

## Phanariots and Boyars at the Borders of Empires

### ‘The Prince Has Died and at His Mourning We Should Rejoice.’<sup>1</sup>

In 1711, at Stănilești on the River Prut, not only was the fate of two great empires at stake, but also the destinies of those who had positioned themselves on one side or the other, following their masters and confirming or renouncing their loyalties. The defeat of Russia and its ally, the little principality of Moldavia, led to the exile of Prince Dimitrie Cantemir and the boyar faction that had joined him in this adventure. Ion Neculce, Grand *Hatman*<sup>2</sup> of Moldavia, was among the boyars who followed his master and patron to Russia. A close advisor of the prince of Moldavia, he had been among the supporters of his plans to enter an alliance with Russia. Once in Russia, Neculce thought of the homeland he had left behind, of the fortune going to waste in his absence, and of the positions of power he had held, and requested permission to return to Moldavia. Dimitrie Cantemir interpreted the boyar’s wish as a form of insubordination and refused to give his consent. At the same time, returning to Moldavia was itself problematic: in following Cantemir, Neculce had shown himself to be unfaithful not only to the new prince, but also to the sultan. With frequent changes of ruler and conflicts between the surrounding great empires, the eighteenth century in Wallachia and Moldavia was a time of numerous positionings, wanderings, and re-fashionings of notions of loyalty, belonging, and social status.

In this part, I propose to explore the relation between office, social status, and loyalty. First of all, I shall examine the social and political ascent of boyars to the highest offices in the princely council through the prisms of belonging, social status, and loyalty. I shall then focus on the manner in which a social status was identified and fashioned in relation to the position of power held at a certain moment in southeast European circles. I shall show how the process of self-fashioning contributed to the underlining of social prestige and the propagation of a social representation designed to uphold the boyars’ pretensions to social advancement. I shall close with a case study intended to mirror the fluid identities and loyalties assumed by the southeast European elites.

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1 Iordache Golescu, *Scrieri alese*, ed. Mihai Moraru (Bucharest: 1990), 132.

2 The highest-ranking military officer, commander of the Moldavian army.

## In Search of the Greeks

The taking over of the thrones of Wallachia and Moldavia by the Phanariots changed the political and social paradigm of the elites. Even if what is generally known in historiography as the Phanariot regime seems actually to have been installed much earlier, it is true that the eighteenth century brought important changes regarding the structure of the games played on the political stage.<sup>3</sup> The local elites faced two types of challenge in defining their social status and political loyalties: the significant infusion of new individuals into the social fabric and the social reforms launched by Constantin Mavrocordat.

But let us start from the beginning. Before Dimitrie Cantemir's withdrawal to Russia in 1711, and the decapitation of Constantin Brâncoveanu in 1714, political groupings competed among themselves for influence and power in the proximity of the princes. These groupings were structured according to immediate interests, political affinities, and relations of kinship. Although they might define themselves as 'native' (*pământeni*) boyars, in opposition to the 'Greek' boyars, an analysis of their ethnic structure shows that in fact it was external factors rather than geographical belonging that counted most in the formation of social and political alliances. The most conclusive example is provided by the political conflicts of the second half of the seventeenth century, in which the 'native' party was led by the Cantacuzino family, while the Băleanu family headed the 'Greek' party. In short, the descendants of the Byzantine Cantacuzinos, who had rapidly and recently become 'local boyars', were *defending* their country of adoption, while 'old boyar families' had made themselves 'foreign' by their alliances with the 'Greeks', whose ideas and interests they had adopted. The rhetoric of these political factions is best reflected in the writing of the chroniclers, who offered an interpretation of events favourable to the grouping to which they belonged.<sup>4</sup> Detailed analysis shows that the two camps could in no way be divided by ethnicity and that it was shared interests that gave rise to the formation of factions in the political arena.<sup>5</sup> The boyar class, divided into great boyars and petty boyars, had its own

3 Andrei Pippidi, 'Aux origines du regime phanariote en Valachie et Moldavie', *Revue des études sud-est européennes*, XI, 2 (1973), 353–355; Andrei Pippidi, 'Phanar, Phanariotes, Phanarotisme', *Revue des études sud-est européennes* XIII, 2 (1975), 231–239.

4 Radu Popescu, *Istoria domnilor Țării Românești*, ed. Mihail Gregorian (Bucharest: 1984); *Istoria Țării Românești de la octombrie 1688 până la 1717. Cronica Anonimă*, ed. Constantin Grecescu (Bucharest: 1959).

5 This aspect has benefitted from ample treatment by researchers. See in this connection Andrei Pippidi, *Tradiția politică bizantină în Țările Române în secolele XVI–XVIII* (Bucharest: 2001); Bogdan Murgescu, "Fanarioți" și "pământeni": religie și etnicitate în definirea

criteria of social definition and recognition, which gave access to important offices in the princely council and, as such, to material and symbolic resources. The great boyars defined themselves by their claims to ancient lineage and their holding of large landed estates. These criteria ensured them the right to expect high positions in the princely council and in the administration of the Principalities. In fact, both in Wallachia and in Moldavia, the great boyars were grouped around just a few dozen families. Matrimonial strategies had helped them to maintain their power and their status as a privileged caste. In the course of the seventeenth century, new figures, preponderantly of Balkan origin, had penetrated the inner circles of power and carved out a path to the high offices that brought income and social prestige. In an analysis of the situation in Moldavia, Radu Păun has shown that the proportion of ‘Greco-Levantine’ who managed to enter the ranks of office-holders in the princely council amounted to between 20 and 25 percent of the total number of council members.<sup>6</sup> It was much the same in Wallachia, with some princes supporting the social and political ascent of individuals of different ethnicity as a reward for fidelity and services rendered. At the same time, the princes created their own political alliances and ‘reservoirs of fidelity’<sup>7</sup> in order to remain in power for as long as possible. They rewarded their favourites for ‘their faithful services to the prince and to the country’ with high offices and sometimes with estates, confiscated from those they considered treacherous (*hain*). Once they had established fiscal residence and were incorporated in a taxable category, they became subjects of the prince, even if their social and cultural integration might take generations.<sup>8</sup>

The term ‘Greeks’, as it appears in the contemporary historical sources, in fact covers a population of diverse regional belongings, but bound together by the Orthodox faith and the use of the Greek language in their commercial

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identităților în Țările Române și în Imperiul Otoman’, in Bogdan Murgescu, *Țările Române între Imperiul Otoman și Europa Creștină* (Iași: 2012); Radu G. Păun, ‘Some remarks about the historical origins of the “Phanariot phenomenon” in Moldavia and Wallachia (16th–19th centuries)’, in Gelina Harlaftis and Radu G. Păun (eds.), *Greeks in Romania in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: 2013), 47–94; Wasiucionek, *The Ottomans and Eastern Europe*; Constantin Iordachi, ‘From Imperial Entanglements to National Disentanglement: The ‘Greek Question’ in Moldavia and Wallachia, 1611–1863’, in Roumen Daskalov, Tchavdar Marinov (eds.), *Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. I: *National Ideologies and Language Policies* (Leiden: 2013), 67–148. Cotovanu, *Migrations et mutations identitaires*.

6 Radu G. Păun, ‘Les grands officiers d’origines gréco-levantine en Moldavie au XVIIe siècle. Offices, carrières et stratégie de pouvoir’, in *Revue des Etudes Sud-est Européennes*, XLV, 1–4 (2007), 155.

7 Ibid.

8 Cotovanu, *Migrations et mutations identitaires*, 478–548.

and financial dealings.<sup>9</sup> Some historians have preferred to refer to them as ‘Greco-Levantine’, a concept that enables the integration of categories such as the Ragusans or the Italianized Slavs alongside Orthodox Christians from the Balkans (Greeks, Albanians, and Vlachs or Aromanians) among the individuals who played a role on the political stage of the Principalities.<sup>10</sup>

The eighteenth century saw a rise in the number of ‘Greeks’ present in the Principalities, some coming in the retinue of the Phanariot princes and other simply in search of a better life. We shall repeatedly encounter this population in the course of this book. In the present chapter, I introduce those at the apex of the pyramid, those who came in the entourage of Phanariot princes and set in motion the repositioning of the local boyars. The ‘Greco-Levantine’ infusion changed the rules of the game in a region already dominated by political instability. The conflicts between different groupings transgressed frontiers, give rise to fierce competition for support and influence. Weaving multiple cross-border networks, the newcomers played on multiple levels, positioning themselves according to the resources available at a particular moment. Members of important families—Ruset, Ispilanti, Suțu—integrated themselves in the local ruling elite by way of administrative office, marriage, and the purchase of large estates, while other members continued to extend their connections using the same methods in the Ottoman Empire, showing solidarity and offering each other economic and political support at key moments. With regard to the administrative structure, we may observe a preference for ‘Greco-Phanariots’ in the offices of grand *postelnic* and grand *spătar* and grand *hatman*. The preference lies in the close connection between these posts and the prince; to keep control over them, the prince would prefer to appoint someone close to himself.<sup>11</sup> He thus ensured that the new appointee was loyal to him and would

9 Radu G. Păun, ‘Les Gréco-Levantins dans les Pays Roumains: voies de pénétration, étapes et stratégies de maintien’, *Studia Balcanica*, 25 (2006), 304–316; Konrad Petrovsky, ‘“Those Violating the Good, Old Customs of Our Lands”: Forms and Functions of Graecophobia in the Danubian Principalities, 16th–18th Centuries’, in Hakan T. Karateke, H. Erdem Çıpa and Helga Anetshofer (eds.), *Disliking Others: Loathing Hostility, and Distrust in Premodern Ottoman Lands* (Brighton: 2018), 187–218.

