: “[1474–1476]”; Tocilescu, 534 *documente*, doc. 90.

Inventories: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, 243: “[approx. 1474–1476]”; Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 362: “[1474–1476]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 110: “[1474–1476]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 3995: “[after March 1474 – before November 8, 1477]”.

It has already been observed (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 3992, 3995) that this letter has a seal similar to that of the document sent by Basarab the Elder to Braşov during the conflict with Radu the Fair (no. 64). Having in mind the scrivener and the seal identifications, we can assume that this concise letter dates either from the short time when Basarab was in Bucharest in August – September 1474 (Zahariuc, “Documente,” p. 171) or, rather, from 1475.

3. [1475]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, regarding the restitution to his subjects, Neacşul and Ilie, of an amount of 200 pieces of fine cloth, seized without right by the castellans of Bran.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 53.

Scrivener identification: [Milco], see Panel I.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 95: “[1474–1476]”; Tocilescu, 534 *documente*, doc. 89.

Inventories: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, 243: “[approx. 1474–1476]”; Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 361: “[1474–1476]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 111: “[1474–

1476]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 3996: “[after March 1474 – before November 8, 1477]”.

In addition to the suggestions offered by the identification of the scribe’s hand (Panel I), the general dating of this document to 1475 is based on the following points. It is intelligible that this letter has been issued as a result of the complaint made by Neacșul and Ilie in Basarab’s court, seeking therefore the lord’s aid in overcoming the injustice done. Based on the preserved evidence, 1475 is the year in which Wallachian lay subjects begin asking for written documents from Basarab voivode (cf. *DRH*, B., I, doc. 148, 149). The firm tone of the letter and the fact that no allusion is made concerning the relations with Brașov – such as the wandering Wallachian boyars or the trade restrictions, recurrent topics for the year 1476 – also point out that the year for writing this letter is supposedly 1475. From a rhetorical view, the persuasive tone of Basarab demanding Brașov’s town authorities to solve this lawlessness is amplified by the repetitive use of the word **сиромаш**, to designate his subjects, Neacșul and Ilie, only in order to hasten the settlement of the dispute. Needless to say, this word, meaning poor people, paupers or wretched men (Miklosich, *Lexicon*, p. 841), is a conspicuous contradiction to the social status of these two wealthy Wallachian merchants, involved in trade with the Ottomans, from whom no less than 200 **БОРАСІН** (*boğası*), meaning thinnish oriental twilled cotton cloth used for linings, were taken without right.

4. [1475–1476]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Brașov, accrediting Badea vornic and Drăghici *spătar* as his messengers. National Archives of Romania – Brașov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 123.

Scrivener identification: See Panel VII.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 104: “[1474–1477]”; Tocilescu, 534 *documente*, doc. 91.

Inventories: Bogdan, *Doc. și regist.*, p. 244: “[approx. 1477]”; Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 365: “[1479–1477]” (?); *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 123: “[after July 4, 1476]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 3994: “[after March 1474 – before November 8, 1477]”.

If in the case of Drăghici *spătar*, the charters of the chancellery of Basarab the Elder identify him as such only for the years 1475–1476 (*DRH*, B., I, doc. 148, 150, 152, 153), the name Badea is quite common in the Wallachian onomastics (cf. *DRH*, B., I, p. 531; Bogdan, *Documente*, p. 362). For instance, in the mentioned documents, there is a certain treasurer named Badea, but not a vornic. However, the popularity of the name Badea for this epoch necessitates caution when proposing identifications (cf. fn. 107 of this essay). For this reason, we believe that the interpretations offered in *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 123, and in *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 3994 are questionable. Although this penman is also present in the chancellery of Basarab the Young (Panel VII), the particular friendly tone of this

short epistle and the general lack of any contextual details do not allow us a narrower dating.

5. February 1 [1475]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, accrediting Tudor and Negre treasurer as his messengers.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 54.

Scrivener identification: See Panel IV.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 92: “February 1 [1475]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 93.