10 Radu G. Păun, ‘Stratégies de famille, stratégies de pouvoir: les Gréco-Levantins en Moldavie au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle’, in Ionela Băluță, Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, Mihai-Răzvan Ungureanu (eds.), *Social Behaviour and Family Strategies in the Balkans (16th–20th Centuries)/ Comportaments sociaux et stratégies familiales dans les Balkans (XVI<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Bucharest: 2008), 17. See also the terminology proposed by Ștefania Costache, *At the End of Empire: Imperial Governance, Inter-Imperial Rivalry and ‘Autonomy’ in Wallachia and Moldavia (1780s–1850s)*, PhD, University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign: 2013), 8–9.

11 See Dan Berindei, Irina Gavrilă, ‘Analyse de la composition de l’ensemble des familles de grands dignitaires de la Valachie au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle’, in *Comunicaciones al XV Congreso Internacional de las Ciencias Genealógica y Heráldica* (Madrid: 1983), 73–74.

not someday turn against him, forming an alliance with his rivals. However, the most important office in the princely council, that of grand *vistier* (treasurer), was held mostly by local boyars, although it was through this office that the prince controlled the financial resources of the country. Even if they came accompanied by a support group, the Phanariot princes tried all the time to recruit clients from among the local elite, gaining their fidelity by the offer of offices and privileges. The appointee to the office of grand *vistier*, for example, was not just any boyar. In accepting the office, the boyar was also accepting a collaboration with the prince and his close associates through his inclusion in their network. His obedience and loyalty were conditional on his being kept in office. In these conditions, the local boyars played the Phanariots' game for the advantages of such a position. Moreover, the grand *vistier* was chosen from among the wealthiest local boyars, those with sufficient resources to enable them to cover shortfalls in the treasury, should the need arise.<sup>12</sup>

Some of the Phanariots went further and put into operation matrimonial strategies and alliances of spiritual affinity to consolidate a network and to make loyalties more secure. By means of marriage, they acquired the right to buy properties in Wallachia and Moldavia and introduced themselves into the local network of alliances of clan and affinity. The sale of real estate was regulated by the *custom of the land*, patrimonial property being protected by a right of pre-emption (*protimisis*). Should part of an inheritance be for sale, relatives had priority, and only after their refusal could it be sold to the other potential buyers, 'strangers' from outside the community.<sup>13</sup> All the same, such a sale posed problems in the long term, for a relative had the right to change their mind and invoke their right of pre-emption later, thus undoing the deal. Analysis of the documents shows that such sales were almost always contested, and the 'stranger' who had entered the patrimonial community by way of purchase might end up being pushed out and given their money back.

The second challenge, alluded to above, concerns the administrative reforms promoted by Prince Constantin Mavrocordat. Mavrocordat bound the quality of nobility to the holding of high office: only those who held functions in the administrative apparatus were considered noble; for their service, the

12 See in this connection the fate of the grand *vistier* Nicolae Dudescu, who ended up paying out of his own fortune considerable sums demanded by the Phanariot princes. He was repeatedly either imprisoned or exiled, and forced to ransom himself with numerous bags of gold pieces. The same happened to the grand *vistier* Mihai Cantacuzino, who was given the task of 'gathering' large sums to cover not only the tribute due to the Porte, but also the regular financial demands of the Phanariots. See Mihai banul Cantacuzino, *Genealogia Cantacuzinilor*, ed. Nicolae Iorga (Bucharest: 1902), 121–157.

13 *Instituții feudale din Țările Române. Dicționar*, eds. Ovid Sachelarie and Nicolae Stoicescu (Bucharest: 1988), 391.

holders of functions were recompensed with a salary.<sup>14</sup> The introduction of salaries under Constantin Mavrocordat's reforms, together with the assimilation of the boyars into an administrative system, both clearly bureaucratizing and modernizing measures, increased the boyars' preoccupation with their posts and their dependence on those holding political power. The boyars accepted Mavrocordat's reforms but did not give up the criteria of social differentiation that had applied until then: the antiquity of one's lineage and the holding of landed estates. In fact, competition stimulated the production of the necessary instruments for social and political legitimation and appealing to the past of one's lineage was one of these. As Petr Mat'a has shown, 'invented pedigrees, origin myths and legends of genealogical descent' were 'key features of aristocratic identity.'<sup>15</sup> The Moldavian and Wallachian ruling elites embroidered legendary kinships and used them not only to underline their social position, but also for political legitimation. In fact the process had begun long before, and was stimulated by the Austrian occupation of Oltenia. Obligated to present documents in support of their noble rank, the boyars had begun an assiduous process of refashioning identity, reaching further and further back into the past and connecting themselves to branches of various cross-border noble lines. The process reached its apogee in the nineteenth century, when every kindred of any antiquity and wealth considered itself duty-bound to produce a 'family book' accompanied by a family tree extending as far as possible in time and space. I shall not insist here on this very important aspect regarding identity formation, except to remark that, as Petr Mat'a has noted, historians have striven to denounce falsehoods and seek truths,<sup>16</sup> and yet the phenomenon, seen in the social and political context of the period, offers valuable insights into the definition of household and kinship.

Contemporary sources tell us that the local boyars had no grounds for fear, given that only a quarter of the holders of high offices were 'Greeks'. However, this did not mean that the boyars did not feel threatened by the presence of the foreigners who came to Moldavia and Wallachia in the company of the Phanariots, and who proved to be unfair competitors for access to the highest

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14 Șerban Papacostea, 'La grande charte de Constantin Mavrocordato (1741) et les réformes en Valachie et en Moldavie', in *Symposium « L'Epoque phanariote »* (Thessaloniki: 1974), 365–367; Gheorghe Brătianu, 'Două veacuri de la reforma lui Constantin Mavrocordat, 1746–1946', *Analele Academiei Române Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, 3d ser., XXIX (1946), 395–461.

15 Petr Mat'a, 'The false Orsini from over the Alps: Negotiating aristocratic identity in late medieval and early modern Europe', *Römische historische Mitteilungen*, 55 (2013), 155.

16 Petr Mat'a, 'The false Orsini', 157.

levels of power. Ion Neculce, a boyar and a contemporary chronicler of this situation, expresses his viewpoint perhaps better than anyone:

Thus I consider with my foolish mind: when God wants to make it so there will be no rust on iron and no Turks in Tsarigrad, and so wolves will not eat sheep in the world, then perhaps there will be no Greeks in Moldavia or in the Land of Walachia either, nor will they [the Greeks] be boyars, and nor will they be able to devour these two lands as they devour them [now ...] Fire you put out, water you dam and divert in another direction, when the wind blows you get out of the way, take shelter, and rest, the sun goes into the clouds, the night with its darkness passes and there is light again; But the Greek has neither mercy nor goodwill, nor justice, nor sincerity, none of these, nor the fear of God.<sup>17</sup>

The Greeks described by Neculce in his chronicle are Orthodox Christians, a little more skilful in handling money and business deals than the Moldavians. As Radu G. Păun observes, direct access to administrative offices eased the path of outsiders to 'high society',<sup>18</sup> providing them with an important lever in the competition for economic resources. As favourites of the princes, the 'Greeks' received functions without having to follow a *cursus honorum* or to be connected to civic life by way of property-owning or other economic activities. In the absence of detailed research on the matter, it is difficult to know who really held power within the princely court. Who took political decisions? Which office-holders in the prince's inner circle really had the power of decision and influence in the princely council? The grand *ban* and the grand *vornic* were the most prestigious offices in the princely council, but were they also the ones that held the power of decision? Each prince displaced the centre of decision-making towards the members of the network to which he belonged. Control was kept over resources by appointing close associates to key offices. Economic resources were gathered from the sale of salt, wax, butter, animals, and skins, from the exploitation of mines, and from the collection of taxes and customs duties. More often than not, the prince would lease the exploitation of the salt mines to members of his network, and would give importance to administrative offices according to the persons appointed to them and not their place in the hierarchy. At the same time, the prince was constrained to use the existing human resources to cover all the posts necessary for the functioning of the state, and this meant appealing to the local boyars. As in the case of Russia, there was no middle class in Moldavia and Wallachia, no rural or

17 Ion Neculce, *Opere. Letopisețul Țării Moldovei și O seamă de cuvinte*, ed. Gabriel Ștrempel (Bucharest: 1982), 301.

18 Păun, *Stratégies de famille*, p. 20.

urban bourgeoisie to supply the functionaries needed if administrative activities were to be carried out.<sup>19</sup> Recruitment was from the ranks of the boyar class, but the prince was able to choose the office-holders that he needed, gratifying them with favours and privileges to compensate for the relatively small salary. Such strategies were always available to a prince, and kept the local boyars dependent on the discretion and mercy of their master. Furthermore, the prince's right to choose his office-holders is mentioned in the numerous *fermans* issued by the Ottoman Empire either to resolve local conflicts or to strengthen the princely prerogatives.

### The Curialization of the Boyars

'Never did he leave Bucharest to go to his villages,' writes Mihai Cantacuzino about Iordache Crețulescu, who held the office of grand *vornic* for twenty-seven years (1719–1746) in spite of changes of ruler and of the political factions at the apex of government. The portrait sketched by Mihai Cantacuzino shows the boyar's extraordinary capacity to adapt to the political and economic thinking of the age. We do not know what Iordache Crețulescu had read, or whether he simply saw how to speculate on the changes of the times, embracing them and adapting to meet them. First, he understood very quickly that landed estates constituted an important economic and symbolic capital, but that in order to maintain them it was necessary to have financial resources and power. Second, after the decapitation of his father-in-law, Constantin Brâncoveanu, in 1714, he realized that the centre of power had shifted towards the Phanariots, who needed loyal functionaries skilled in exploiting the province, not boyars proud of their dignity (*ighemonicon*), refined but conflictual and unreliable.<sup>20</sup> It was said of him that he served all the princes with the same devotion and loyalty, keeping as distant as he could from political intrigue, but as close as he could to the princely courts; that he maintained a balance between his job and his private life ('he never spoke in his home about anything of what happened at Court or in the homes of others'); and that he displayed moderation, even

19 For comparisons with the Russian boyar class, see Marc Raeff, 'The Bureaucratic Phenomena of Imperial Russia, 1700–1905', *American Historical Review*, 84, 2 (1979), 399–411.

20 Iordache Crețulescu was married to Safta, the daughter of Constantin Brâncoveanu and Marica. For details, see also Mariana Lazăr, 'Spre lumea "de dincolo", trecând împreună prin lumea pământeană. Marele vornic Iordache Crețulescu și soția sa, domnița Safta Brâncoveanu', in Mircea Ciubotaru, Lucian, Valeriu Lefter (eds.), *Mihai Dim. Sturdza la 80 de ani. Omagiu* (Iași: 2014), 799–822.



frugality both in his family life and in his public appearances ('very economical with household expenses he was, and his servants poorly dressed; money on loan he would never give, even at threefold interest'), preferring to live in seclusion, surrounded only by his family.<sup>21</sup> The boyar's behaviour was conditioned by the new political circumstances and by the competition for resources.

As Michał Wasiucionek has observed, departure from the capital involved a considerable risk: the absent boyar might be discredited by his opponents.<sup>22</sup> It was also in order to have access to information that the Moldavian and Wallachian boyars became curialized and tried to remain in the proximity of the princely courts. Gradually the boyars left the residences they had erected on their estates and built houses in the capitals, as close as possible to the centre of power.<sup>23</sup> By the middle of the eighteenth century, the phenomenon had become so alarming that the princely authorities took measures. In 1765, Prince Ștefan Racoviță demanded that the boyars 'without posts' leave Bucharest to attend to their estates and their property in the provinces. He threatened with banishment those found in the city 'spending and ruining themselves only to acquire some post or other.' The measure cannot have been effective, as the prince himself acknowledged that he could not 'judge' the insubordinate boyars, but only frighten them with the threat of 'punishment'.<sup>24</sup>

In the early years of the nineteenth century, the British consul William Wilkinson noted the abandoning of estates and country houses by the boyars in order to be present in the capitals:

They hardly ever visit their country possessions, which some let out for several years, for much less than their real value, when they find customers who are willing to pay the whole amount of rent in advance. They build fine country-houses which they intend never to inhabit, and which, in a few years, fall into ruin. The most delightful spots in their beautiful country have no power to attract them, neither is it at all customary with them to quit the town residence at any season of the year.<sup>25</sup>

Neglected or left in the hands of tenants, the estates upheld the fame and grandeur of a great boyar, but did not supply him with economic resources. Hence

21 Cantacuzino, *Genealogia*, 372–373.

22 Wasiucionek, *The Ottomans and Eastern Europe*, 43.

23 George D. Florescu, *Din vechiul București. Biserici, curți boerești și hanuri între anii 1790–1791 după două planuri inedite* (Bucharest: 1935).

24 Valentin Al. Georgescu, Emanuela Popescu (ed.), *Legislația urbană a Țării Românești, 1765–1782* (Bucharest: 1975), 235.

25 William Wilkinson, *An Account of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia: With Various Political Observations Relating to Them* (London: 1820), 137–138.

the continual need to hold high offices, and to arrange the political stage in such a way that these positions would remain in the family. The nobility thus came to be attached to functions and not to persons, as the French diplomat Charles Bois-le-Comte observed in his report to count Henri de Rigny.<sup>26</sup> The struggle for positions in the princely council and opposition to numerous ennoblements (grants of titles without the effective content of an administrative office) seemed perfectly legitimate. This rendered the Wallachians ‘ungovernable’, but also gave them the ‘strength’ always to hold the ‘reins of administration’ and political power<sup>27</sup>; less interested in this ‘rush’ for offices were the Moldavians, the boyar and memorialist Nicolae Suțu writes:

The Moldavian boyars, much more attentive to their material interests, concern themselves much more with the exploitation of their lands than with seeking administrative offices. For this reason, they have always been more independent and have known how to resist the power of their rulers when public interest required it. The Wallachians were more malleable and more inclined to pull all sorts of strings for the occupation of administrative offices, and thus less docile.<sup>28</sup>

But before Suțu, the French consul Charles-Frédéric Reinhard had also noticed this difference.<sup>29</sup> His observation is repeated by Wilkinson:

The Boyars in Moldavia, like those in Wallachia, are the great land-proprietors; but they bestow much more of their attention and time to the improvement of their estates, which they make their principal source of riches.<sup>30</sup>

Lack of interest in their estates increased the boyars’ dependence on the positions offered by the prince and implicitly on political power. ‘Waiting for the mercy of the ruler,’ writes Dinicu Golescu at the start of the nineteenth century, ‘we are merely born and rot in the city.’ This waiting ‘for some five or ten

26 *Călători străini despre țările române în secolul al XIX-lea*, eds. Paul Cernovodeanu and Daniela Bușe (Bucharest: 2007), III, 124; See also Gheorghe Platon, Alexandru Florin Platon, *Boierimea din Moldova în secolul al XIX-lea. Context european, evoluție socială și politică (Date statistice și observații istorice)* (Bucharest: 1995), 69, note 42.

27 *Călători străini în secolul al XIX-lea*, III, 124.

28 Nicolas Soutzo, *Mémoires du Prince Nicolas Soutzo, grand-logothète de Moldavie, 1798–1871*, ed. Panaïoti Rizos (Vienne: 1899), 356; See also Gh. Platon, Al. F. Platon, *Boierimea din Moldova*, 69.

29 *Călători străini în secolul al XIX-lea*, I, 254–255.

30 Wilkinson, *An Account of the Principalities*, 138.

years, or till our turn comes' was not easy, and led to a total abandoning of their estates, of their true wealth, in favour of the desire to 'rule'.<sup>31</sup>

### 'For Him to be Again Alpha and Omega': Patronage and Kinship

The Phanariots came to their thrones accompanied by an entourage, and they offered key posts to close associates so as to hold onto their power as long as possible and be sure that the resources at their disposal were exploited as effectively as possible. The newcomers relied in the first place on the protection offered by their patron. Direct and immediate access to administrative office came, however, with a vulnerability: dependence on the goodwill of the patron, in this case the prince, who in his turn depended on the goodwill of the Porte. In these conditions, the 'Greeks' had to find levers that could enable them to build stability and to ensure a future for themselves.

Before arriving in Iași or Bucharest, they created for themselves transborder support networks to help them to obtain positions. The Phanariots knew no territorial limits, building networks as wide-reaching as possible, and their mastery of foreign languages helped their self-advancement. The cultivation and maintenance of as many personal relations as possible was directed towards the structuring of a network in which patrons and clients offered one another mutual support in the promotion of common interests. The local boyars appealed to the antiquity and prestige of their lineages as grounds for receiving administrative offices, but these two criteria were not sufficient when it came to appointments to important posts. It was matrimonial strategies that contributed to the construction of connections that were durable and profitable in the long term. Ion Neculce offers as an example the boyar Iordache Ruset (Rosetti), who became one of the most powerful men in Moldavia: 'Iordache thought that again he would bring Mihai-vodă from Tsarigrad, to make him prince here in this country, that he might again *be alpha and omega*, just as he was before princes sent by the Turks ruled.'<sup>32</sup> The moment of this

31 Dinicu Golescu, *Însemnare a călătoriei mele, Costandin Radovici din Golești făcută în anul 1824, 1825, 1826*, ed. Mircea Iorgulescu (Bucharest: 1977), 116. The hypothesis is also supported by the historians Gh. and Al. F. Platon. In a very detailed analysis for Moldavia, they observe that the boyars of Wallachia were much more tied to administrative functions and ranks, which constituted to a large extent their economic support, while the Moldavian boyars managed to maintain a degree of independence due to their involvement in the exploitation of their estates (Gh. Platon, Al. F. Platon, *Boierimea din Moldova*, 87).