Inventories: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, 243–244: “February 1 [approx. 1476]”; Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 366: “February 1 [1475]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 114: “February 1 [1475]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4026: “February 1 [1475]”.

Bogdan, *Documente*, 120, supposed, we believe correctly, that Tudor and Negre were sent to Braşov for the negotiations that ended up with the commercial privilege of July 11, 1475. Bogdan also stated that in 1475 “Negre could have been a treasurer, because next year the treasurer is Badea.” On July 15, 1475, Badea the treasurer is already in this office. As for the Negre treasurer, this letter is the only evidence about his activity (Stoicescu, *Dicţionar*, p. 26). A certain Tudor, serving as logothete, is attested in the same year 1475 (*DRH*, B., I, doc. 148). If we admit the identification with Tudor the logothete (also accepted by Stoicescu, *Dicţionar*, p. 26), and if we also accept that at the beginning of 1475 Negre might have been a treasurer, having the only indirect argument the facts that previously, during the reign of Radu the Fair (until 1474), the princely treasury was administered by Vâlcu, and under Basarab’s reign the first treasurer attested in the chancellery’s documents is Badea (on July 15, 1475), the same boyar holding this position in 1476, then we can presume that the missive in question dates from February 1, [1475].

6. June 26 [1475]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, informing about the peace agreement concluded between the Ottoman Empire and Wallachia, as well as accrediting Cârştian *portar* as his messenger.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 60.

Scrivener identification: [Caloiana], see Panel V.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, doc. 80: “June 26 [1474]”; Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 89: “June 26 [1474]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 86.

Inventories: Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 351: “June 26 [1474]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 101: “June 26 [1474]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4004: “June 26 [1474]”.

See our discussion previously covered in the last section of this essay.

7. July 11, 1475. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, confirms the commercial privileges of the citizens of Braşov in Wallachia.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Privilege Documents Collection, no. 769.

Scrivener identification: [Caloiana], See Panel III.

Critical editions: Miletič, “Vlaho-bălgarski gramoti,” doc. 82 (ascribed to Basarab the Young); Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, doc. 83; Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 91; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 92.

Inventories: Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 371; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4059.

8. [the second half of 1475]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, regarding the arrival of an Ottoman merchant at the princely court in Bucharest, and inviting the Saxons to trade with him.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 61.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, doc. 155: “[after 1517]” (assigned to Neagoe Basarab); Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 98: “[1474–1476]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 95.

Inventories: Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 363: “[1474–1476]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 109: “[1474–1476]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 3993: “[after 1474 March – before 1476 November 8]”.

The Turkish tradesman, who came to Wallachia loaded with many valuable trade goods, is described by Basarab as “a very good friend of mine.” Judging by its content and comparing it to other epistles (nos. 62, 69, 70, 204/XXI), this letter can reasonably be dated to the period after the conclusion of peace with the Ottomans (summer of 1475), since peace relations generally boost the trading activities, but before worsening the relations between Basarab and Braşov (spring and summer of 1476). The general affable tone of the epistle seems to suggest the same conclusion about its dating. The lord states that the Ottoman merchant was housed in the **ГРАДЪ** of Bucharest, referring here, as in the Wallachian charters, to the fortress of Bucharest – another cogent evidence of Basarab’s closeness to the mercantile milieux of the Balkans (cf. no. 62).

9. February 8 [1476]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, accrediting Dimitru *postelnic* as his messenger to Braşov and Stephen Báthory.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 35.

Scrivener identification: See Panel VI, this scribe is active in 1476, and then later on.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, doc. 78: “February 8 [1474]”; Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 88: “February 8 [1474]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 85.

Inventories: Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 350: “February 8 [1474]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 100: “February 8 [1474]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4094: “February 8 [1476]”.