32 Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, 557–558.

intervention is very important: 1711, when Dimitrie Cantemir opted for Russia and Tsar Peter I to the detriment of the Ottoman Empire, which had, after all, appointed him to the throne of Moldavia. In this moment of testing of faith and loyalties, the boyars aligned themselves according to their own interests and political and social attachments. Iordache Ruset had opposed the alliance with Peter, ably manoeuvring his relations and influence among the boyars, Phanariots, and Ottoman dignitaries to bring his nephew, Mihai Racoviță to the throne.<sup>33</sup> His intrigues aroused the fury of the tsar, who had him arrested and imprisoned him in Kyiv for two years.<sup>34</sup>

How did Iordache Ruset manage to amass so much power? What political and social levers did he make use of in his ascent? The figure I shall now focus on is one among many 'Greek' office-holders who managed to hold immense power at a particular moment, and in what follows I shall try to identify the means by which this was possible.

The roots of the Ruset (Rossetos, Rosetti) lineage go back to thirteenth-century Genoa, whence it seems that one Ioanes Rossetos left for Constantinople, where he married, converted to Orthodoxy, and so managed to enter the ranks of the Byzantine aristocracy.<sup>35</sup> However it is only from the seventeenth century that we have concrete and verifiable data, starting with Laskaris Rossetos, grand logothete of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, married to Bella, daughter of Ioan Cantacuzino. According to Radu Rosetti, he was the father of Constantin the *cupar*<sup>36</sup> and Antonie Ruset, the founders of the Ruset lineage in Wallachia and Moldavia.<sup>37</sup> According to Eugène Rizo-Rangabé, however, Constantin the *cupar* was not the son of Laskaris Rossetos, but merely a contemporary of his, who held various offices in the service of the princes of Wallachia and Moldavia and succeeded in acquiring great influence at the Porte.<sup>38</sup> Iordache

33 Mihai Racoviță was the son of Ion, grand *vornic* of Moldavia. Ion's sister, Safta was married to Iordache Ruset.

34 He would be released in 1714 at the intervention of his son's father-in-law, Constantin Brâncoveanu.

35 Radu Rosetti, *Amintiri. Ce am auzit de la alții. Din copilărie. Din prima tinerețe* (Bucharest: 2013), 19; Radu Rosetti, *Familia Rosetti. I. Coborătorii moldoveni ai lui Lascaris Rousaitos* (Bucharest: 1938), 56; See Andrei Pippidi, 'Date noi despre Rosetești și pământurile lor la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea', *Carpica*, IV (1971), 331–341; Andrei Pippidi, 'Originele familiei Rosetti și confirmarea unei mărturii a lui Neculce', *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie "A.D. Xenopol"*, XX (1983), 275–180.

36 So called because he held the office of *cupar*, a minor post with responsibility for the princely beverages. His sons would also be known as 'Cupăreștii'.

37 Rosetti, *Amintiri*, 20.

38 Eugène Rizo-Rangabé, *Livre d'or de la noblesse phanariote en Grèce, en Roumanie, en Russie et en Turquie, par un phanariote* (Athènes: 1892), 113.

Ruset began his career in Wallachia, building, together with his four brothers, a network that extended its tentacles as far as Istanbul. Married to Maria, daughter of Prince Eustratie Dabija and sister of Dafina, the wife of Prince Gheorghe Duca, he invested energy, time, money, and influence to bring favourable rulers to the thrones of the two countries. Manole (Manolache), Scarlat (Scarlatache), Lascar (Lascarache), and Mihai (Mihalache) Ruset acted together with him. The first two represented the interests of the princes at the Porte in the role of *capuchehaia* (diplomatic agent), while the other two were active on the political arena, sometimes in Moldavia and sometimes in Wallachia, marrying their offspring into local boyar families, and laying the foundations of a network that would enable them to hold political control.<sup>39</sup> When Maria died, Iordache Ruset married Ecaterina, the daughter of Nicolae Racoviță and aunt of Mihai Racoviță.<sup>40</sup> This marriage introduced him into another trans-border network, and also brought him a significant dowry. Iordache Ruset settled permanently in Moldavia, and with the help of Ecaterina's dowry, he began to build a land-owning empire, assiduously buying village after village. In order to root himself as deeply as possible in his country of adoption, he skilfully developed a matrimonial policy for his family, marrying his sons and daughters into some of the most distinguished boyar families in Wallachia and Moldavia. By 1710, he was a target of hatred, fear, and envy. The boyars expressed their discontent and unease in a letter addressed to Nicolae Mavrocordat:

Iordachi the *vornic*, being here a man foreign to the country, with the help of his brothers who were *capuchehaias* to the imperial Porte, has ruined our whole country, changing frequently the princes who were not pleasing to him, thus incurring very heavy expenses, without the country knowing. Similarly he has trodden over and disregarded all the boyar houses, completely ruining most of them.<sup>41</sup>

Nicolae Mavrocordat loathed Iordache Ruset for this ability to grasp any opportunity, diligently weaving networks of kinship by placing his sons, daughters, and grandchildren in wealthy and politically influential families. The real reason for his hostility, however, was the fear that, Ruset, in collaboration with his brothers based in Istanbul, was plotting to have Mavrocordat deposed and his nephew, Mihai Racoviță, put on the throne. Although he discovered a series of

39 For the political careers of these brothers, see Nicolae Stoicescu, *Dicționar al marilor dregători din Țara Românească și Moldova* (Bucharest: 1971), 436–440.

40 Mihai Racoviță occupied the throne of Wallachia twice (1730–1731, 1741–1744) and that of Moldavia three times (1703–1705, 1707–1709, 1716–1726).

41 *Cronica Ghiculeștilor. Istoria Moldovei între 1695–1754*, eds. Nestor Camariano and Ariadna Camariano-Cioran (Bucharest: 1965), 67–69.

compromising letters in Ruset's house, Mavrocordat was afraid to punish him with death. He staged a treason trial coordinated by Metropolitan Ghedeon of Moldavia, supported by the boyar faction who were faithful to him. 'The law condemns him to death,' wrote the metropolitan, but the prince commuted the death penalty to having his tongue cut out, because Ruset had defended himself by saying that all the evidence brought against him was mere 'lies'. Even this sentence he could not carry out. 'Several of the Greek boyars, close to the prince, went again to him and begged him not to apply that punishment,' writes the chronicler of the events of the time.<sup>42</sup> What is striking is the repeated attempts ('again') to eliminate Ruset from the political game. As on every occasion, the family and transborder network intervened, showing its power and influence.

In contrast to Iordache Crețulescu mentioned above, who was loyal to all princes, Iordache Ruset was loyal only to his own interests, aligning himself according to the context and the immediate utility of a relationship. His interests lay in installing and maintaining on the Moldavian throne a member of his network, a patron who would repay his services with access to economic resources. Mihai Racoviță met these criteria and so Ruset's efforts and those of his network were focused on this end, though it was only in 1716 that Racoviță obtained the throne of Moldavia. According to the chronicles of the time, he repaid the efforts of the Ruset brothers, giving them his full confidence and power: 'What he wanted, what he commanded, that Mihai *vodă* did,' writes a contemporary of Iordache Ruset.<sup>43</sup>

Ion Neculce, belonging to the opposing side, had every reason to characterize Ruset as the 'source of all evils' in Moldavia, judging as treason the decisions of his rival to align himself according to immediate interests, but acknowledging his extraordinary ability to find a way out of any situation. Of Iordache Ruset's decision to resolve his open conflict with Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu by a marriage, he writes:

At least he was a wise man, and his nature was that of a Greek greedy for honour; he took no account of God, nor of shame in the eyes of people, nor of punishment, nor of what might come after. And straight away he made the engagement

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>43</sup> Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Cronicele României sau Letopiseștele Moldaviei și Valahiei* (Bucharest: 1872), II, 278–280. On favourites and the great power that they might exert, see the excellent study by Günhan Börekçi, *On the Power, Political Career and the Patronage Networks of the Ottoman Royal Favourites (late Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries)* [https://www.academia.edu/38073778/On\\_the\\_Power\\_Political\\_Career\\_and\\_Patronage\\_Networks\\_of\\_the\\_Ottoman\\_Royal\\_Favourites\\_Late\\_Sixteenth\\_and\\_Early\\_Seventeenth\\_Centuries](https://www.academia.edu/38073778/On_the_Power_Political_Career_and_Patronage_Networks_of_the_Ottoman_Royal_Favourites_Late_Sixteenth_and_Early_Seventeenth_Centuries) [accessed 12.09.2020].

and agreed to cast off the Cantemirs. Brâncoveanu asked Antioh *vodă* to [let him] give him his daughter and to cast off the friendship of the Cupărs, and he [Antioh] did not agree; and he [Ruset], when he had the chance, immediately agreed happily.<sup>44</sup>

The move was well thought-out, for by the marriage of his firstborn Nicolae to Brâncoveanu's daughter Ancuța, Ruset was appeasing a conflict and bringing a rich and important ruler close to him. Of course the alliance raised problems: the Cantemirs and the Brâncoveanus were deadly enemies.<sup>45</sup> Antioh Cantemir remained faithful to his office-holder, refusing the matrimonial alliance proposed by Brâncoveanu in order to protect his subject and adviser.<sup>46</sup> Iordache Ruset, however, had no reservations about betraying his master. He sensed which way the wind was blowing and directed his attention to the most powerful figure of the moment. Dimitrie Cantemir would assign him an important role in his allegorical history of the conflict between the Cantemirs (Antioh, the son of the Elephant, and Dimitrie, the Unicorn) and Brâncoveanu (the Raven). Written in Istanbul in the years 1703–1705, after the death of the author's father, Constantin Cantemir (1693), the *Hieroglyphic History* (*Istoria ieroglifică*) describes the rivalries between the various political factions seeking to take power in Moldavia (the land of quadrupeds), Wallachia (the land of birds), and the Ottoman Empire, (the empire of fish). Iordache Ruset takes the form of the Leopard in the land of animals, while his brother Scarlat Ruset is the chameleon, capable of changing according to its prey. When Dimitrie Cantemir was finishing the writing of the *Hieroglyphic History*, his brother Antioh took the throne of Moldavia for two years (1705–1707).<sup>47</sup>

On his death (probably around 1720), Iordache Ruset left one of the greatest fortunes in Moldavia, which he divided among his sons and daughters. But above all, he had managed to lay the foundations of an extensive and influential family network, making alliances with the most powerful families of Moldavia.<sup>48</sup> By means of this network, the Ruset family dominated the Moldavian political scene throughout the eighteenth century, modifying

44 Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, 430–431.