Dating this epistle is an extremely tangled story. There are at least two solid arguments linking this letter to the reign of Basarab the Elder. Although the seal of the letter is currently damaged, a century ago Bogdan, *Documente*, 115, was able to read that its legend begins with **Юнь**, as the legends of this voivode’s seals commonly begin, in contrast to forms such as **Юан** or **Ю** normally used on the seals of Basarab the Young (Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 87, 89, 90, 91, 93–96, 98, 100, 102, 104, 106, 109, 111, 114, 119, 125, 135–137). The second argument: for the years 1475–1476, Dimitru *postelnic* (**Димитра постелника**) appears in the entourage of Basarab the Elder (Stoicescu, *Dicționar*, p. 19–20), and the internal charters always mention him as **Димитръ страторник** (*DRH*, B., I, doc. 148, 150–153). The missive discussed here is, to our knowledge, the first extant Wallachian document that uses the term **постелника**, regularly employed in the Moldavian chancellery during this epoch. In the reign of Basarab the Young, this office will be held by others, Dimitru disappearing until 1482 from the preserved sources (*DRH*, B., I, doc. 158, 160, 161, 170, 175, 179). Establishing the year in which this epistle was written is a much thornier problem. February 8 in [1474] is too early, because the military expedition led by Stephen the Great, which was seeking to enthrone Basarab the Elder in Wallachia, takes place only in March 1474 (*Cronicile slavo-române*, p. 32). Consequently, the voivode of Wallachia, at least for the first months of 1474, remains Radu the Fair (Rezachevici, *Cronologia*, p. 109; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4009). In February 1474, Basarab the Elder was most likely attending the court of Stephen the Great in Moldavia. In January 1474, Stephen Báthory is present in Buda, leaving afterwards for Slovakia in late February and early March (Horváth, Neumann, *Bátori István*, p. 142–3), thus being geographically very far from Braşov and Wallachia. A similar observation can be made for 1475 concerning Báthory. The main argument advanced in favour of 1476 was that “Stephen Báthory does not appear in Transylvanian contexts until this year [1476]” (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, p. 79), which is quite insufficient to establish a strong connection between Báthory and Basarab the Elder at the beginning of 1476. However, we also believe that this epistle is from 1476. On the one hand, the same scribe also wrote a missive for Basarab the Elder in the autumn of 1476 (Panel VI & no. 70). On the other hand, the first time in his military career when Stephen Báthory was relatively nearby Wallachia was when he participated in the army of King Matthias in the winter campaign of 1475–1476, ended up with the capture of the fortress of Šabac (Szabács) on February 15 (Horváth, Neumann, *Bátori István*, p. 39, 178). From a contemporaneous report dated March 14, 1476, we find out that afterwards Matthias’ army marched eastwards to Smederevo (in Latin *Semendria* or *Zenderew* from the Hungarian *Szendrő*): “ac castrum Zenderew Regia Maiestas subsedit, sonitus bombardorum audierunt diversi Wolachy ad

Szlatina. Primo misit dominus vaivoda unum currum cum decim equibus et octo bombardorum et viginti pixides cum pulveribus ad adiuvamen infidelium Turcorum contra totius christianitatis, et commisit nuntio quod usque octavum diem reveniat” (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4103). Although already in March 1476 this *dominus vaivoda* – who could be none other than Basarab the Elder – is portrayed as helping (*adiuvo*) the Ottomans, one may not exclude the possibility that an exchange of messengers as mentioned in the Slavonic letter in question happened a month earlier, at the beginning of February 1476. Finally, February [1477] seems to us unlikely, since the relations with Braşov appear now quite tense (Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 221; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4201), and in 1477 Báthory is mentioned either in the north of the Kingdom of Hungary, or in connection to the royal court of Buda (Horváth, Neumann, *Bátori István*, p. 143–4; *Documenta Bátori*, doc. 108). Until another discussion on this letter, February 8 [1476] appears to us the most plausible alternative.

10. [the first half of 1476]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, announcing that his servant Proica has been sent to Braşov in order to buy shields and bows.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 115.

Critical editions: Miletič, “Vlaho-bălgarski gramoti,” doc. 88 (ascribed to Basarab the Young); Bogdan, *Doc. şi regeş.*, doc. 86: “[approx. 1474–1476]”; Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 94: “[1474–1476]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 88.

Inventories: Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 360: “[1474–1476]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 108: “[1474–1476]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4090: “[after January 16, 1476]”.

Although the latest proposed dating is based only on the mention from a letter of the voivode of Transylvania, Johannes Pongracz, of the alliance between Basarab and the king of Hungary (January 16, 1476) (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4089, 4090), this point of reference is not very useful, because a similar alliance has been adverted in Transylvania since the summer of 1475 (*Hurmuzaki*, II/1, doc. 15). Another detail appears to us more relevant. This Slavonic letter mentions a certain Proica (Пронка). Or, in a Latin missive of Basarab the Elder sent to Braşov on May 30, 1476, it is also mentioned *fideles nostros Proyka et Thudoran*, both sent to Braşov on behalf of the voivode to buy weapons and food (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4117). Therefore, the similar content of the two letters encourages us to assign the Slavonic one to the first half of 1476.

11. [the first half of 1476]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, regarding the lord’s desire to assign priest Costea to a church in Wallachia.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 43.

Scrivener identification: See Panel II. All three letters (nos. 43, 62 & 204/XXI), identified as being written by the same scribe, can assuredly be dated to the first half of 1476.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 97: “[1474–1476]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 97.

Inventories: Bogdan, *Doc. și regest.*, p. 259–260: “[approx. 1512]” (assigned to Neagoe Basarab); Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 364: “[1474–1476]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 112: “[1474–1476]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4108: “approx. April 16, 1476”.

Besides this Slavonic letter, there is also preserved a Latin missive of Basarab the Elder, dated April 16, 1476, and written about the same priest, *Costha presbyterum* (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4107). The suggestion that these two epistles are, in all likelihood, contemporaneous (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4108) is strengthened by the date and the content of the Latin missive. See also the conclusions drawn from our analysis of the handwritings, indicating to the first half of 1476 as a valid interval for penning this missive. Since both letters refer to the desire of Basarab to securely relocate the priest Costea to Wallachia, it may suggest a short period of time between these two epistles. The difference in addresses motivates the change of the communication’s language, and also suggests the fact that each letter was intended for a different audience: if the Slavonic letter contains the conventional formula (“† **ПРИЯТЕЛЕМ ГОСПОДСТВА МИ, ПЪРГАРОМ БРАШОВСКИМ**”), the address of the Latin missive includes, in addition to *iudici, iuratorum et consules civitatis Brassouiensis*, also *ac castellanis castri regalium de Thercz, amicis nobis plurimum diligendi*, to whom Basarab writes in Latin.

12. [the first half of 1476]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Brașov, on sending some servants to buy iron and weapons on behalf of the lord, mentioning also the restrictions that Brașov imposed on the Wallachian subjects by forbidding them to carry iron or weapons outside Brașov.

National Archives of Romania – Brașov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 62.

Scrivener identification: See Panel II. This letter, alongside two others (nos. 43 & 204/XXI), was written by a scribe available at Basarab’s court in the first half of 1476.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Doc. și regest.*, doc. 154: “[after 1517]” (assigned to Neagoe Basarab); Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 99: “[approx. 1475–1476]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 96.

Inventories: Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 376: “[1475–1476]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 118: “[1475–1476]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4060: “[after July 11, 1475]”.

The strife that appears at the end of the reign of Basarab the Elder in his relations with the town of Brașov has already been mentioned (Papacostea, “Trade