45 It seems that the alliance was mediated by the patriarch of Jerusalem, Chrysanthos Notaras. Kogălniceanu, *Cronicile României*, II, 274.

46 At this point, Iordache Ruset held the office of grand *vistiernic* under Antioh Cantemir. Stoicescu, *Dicționar*, 436.

47 Dimitrie Cantemir, *Opere fundamentale*, vol. I (*Divanul. Istoria ieroglifică. Hronicul vechimei a româno-moldo vlahilor*) (Bucharest: 2003).

48 Elena Bedreag, 'Descendența și averea marelui vornic Iordache Ruset', in Dan Dumitru Iacob (ed.), *Avere, prestigiu și cultură materială în surse patrimoniale. Inventare de averi din secolele XVI–XIX* (Iași: 2015), 157–203; Elena Bedreag, "La vrerea me este să-i dau au

its identity and integrating perfectly in the Moldavian environment. In the course of a generation, the family's Greekness was lost, and they adopted a Moldavian identity. Already by the middle of the eighteenth century, the Ruset kindred had managed, by way of marriage, to enter the ranks of the great boyar families of Moldavia, and were considered to belong there. Their name was changed from Ruset to Roset, and then, in the early nineteenth century, the legends of their Italian origin led to its being changed to Rosetti.<sup>49</sup> In 1856, when Constantin Sion was compiling the book of the Moldavian boyars, he questioned both the Greek and the Italian origins of the Rosettis. Known for the virulence of his criticisms of the 'Greeks', Sion proved more than generous in the case of the Rosettis. Indeed, he even justified and accepted their Greek origin, which no longer seemed so bad once it was lost in the mists of time: 'If these Rosettis who are great boyars are also Greeks, they came to our country long ago, for 200 years have passed since they were raised to high ranks.'<sup>50</sup>

The above case highlights the importance of a family network for social advancement and active participation in the political arena. The economic resources of the Principalities were limited, and the system of succession resulted in their being divided with each new generation. Written law (the *Pravilă*) and custom provided for the transmission of estate to all rightful heirs in Moldavia, men and women alike. In Wallachia, only men could receive equal shares in the estate, while women received a dowry on marriage. In the case of boyar families, the dowry was often very substantial, and might be considered an important part of the paternal patrimony. In these conditions, the patrimony crumbled. Even if the heirs received significant shares of the estate, they were obliged to enter the political game in order to amass a patrimony of their own, which would then be shared among the members of their families. Ultimately, to borrow Valerie A. Kivelson's conclusion, this system of succession was 'a way of life', which the elites did not regard passively, but sought to make use of in order to build up their own wealth.<sup>51</sup> By rationally thought-out matrimonial strategies, the boyars constructed for themselves the levers necessary for access to the political arena, and from there, to economic resources. From among the members of the family, trustworthy figures were recruited who could be inserted into key posts and who could be relied on at any time.

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ba dintr-ale mele lucruri". Diata marelui vornic Iordache Ruset', in Mircea Ciobotaru, Lucian-Valeriu Lefter (eds.), *Mihai Dim. Sturdza la 80 de ani. Omagiu* (Iași: 2014), 571–586.

49 Rosetti, *Familia Rosetti*, 25.

50 Constantin Sion, *Arhondologia Moldovei. Amintiri și note contimporane. Boierii Moldovei* (Bucharest: 1973), 222–223.

51 Valerie A. Kivelson, 'The Effects of Partible Inheritance: Gentry Families and the State in Muscovy', *The Russian Review*, 53, 2 (1994), 206.



Trust was an important ingredient in the construction and maintenance of a network.<sup>52</sup>

Iordache Ruset had made sure of a future for himself, anchoring himself permanently in a 'homeland'. By buying estates, building houses for himself in Moldavia, marrying his children into the native elite, and participating actively in the political life of the country, Ruset had won the right to be considered 'Moldavian'.

### Identification and Loyalty

In the face of this aggressive campaign of self-promotion, the local boyars had no option but to adapt, to learn, and then to fight back using the same methods. I opened this chapter with Ion Neculce, grand *hatman* of Moldavia, who witnessed the rise of the Phanariots and of Greek office-holders in the principality in the first half of the eighteenth century. Born in Moldavia around the year 1672, the son of the *vistier* Neculce and Catrina Cantacuzino, Ion Neculce had the privilege of belonging to a network of family solidarity that spread out towards Wallachia and the Ottoman Empire. Although the Byzantine ancestry of the Cantacuzinos was continually asserted to add to the prestige of the lineage, their ethnicity had been lost along the way through integration and assimilation among the boyar families. Their Greek origins were ignored, while they obstinately insisted on the prestige of imperial descent. The 'Greeks' criticized by Neculce were in fact his competitors in the political arena, recently arrived with the Phanariot prince, and thus much better placed than he and the other Moldavian boyars were. Through direct connections, these 'Greeks' obtained important offices directly and immediately. It was with them that Neculce had his quarrel. The others, settled for a generation or two, with houses, families, and estates, were accepted as already part of the social fabric.

Nevertheless, our interest in Neculce focuses on his period of exile, to bring to light the different forms that allegiance could assume.<sup>53</sup> Returning to 1711, it must be emphasized that Ion Neculce, grand *hatman* of Moldavia, had been one of the leading supporters of the alliance with Russia.<sup>54</sup> When the war took

52 Wasiucionek, *The Ottomans and Eastern Europe*, 45.

53 Roland Mousnier, 'Les concepts d' « ordres » d' « états », de « fidélité » et de « monarchie absolue » en France de la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup>, *Revue Historique*, t. 247, Fasc. 2, 502 (1972), 289–312; Antoni Mączak, *Unequal Friendship. The Patron-Client Relationship in Historical Perspective* (Frankfurt am Main: 2017).

54 For the stages in the course of the war, see Virginia H. Aksan, *Ottoman Wars, 1700–1870. An Empire Besieged* (London: 2007), 90–98.

an unexpected turn and the Ottomans won, the *hatman's* fate too was sealed. In the same situation were another 4,000 people: great boyars with their families (24), lesser boyars with their families (448), servants, soldiers, and members of the princely family.<sup>55</sup> During his stay in Kyiv in October 1711, Cantemir had to face the first cracks in his people's fidelity.<sup>56</sup> A number of boyars, including Neculce, asked leave to remain in Kyiv and wait for a suitable moment to return to Moldavia. The prince had gone to some effort to get Peter I to grant his boyars and servants posts and means of subsistence in their new homeland. Early in 1712, many of them indeed received estates and serfs, each according to his rank, in the regions of Novomlisk, Balakleika, Kolodezhna, Dvurechny Kut, and Kursk.<sup>57</sup> Ion Neculce refused to accept the grant of property, and repeated the same request to be allowed to return to Moldavia. When Cantemir refused his request, Neculce appealed to the Tsar, who gave him a favourable answer: 'If he does not want to settle, let him have his will: God help him to go where he wishes, for he is not my slave.'<sup>58</sup> In appealing to Peter, Neculce was highlighting the new status he had assumed from the moment he entered Russia: that of one under the Tsar's protection. His patron, Dimitrie Cantemir had lost his exclusive power and capacity to offer services to his clients.<sup>59</sup> Leaving such a relationship was more than justified from the point of view of Neculce, who pragmatically noted his patron's powerlessness to build a future:

And the prince dreams that he is still powerful, as in his own country, when he is prince, and wants to keep it so, to upset those boyars, and he does not consider the service they have done him, that they have abandoned their homes, which he has no understanding of.<sup>60</sup>

Of course he is referring to the relations between himself and Dimitrie Cantemir, which deteriorated from the moment he declared himself dissatisfied with exile and with the new power relations. Furthermore, the new social

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55 A list of the boyars who followed Dimitrie Cantemir can be found in Ion Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, 602. For an exhaustive list, see Mihai-Bogdan Atanasiu, 'Bucuroși Muscalilor și Greșiți Prealuminății Porți. Oamenii Măriei Sale Dumitrașcu Vodă Cantemir, pribegi la Harkov', in Cristian Ploscaru, Mihai-Bogdan Atanasiu (eds.), *Elitele Puterii-Puterea Elitelor în spațiul Românesc (secolele XV–XX)* (Iași: 2018), 243–256.