Routes,” p. 445). But, at present, we can emphasise that these political and commercial changes occurring in 1476 (and supposable in the first half of 1477, see *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4201; Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 221) had two main features: the hosting of several Wallachian boyars hostile to Basarab in the town, as well as a mercantile prohibition of the trade of iron and weapons set for the Wallachian subjects. The Latin letters, accurately dated (*Hurmuzaki*, XV/1, doc. 153, 154, 159–161), help us substantially in this case to date some Slavonic letters in which similar subjects matters are taken into consideration. In the first half of 1476, the relations between Basarab the Elder and Braşov began to deteriorate. However, already on January 16, 1476, Johannes Pongracz, the voivode of Transylvania, writing to Braşov town (*Hurmuzaki*, XV/1, doc. 149), had to use in the same sentence three times verbs in the subjunctive mood (*componatis*, *conformetis*, and *possitis*) — expressing thus wishes, commands or doubts — in an attempt to persuade the magistrates of Braşov to respect the agreement concluded earlier between King Matthias and Basarab voivode. Speaking of the export of several strategic commodities from Transylvania to Wallachia (cf. Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor*, p. 70, n. 101), Basarab includes this time in the letter’s address not only **пѣргаромъ Брашовскимъ**, but also **вѣмешѸ**. It is also worth mentioning the explicit remark of Basarab concerning the existence of a mercantile alternative for the restrictions imposed on the Transylvanian market, an alternative represented by the Turkish market. See also the conclusions that emerge from the identification of the scrivener who wrote this document.

13. [the first half of 1476]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, complaining about the trade restrictions imposed by Braşov in relation to Wallachian subjects.

Romanian Academy Library, Historical Documents Collection, no. 204/XXI.

Scrivener identification: See Panel II.

Critical editions: Sturdza, *Documente*, doc. 5, and stamp I (assigned to Neagoe Basarab); Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 102: “[1476]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 99. Inventories: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, VI, XXIV, n. 1: “[approx. 1474–1476]”; Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 396: “[1476]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4061: “[after July 11, 1475]”.

This document, together with two others (nos. 43 & 62), was written by a scribe working in the first half of 1476. The content of this letter supports the same conclusion. Basarab mentions the trade agreements with Braşov that are now being violated by the town’s authorities and complains about the trade restrictions imposed concerning goods such as shields, bows, or iron. The same general attitude of the Wallachian lord can be found in other Slavonic letters presumably dating from this year (nos. 62 & 70). An observation by Bogdan, *Documente*, p. 129, confirms our reasoning: he noticed that “Dumitru from the fortress” (**ДѸмитрѸ ѿт града**), who had paid in advance for crafting several shields in

Braşov, mentioned in this Slavonic letter, also appears most likely later on, in a Latin letter of June 14, 1476, as *Demetrius cum socio suo in Castro nostro Novo existentes*, occasion on which the lord complains about the seizure of their goods (*quomodo res et bona ipsorum*) (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4121), menacing retaliatory measures, an attitude that matches that displayed in the Slavonic letter discussed here. Turning back to this Slavonic epistle, it is quite peculiar how Basarab insists upon the idea that he does not understand why Braşov magistrates do not value any more the previous agreements concluded in 1475, even if the lord's propinquity to the Ottoman factor seems to us the most straightforward explanation (cf. Iorga, "Îndreptări şi întregiri," p. 116–7). From this perspective, it is clear that, for Basarab, obeying the Ottomans does not rule out the continuous endeavour to maintain favourable relations with the Kingdom of Hungary. For him, it was ordinary to preserve peaceful collaborative relations with both parties, and, as a consequence, the closeness to the Ottomans was not seen as a well-grounded reason to deteriorate the relations with Saxon towns, although the latter do not seem to share the same view (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4103, 4120; but also doc. 4122: *hiis occulte et secrete avisemus ut pro evitandis machinationibus ipsius Boszarab*, without explicitly mentioning here the Ottomans).

14. [the first half of 1476]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, on receiving letters about Oprea, and protesting against the support that Braşov offers to the lord's political enemies.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 69.

Scrivener identification: [Caloiana], See Panel III.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, doc. 87: "[approx. 1474–1476]"; Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 100: "[1475–1476]"; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 98. Inventories: Andronescu, "Repertoriul," doc. 375: "[1475–1476]"; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 122: "[after May 9, 1476]"; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4111: "[after May 9, 1476]".

As Bogdan, *Documente*, 126, justifiedly observes, in a Latin letter of May 9, 1476, Basarab asked for the extradition of Oprea, *Opra Logofetum* (*Hurmuzaki*, XV/1, doc. 154), mentioned in this Slavonic letter as well (cf. *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4110, 4111). In the latter, Basarab refers to the agreements of 1475 that are now disregarded by the authorities of Braşov. The fact that Basarab stipulated in this letter sent to Braşov the friendly relations that he has with Sibiu seems rather a rhetorical artifice (see *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4098, 4099, 4112, 4122) than a trustworthy message (see also Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor*, p. 91).

15. [the first half of 1476]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, on the wandering Wallachian boyars that were housed in Braşov, the lord requesting either to their return to Wallachia or to their expulsion to the Kingdom of Hungary.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 57.

Scrivener identification: See Panel IV.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, doc. 85: “[approx. 1475–1476]”; Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 93: “[approx. 1475–1476]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 94.

Inventories: Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 377: “[1475–1476]”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 117: “[1475–1476]”; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4100: “[approx. 1476 februarie 28]”.

The editors of *Urkundenbuch*, VII, p. 82, do not justify by arguments their choice for such a narrow dating interval. Since almost all known Latin letters referring to the Wallachian boyars who sought refuge in Braşov during the reign of Basarab the Elder date only from the spring of 1476 (*Hurmuzaki*, XV/1, doc. 153, doc. 154; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4201), it would be reasonable to think that the Slavonic letter discussed here is also related to the same political context (see no. 69, alongside the previous remarks).

16. [September – October 1476]. Basarab the Elder, voivode of Wallachia, to the magistrate of Braşov, in relation to the release of a Wallachian messenger obstructed in the town due to the commands of Stephen Báthory, who arrived in Braşov as well.

National Archives of Romania – Braşov, Town Hall Fonds, Stenner Documents Collection, Series I – Slavo-Romanian, no. 70.

Scrivener identification: See Panel VI, this scribe being active in 1476.

Critical editions: Bogdan, *Doc. şi regest.*, doc. 79: “[1474]”; Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 90: “[June – December 1474]”; Tocilescu, *534 documente*, doc. 87.

Inventories: Andronescu, “Repertoriul,” doc. 353: “[August – September 1474]”, also stating: “following the passage in the text, ‘the messengers of Stephen voivode are now going...,’ Prof. A. Sacerdoţeanu dates the document to the end of August – beginning of September”; *Inventar arhivistic*, doc. 103: “[September 1474]” (ascribed to Basarab the Young); *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4150: “[approx. October 7, 1476]”.

The messenger sent by Stephen voivode to the Ottomans, a detail previously emphasised by Aurelian Sacerdoţeanu, is, as far as we know, not hinted at – neither at the end of 1474 nor of 1476 – in other extant sources to represent a chronological point of reference for this Slavonic letter. Rather, the passage in question is part of Basarab’s rhetoric, suggesting that not even the Turks, who are not Christians (не сѣ кр(ъ)щени), as Basarab himself utters, do not have the custom of blocking the messengers, while the Christian Transylvanians do have this blamed habit. Both the seal’s legend (commencing with **Юнь**) and the content of this epistle prove beyond doubt that it was issued by Basarab the Elder, although this missive was attributed without argument in the 1986 inventory to Basarab the

Young. The last proposed date is based upon the argument of Stephen Báthory's presence in Braşov (*Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4150), detail resulting from this epistle, presence also attested by a document dated October 2, 1476 (Horváth, Neumann, *Bátori István*, p. 143). The tone of Basarab in this letter explicitly indicates a very tense political situation, pointing to the context in which the epistle was sent to Braşov. We only know that on August 25, 1476, Stephen Báthory was in the military camp near Breţcu, at the entrance to the Oituz valley (*Războieni*, doc. 33). From the content of the Latin letter sent to King Matthias on this occasion, it appears clearly that Báthory no longer intended to enter Moldavia (cf. *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4141), which indicates that during the month of September Báthory could already have been in Braşov. Subsequently, on October 7, 1476, from Braşov, Vlad the Impaler granted the Saxons of this town a commercial privilege, proof that the Transylvanian army led by Báthory had not yet left the Kingdom of Hungary in the first week of October 1476 (cf. Bogdan, *Documente*, doc. 74; *Hurmuzaki*, VIII, doc. 26; *Urkundenbuch*, VII, doc. 4153). In conclusion, dating this letter to September – October 1476 seems the most plausible option.