56 On Cantemir, see Ștefan Lemny, *Cantemireștii. Aventura europeană a unei familii princiare din secolul al XVIII-lea* (Iași: 2013), 133–145.

57 Atanasiu, *Neculce*, 70.

58 Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, 618.

59 Kettering, 'Patronage', 845.

60 Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, 620.

and political context does not favour a father's dreams of greater things for his sons:

So, as for my life, it was as it was, but [I cared] more for my children, what they would be left with, that they would just be soldiers; while in other high noble offices there is not room for the sons of some [exiles] as for these.<sup>61</sup>

Peter I's reforms had created the necessary premises for the absorption of new members into the ranks of the 'Russian nobility', but had also prepared the ground for better competition. The table of ranks opened the way to noble privilege and status for soldiers and capable functionaries in the imperial administration.<sup>62</sup> However it was a way that seemed long and unpredictable.

According to Neculce, obedience and loyalty towards a ruler should be limited to the borders of the country and the duration of his rule:

Which, brother Moldavians, I beg you to bear in mind, to teach yourselves, and to guard yourselves. However much is honourable towards a prince, it is good to serve him with justice, for from [God] too you have payment. And with the prince never to go into exile, no matter what, and not only in a foreign country but neither to Tsarigrad to go with him, you being Moldavian. You should serve him in your own country, for foreigners seek only to pity and to honour the prince, but the boyars who are in exile with him are as nothing.<sup>63</sup>

Tsarigrad and the Ottoman Empire are not assimilated to 'foreignness', but fix the status of the Moldavian as Orthodox Christian and Ottoman subject. This status of 'Ottoman subject' remained attached to the boyar and brought and carried with it an inherent ground for suspicion. The fear that the boyars might quickly change their loyalty to the Tsar for loyalty to the sultan was expressed both by Dimitrie Cantemir and by the Russian generals. Cantemir denounced his boyars for having an understanding with the 'Turks', while the Russian generals did not want powerful competition in Kharkhiv, and thus made the Tsar aware of their suspicion that the Moldavian prince might make peace with the sultan at any time, as others had done before him.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, cooperation with Russia brought as a consequence the annulment of the protection offered

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61 Ibid. 619.

62 Nancy Shields Kollmann, *The Russian Empire, 1450–1801* (Oxford: 2017), 428.

63 Neculce, *Letopiseșul Țării Moldovei*, 620.

64 Ibid., 615, 617.

by the sultan according to the terms of the capitulations, and might lead to the arrest or even enslavement of the boyars.<sup>65</sup>

Neculce's exile and his regaining of the sultan's trust lasted nine years. Family solidarities and transborder networks worked together to obtain the sultan's forgiveness. Without this, a boyar could not safely cross the Moldavian border. As *capucehaias*, princes, and viziers were bombarded with more and more letters and gifts for the winning of forgiveness, so the boyar would advance closer and closer to the border. Exile had brought with it the confiscation of his wealth, as a punishment for betrayal, and its redistribution among the other competitors. They in their turn would do what they could to keep the renegade beyond the border, similarly, making use of money and networks to prevent forgiveness. Such was the case of Neculce, whose wealth had been confiscated and shared out by Nicolae Mavrocordat among other boyars who had here he embarked on the process of winning the trust of the new prince, recovering his wealth, remaking his alliances, and regaining his place in the networks of power. A 'face-washing', as Neculce put it, was necessary for him to regain his social position and to introduce his sons into circles of power.<sup>66</sup>

In 1720, when he launched the process of recovering his estates, Ion Neculce set down the nature of the relations between patron offered him their loyalty.<sup>67</sup> However, Mavrocordat himself, together with the other Phanariot prince, Mihai Racoviță, helped to obtain a *ferman* of forgiveness from the sultan. Mavrocordat's volte-face can only be explained by his need for allies within the country when he regained the throne of Moldavia. The *ferman* arrived at the end of 1719 and Neculce returned to his 'homeland', wand client, between master and subject, establishing the framework in which they operated and the obligations of each party. Accused that he had been influential in the decision to enter an alliance with Russia, Neculce defended himself, emphasizing that 'he had been no more than the servant who served his master rightly,' obeying him and being faithful to him as his office and honour demanded. He could have no power of decision in such a relation ('nor was he anyone with power'), given his position in the political hierarchy.<sup>68</sup> Speaking about the events of 1711, the document recounts in detail the relations of the boyars with their various

65 Will Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War. The Ottoman Empire, Russia and International Law* (Oxford: 2018), 26. See also Viorel Panaite, 'The Re'ayas of the Tributary Protected Principalities: The Sixteenth Through the Eighteenth Centuries', *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, 9, 1 (2003), 79–104.

66 Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, 625.

67 Iulian Marinescu, 'Documente relative la Ioan Neculce', *Buletinul Comisiei Istorice a României*, IV (1925), 1 august 1712, 43–45.

68 Marinescu, *Documente*, 49, [1720].

patrons, showing the rapidity and pragmatism with which loyalties might shift according to immediate material ends.<sup>69</sup>

Loyalties and disloyalties were proven or disproven with every reign; the new prince punished some but forgave the majority. Forgiveness was an aspect of princely mercy, by means of which he ensured future allegiances. Moreover, a prince could not govern when there were significant groups of boyars scattered through the neighbouring empires who might at any time come together and complain to the sultan, thus contributing to his removal from the throne.<sup>70</sup> Forgiveness thus also had a practical dimension: it kept subjects close so that they could be supervised and controlled. In its turn, the Ottoman Empire granted collective forgiveness after every conflict. Preoccupied with the economic capacity of its subjects, it urged them to return to their homes, to work their land, and to pay their taxes.<sup>71</sup> Different objectives converged towards the social pacification that could ensure the human resources necessary for the political and economic process.

### Waiting for Peace: Subjecthood as an Oriental Embroidery

On 15 June 1773, Zoița Brâncoveanu sent Empress Maria Theresa an oriental embroidery together with the following letter of thanks:

Madame, It is only after obtaining the permission of His Imperial Majesty, our August Emperor, that I take the liberty of presenting the first fruits of my work to Your Sacred Royal and Imperial Majesty. As these are oriental effects, I believe that Your Majesty will be pleased to accept them from a *most obedient subject*. It is all worked by my hand to give an idea of Turkish work. I shall be happy if Your Majesty will be pleased to receive it favourably. Ever recommending myself to her powerful protection, I shall glory in being, with the most

69 Kettering, 'Patronage in Early Modern France', 844.

70 Dimitrie Cantemir writes that a skilful ruler who knows how to introduce himself into the Ottoman networks of influence may at any time counter any complaint with gifts to the great ones of the moment. Cantemir, *Descrierea Moldovei*, 74–75.

71 Such an amnesty also took place after the Russian–Ottoman war of 1711, when 'the most exalted Porte, after the return of the Muscovites, at once to all showed mercy and pardoned everyone of all their wrongdoings that they might return to their lands and be tax-payers as they had been before'. Marinescu, *Documente*, 56. After almost every war, *fermans* of amnesty were issued for the Christians of Moldavia and Wallachia, either collectively or individually. See, for example, the *fermans* of 4/14 November 1774, 2/12 May 1792, and 9/19 June 1793, which speak of the pardoning of 'boyars and rayas' and the 'forgetting' of wrongs committed in time of war. Mustafa A. Mehmet (ed.), *Documente turcești privind la istoria României* (Bucharest: 1983), vol. II, 2–4; (1986), vol. III, 31, 46–47.

profound respect, the most humble and most obedient servant and *faithful subject*. Zoitza B. De Brancovanis. Wife of Emanuel.<sup>72</sup> [emphasis mine]

The letter and the embroidery left the city of Kronstadt (Braşov) in Transylvania, for Vienna.<sup>73</sup> Emanuel (Manolache, Manuil) Brâncoveanu likewise wrote a letter, this time to Chancellor Kaunitz, announcing and praising the gift as something that 'cannot be found in Europe, but only among the oriental nations.'<sup>74</sup> By this gesture, he was showing his gratitude for the most important service with which the empress had rewarded him: the granting of a passport. The process had taken more than three years, and had involved an assiduous correspondence in which he affirmed his fidelity to the imperial crown. Why did Brâncoveanu now need such a gesture of gratitude? What happened to the status of subject in wartime? Was it suspended? By examining an important body of correspondence preserved in the archives in Vienna, I shall try to analyse the multiple facets of the status of subject, as it appears in the writing of the actors involved: Wallachian boyars, the Austrian authorities, and the Russian authorities.

The eighteenth century was marked by the exile of various groups of boyars in Poland, Russia, the Habsburg territories, and the Ottoman Empire. The wars fought in the region were the cause of most such flights and led to many families seeking refuge elsewhere. The Moldavian boyars withdrew especially to Poland or Russia, while those from Wallachia preferred Transylvania. For their protection, some made efforts to seek powerful patrons among the tsars, kings, and emperors, offering them their allegiance and taking oaths of loyalty. The process did not prevent them remaining also Ottoman subjects. In an age of permanent insecurity, protection was necessary to ensure one's survival. The Cantacuzinos, Bălăceanus, Brâncoveanus, and Văcărescus were just a few of the great boyar families that assiduously cultivated relations with the crowned

72 'Madame, Ce n'est qu'après avoir obtenu la permission de Sa Majesté Impériale, notre Auguste Empereur, que je prends la hardiesse de présenter les prémices de mes ouvrages à Votre Majesté Sacrée Royale Impériale. Comme ce sont des effets orientaux, je crois que Votre Majesté voudra bien les recevoir comme partant d'une sujette très soumise. Le tout est travaillé de ma main pour donner une idée des ouvrages Turcs. Je me trouverai heureuse si Votre Majesté veut bien l'accueillir favorablement me recommandant toujours sous sa puissante protection, je me ferai gloire d'être avec le plus profond respect. La plus humble et la plus obéissante servante et fidele sujette. Zoitza B. De Brancovanis. Epouse d'Emanuel!'