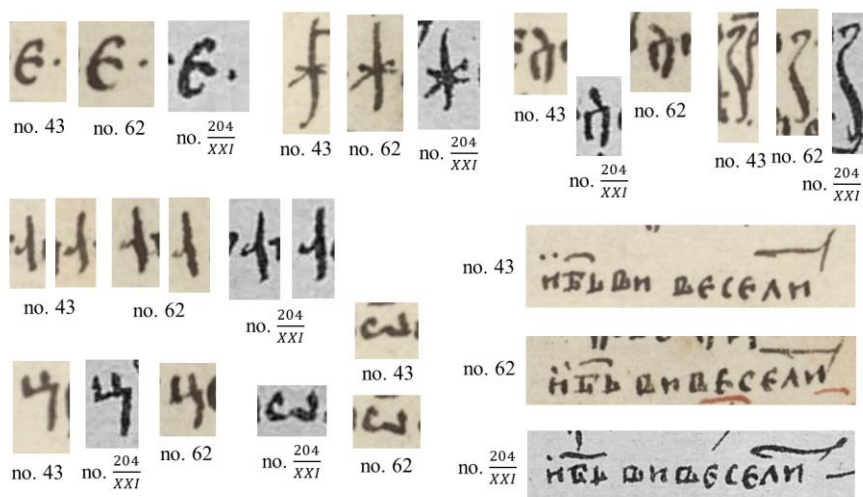
Panel I

no. 2 [the charter of December 12, 1471], no. 53, no. 56 & no. 64 –
the handwriting of Milco



Panel II

no. 43, no. 62 & no. $\frac{204}{XXI}$ – similar handwriting



Panel III

no. 56 [the charter of July 15, 1475], no. 69 & no. 769 –
the handwriting of Caloiana



Panel IV

no. 54 & no. 57 – similar handwriting



Panel V

no. 56 [the charter from July 15, 1475] & no. 60 –
the handwriting of Caloiana



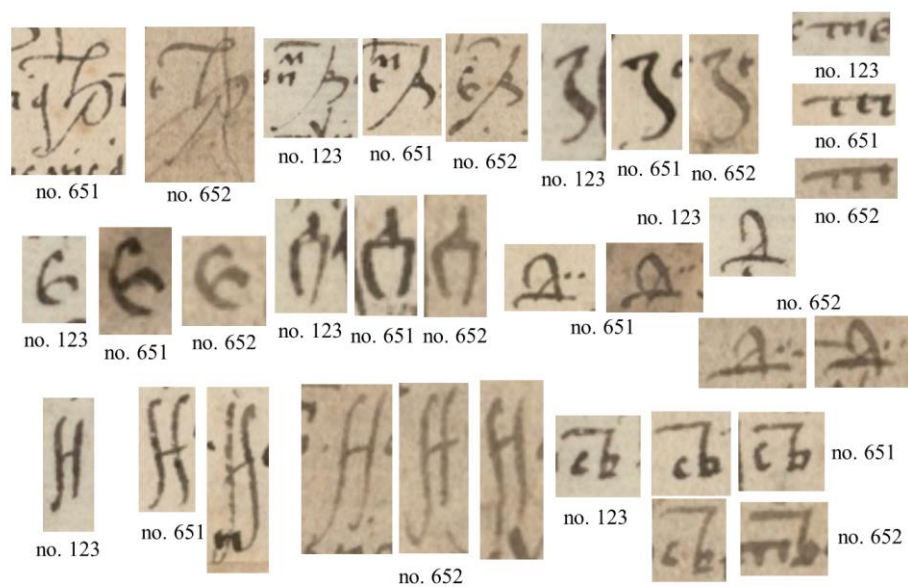
Panel VI

no. 35 & no. 70 – similar handwriting



Panel VII

no. 123, no. 651 & no. 652 – similar handwriting



Seven panels displaying similar handwriting patterns