73 See HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan (1767–1777), f. 41.

74 HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan (1767–1777), f. 40, 15 June 1773.

heads round about, seeking and managing to obtain noble titles.<sup>75</sup> On the basis of these titles, family members sought protection, asylum, passports, and other favours, invoking their obedience and fidelity over the decades to the values of the empires.<sup>76</sup>

The Russian–Ottoman war of 1768–1774 brings a situation of this sort to the foreground.<sup>77</sup> The moment is captured in a number of sources, giving us access to a variety of opinions both about the event itself and about the positions expressed regarding the social and political status of the members of the elite.<sup>78</sup> Two contemporaries record the event, each from a different position: *ban* Mihai Cantacuzino, writing the history of his family, supports the pro-Russian wing among the boyars<sup>79</sup>; Ianache Văcărescu, writing a history of the Ottoman Empire, supports the pro-Ottoman wing.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, the correspondence of the refugee boyars in Transylvania provides further material for an analysis of behaviour and of the definition of a social status in relation to social and political circumstances. The Russian–Ottoman war divided the political class according to their affinities and interests. The Cantacuzinos tried to gather around them as many boyars as possible dedicated to the Russian cause. The Russian advance into Moldavia aroused the hopes of Christians (encouraged by the propaganda of Russia, which presented itself as the defender of all Christians<sup>81</sup>) and opened doors for numerous opportunists who profited from the war, as Ianache Văcărescu observed:

75 See the transcription of these diplomas, passports, and other privileges in Cantacuzino, *Genealogia*, 259–283.

76 HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26/Vaccareculi (1772–1773) and Brancovan (1767–1777).

77 Aksan, *Ottoman Wars*, 129–159.

78 For the Russian–Ottoman war, see also two contemporary accounts in V.A. Urechia, ‘Istoria evenimentelor din Orient cu referință la principatele Moldova și Valahia din anii 1769–1774 de biv-vel stolnicul Dumitrache’, *Analele Academiei Române. Memorile Secției Istorice*, t. X (1887–1888), 398–417; and Dionisie Eclislarhu, *Scrieri alese. Hronograf. Predoslovii*, ed. Natalia Trandafirescu (Bucharest: 2004). The archimandrite Venedict, member of the Moldavian delegation also wrote a travel diary. See Drace-Francis, *Traditions of Invention. Romanian Ethnic and Social Stereotypes in Historical Context* (Leiden: 2013), 99–102.

79 Mihai Cantacuzino, *Genealogia Cantacuzinilor*, ed. Nicolae Iorga (Bucharest: 1902).

80 Ianache Văcărescu, *Istoria Othomanească*, ed. Gabriel Ștrempel (Bucharest: 2001).

81 Mihai Cantacuzino introduces into his history a translation of the printed manifestos (‘tălmăcire a manifestelor tipărite’) that Russia distributed among the Orthodox Christians of the Balkans. Cantacuzino, *Genealogia*, 161–167. On this subject, see Victor Taki, *Limits of Protection: Russia and the Orthodox Coreligionists in the Ottoman Empire* (Pittsburgh: 2015), 1–79.

All Christians who did not ponder on what had happened, and who were not steeped in knowledge of political direction, considered that Russia would lift from the world, or at least from Europe, all Turkish rule. Some out of ardour for the law, others out of an appetite for glory, and others for the love of plunder became Russian soldiers.<sup>82</sup>

The boyars on the side of Russia sent a delegation, headed by *ban* Mihai Cantacuzino and Nicolae Brâncoveanu, to Saint Petersburg to declare their fidelity to the empire. Ferdinand William Ernest von Solms wrote from Saint Petersburg on 10 April 1770 that ‘the delegates from Moldavia and Wallachia, clergy and nobles, have arrived here and the day before yesterday they had a solemn audience with His Imperial Majesty, in the course of which they formally recognized the subordination of their provinces to the sceptre of Russia.’ Among them, Solms recognized the metropolitan of Moldavia, the principal bishops and archimandrites, and the boyars Cantacuzino and Brâncoveanu at their head, both ‘maintaining that they are descended from old Greek emperors.’<sup>83</sup> In his turn, Mihai Cantacuzino recounts in great detail the splendid reception that the Moldavian and Wallachian delegations enjoyed in the presence of Empress Catherine II.<sup>84</sup> As Victor Taki notes, by accepting the protection of Russia, the boyars were seeking to consolidate their own position in relation to the Phanariot princes and the Ottoman Empire.<sup>85</sup> Many of them would receive important offices in the administration of their countries under Russian occupation (1768–1774), but at the end of the war they would have to go into exile in Russia to escape the wrath of the sultan.

Ianache Văcărescu, who at the time held the office of grand *visțier*, deftly managed to avoid inclusion in the delegation, and took refuge in Braşov, in Transylvania. For political reasons and seeing things through the prism of the network of which he was part, he remained faithful to the Ottoman Empire, and tried to make himself useful and to respond whenever his involvement was solicited.

However, if the positions of the Cantacuzinos and the Văcărescus were clear, Nicolae and Emanuel Brâncoveanu wavered. After his return from Saint Petersburg to Iaşi, Nicolae Brâncoveanu came into conflict with the Russian army stationed there, as a result of which he decided to take refuge in Braşov,

82 Văcărescu, *Istoria*, 103.

83 Nicolae Iorga (ed.), *Acte și fragmente cu privire la istoria românilor adunate din depozitele de manuscrise ale Apusului* (Bucharest: 1896), vol. 2, 27.

84 Cantacuzino, *Genealogia*, 181–184.

85 Taki, *Limits of Protection*, 8.



where he had a house and several estates.<sup>86</sup> The insecurity generated by the armed conflict led numerous other boyars to leave the conflict zone and take refuge over the mountains in Braşov. It cannot have been easy for the administration of the city to handle the influx of population from south of the Carpathians, a pretentious and demanding group. Accustomed to enjoying privileges and prestige in their homeland, the boyars tried to maintain these in their migration, to demand them, and indeed to insist on them.<sup>87</sup>

The case of the Brâncoveanus is important as an example of this game of *self-fashioning* and underlining of social status despite the conditions of exile. The Brâncoveanus requested and obtained diplomas as princes of the Holy Roman Empire. Constantin Brâncoveanu, prince of Wallachia (1688–1714), had received the title of Prince of the Empire from Emperor Leopold I on 30 January 1695, with the right to buy properties in Transylvania where he could take refuge in case of war.<sup>88</sup> Later, his grandson, Constantin Brâncoveanu (1707–1752) took steps to have this title renewed, so that his sons, Nicolae and Emanuel might request and obtain the reconfirmation of the title of ‘Prince’.<sup>89</sup> As refugees in Braşov, waiting for peace, Nicolae and Emanuel Brâncoveanu invoked whenever they had occasion the fidelity of their lineage to the Habsburg Monarchy, and above all to the emperor. In the name of this fidelity, they considered themselves entitled to expect protection and help in difficult situations, especially when they were on the territory of their patron. On 20 September 1772, Emanuel Brâncoveanu writes from Braşov:

I claim very respectfully at the foot of the sacred throne of Your Imperial Majesties the protection that my ancestors enjoyed in Your States. The fidelity with which they always served this Empire to the point of shedding their blood

86 The Brâncoveanu family had properties in Braşov, Poiana Mărului, and Berivoiu, and at Sâmbăta de Sus, where they had built a residence and a church. Vezi Ştefan Meteş, *Moştile domnilor şi boierilor din ţările române în Ardeal şi Ungaria* (Arad: 1925, 81–89); See also the document of 20 November 1761, in which Constantin Brâncoveanu writes to the city of Braşov about his house there. On 1 May 1762, the city authorities informed him that an officer had been quartered in his house. Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV/2, 1719, 1720.

87 In December 1771, Ianache Văcărescu and other boyars complained to the governor of Transylvania about the insults and mistreatment to which they had been subjected by the people of Braşov. Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV/2, 1737.

88 Nicolae Iorga, ‘Les diplômes impériaux de Constantin Brâncoveanu, prince de Valachie’, *Revue historique du sud-est européen*, XIV, 7–9 (1937), 177–186.

89 Paul Cernovodeanu, ‘Coordonatele politicii externe a lui Constantin Brâncoveanu. Vedere de ansamblu’, in Paul Cernovodeanu, Florin Constantiniu (eds.), *Constantin Brâncoveanu* (Bucharest: 1989), 123–138.

on the occasions that arose, leads me to hope that I shall obtain my just demand from the magnanimity of Your August Majesties.<sup>90</sup>

In this petition (*'placet'* he calls it in the text) addressed both to Empress Maria Theresa and her son, Joseph, Brâncoveanu maintains that it is precisely this fidelity that has led to the requisitioning of his wealth in Wallachia.<sup>91</sup> At this moment, the patrons become the rulers asked to protect their 'subjects':

Your Majesties deign to order that I be supplied with a certificate and passport to cross into my homeland so as to be recognized as a subject and member of your Empire, that in this quality no violence be done to me during my stay in Wallachia, that I may be able to enjoy in peace my revenues, and the permission to return here when I find it appropriate.<sup>92</sup>

Requesting protection or financial support was no mere whim. Both Russian and Ottoman soldiers resorted to looting as soon as they entered Wallachia and Moldavia, and boyar houses were always the first targets.<sup>93</sup> In an agrarian economy, the means of storing wealth were limited. Part of a boyar's fortune would be tied up in jewellery and clothing; otherwise, the wealth of these boyars consisted in the grain, cattle, honey, wax, and skins in which they traded, and above all in the income from the posts they occupied. In wartime, all these no longer produced anything, leaving the boyars to survive for months or years on what they had managed to store or from the sale of future harvests. In exile, the great boyars were keen to display a lifestyle that reflected their rank and position, investing in appearances. The goods necessary for survival and to uphold their rank were there to be purchased, as Braşov was an important commercial centre. Some took the risk of incurring expenses that they subsequently

90 'Je réclame très respectueusement au pie[d] du trône sacré de Vos Majestés Impériales la protection dont mes ancêtres ont joui dans Vos Etats. La fidélité avec laquelle, ils ont toujours servi cet Empire jusqu'à répandre leur sang dans les occasions qui se sont présentées, me font espérer que j'obtiendrai ma juste demande de la magna[ni]mité de Vos Augustes Majestés' HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26/Brancovan, f. 21.

91 At this point, the peace negotiations were in progress in Bucharest. The Russian delegation, led by General Aleksey Mikhailovich Obreskov, was lodged in the house of Emanuel Brâncoveanu in the Sfântul Spiridon district. Urechia, 'Istoria evenimentelor', 416.

92 'Vos Majestés daignent ordonner que je sois muni d'un attestat et passeport pour passer dans ma patrie à fin d'être reconnu sujet et membre de votre Empire, qu'en cette qualité, il ne me soit pas fait de violence pendant mon séjour en Valachie, que je puisse jouir tranquillement de mes revenus et la permission de m'en revenir ici lorsque je le trouve à propos.' HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26/Brancovan, f. 21.

93 Urechia, 'Istoria evenimentelor', 370–373. On the difficulties of feeding the Ottoman army during the Russian–Ottoman War, see Virginia Aksan, 'Feeding the Ottoman Troops on the Danube, 1768–1774', *War & Society*, 13, 1 (1995), 1–14.

could not cover, thus giving rise to conflicts.<sup>94</sup> In this context, the Brâncoveanu brothers introduce and insistently make use of three key words: 'protection', 'fidelity', 'subject'. These words acquire multiple meanings as the brothers experience the 'fatalities' of war and the deprivations of exile.<sup>95</sup> It should be mentioned that shortly before the outbreak of war, the Brâncoveanu brothers had quarrelled over the division of their paternal patrimony. Dissatisfied at the solution offered by the Divan of Wallachia, Nicolae and Emanuel appealed to the mediation of the kadı of Giurgiu. Kadı Ilyas transcribed into a *hoğjet* the reconciliation of the parties, at the same time recording details of the history of the family.<sup>96</sup> Through kadı Ilyas, Nicolae Brâncoveanu asked the 'High Porte of the Devlet' to turn the *hoğjet* into a *ferman* to reinforce the reconciliation between the brothers.<sup>97</sup> As I have shown elsewhere, the Christians of the principalities were not shy of appealing to the Ottoman authorities to resolve legal conflicts when they felt wronged by the decisions of the princely authorities. In so doing, they were implicitly recognizing the authority of the Ottoman Empire and claiming the protection due to its subjects.

In 1770, Nicolae and Emanuel Brâncoveanu requested the right to reside on the properties they owned in Braşov and at Sâmbăta de Sus for the duration of the war. The government of Transylvania granted them this right, as it did to other families or individuals fleeing from the path of war.<sup>98</sup> The Brâncoveanus, however, were eager in all circumstances to underline the old connections and the fidelity that bound them to the Emperor, making them stand out from the general mass of refugees. Chancellor Kaunitz recognized their quality of 'princes of the Empire' and used the designation in all their correspondence, but he made a distinction between the form and the content of this title. It was

94 See the conflict between Emanuel Brâncoveanu and the merchant Gavril of Şcheii Braşovului, 23 July 1771, in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV/2, 1737.

95 In Braşov, Nicolae Brâncoveanu was accompanied by his wife, Maria, the sister of Ianache Văcărescu, and a minor son, Constantin, while his brother, Emanuel Brâncoveanu, came with his wife, Zoe Sturza, and four children, as he declares in one of his petitions. In addition, there were relatives, clients, and servants. HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 38.

96 Emanuel Brâncoveanu tells how his brother Nicolae raised him, fed him, and arranged his marriage, following the death of their father when he was still a minor. After his marriage, on the urging of relatives, he started legal proceedings against his brother, claiming a larger share of their paternal inheritance. See the document of 12 November 1768 in *Documente turceşti*, vol. I, 309–310.

97 *Ibid.*, 311, document of 13 November 1768.

98 On 28 May 1770, the governor of Transylvania wrote to the city of Braşov, requesting it to provide shelter and hospitality for the Brâncoveanu and Dudescu families and for monks taking refuge because of the war. Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV/2, 1735–1736.

an honorary title that implied only relatively superficial clientelary relations. In a first phase, the Brâncoveanus made use of the weak sense of the words ‘protection’ and ‘fidelity’, without making any reference to the quality of ‘subject’. The context was their conflicts with the ‘Greek’ merchants from whom they had bought goods on credit and who were now pursuing them even within the city of Braşov.<sup>99</sup> Indeed the Brâncoveanus were not the only ones in this situation, as we may notice in the letter sent to Chancellor Kaunitz by Nicolae Brâncoveanu, in which he offers explanations regarding the fate of the exiles:

The Russians have pillaged every great house since we started wandering about, so to speak, here and there, [and we are] even very embarrassed in the upholding of our rank. Moreover, at present, with our goods confiscated by the Russians, and we resolved to wait here for bread, so receiving none of the income of our estates, even if the pretensions of these people are just, by what channel might we satisfy them?<sup>100</sup>

For this reason, in the name of the Wallachian boyars, refugees in Braşov, Brâncoveanu draws Kaunitz’s attention to the fact that the boyars enjoy ‘the protection of His Imperial Highness’, a protection requested so they may be ‘in peace’, and that they cannot be judged according to the laws of ‘the imperial courts of Transylvania’, which are so different from those of Wallachia.<sup>101</sup> The Wallachian boyars here make reference to the unwritten law of hospitality, but also to the imperial protection that they have sought both collectively and as individuals. They request the postponement of any trial till the end of the war, as the cases are within the competence of the courts of Wallachia, whose *subjects* they still are. In his response, Kaunitz does not go beyond the game of rhetoric, assuring the refugees that he is trying to make their stay as pleasant as possible. No more than that!<sup>102</sup>

The prolongation of the war, and above all the breakdown of the peace negotiations at Focşani and Bucharest, led the Brâncoveanu brothers (and

99 On the Greek merchants and the commercial companies of Sibiu and Braşov, see Mária Pakucs, ‘“This is their profession”. Greek merchants in Transylvania and their Networks at the End of the 17th century’, *Cromohs: Cyber Review of Modern Historiography*, 21 (2017–2018), 36–54.

100 ‘Les Russes pillèrent chaque grande maison, depuis errant, pour ainsi dire, ça et la même forte embarrasse pour soutenir notre rang; de plus à présent, tous nos biens confisqués par les russes, nous étant résolus d’attendre ici la pain, ainsi ne recevant point de revenus de nos terres quand bien même les prétention de ces gens-là fussent justes, par quel Canal pourrions nous les contenter?’ HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 13.

101 HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 14, 15 January 1772, Kronstadt.

102 HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 15, 3 February 1772, Vienna, Kaunitz to Nicola de Brancovano.

implicitly the other boyars too) to seek pertinent solutions to get out of the financial impasse in which they found themselves.<sup>103</sup> Even though they had fled because of the war, their status was uncertain. Their actions were interpreted differently by the boyars who had stayed at home, by the Russian authorities in control in Moldavia and Wallachia, and by the Ottoman authorities. Their fate was intrinsically bound to the empire that had offered them shelter. Even if there were nuances in the way their 'desertion' was regarded, ultimately 'perfidy' was on the lips of all. As in the case of Neculce presented above, the boyars wanted to help themselves to the wealth of the Brâncoveanus, while the Russian and Ottoman authorities pursued them to punish them for the disloyalty they had shown. In this new context, the brothers reconsidered the concepts of fidelity and protection, trying to obtain as much as they could to protect themselves.

Tempting fate, Nicolae Brâncoveanu went back to Moldavia to attend to the administration of his estates, according to his own declaration.<sup>104</sup> However, the Russian authorities arrested him, accusing him of engaging in secret correspondence in favour of the Ottomans. Meanwhile, Sultan Mustafa III had issued a *ferman* in which he threatened to enslave the prince, boyars, and clergy who had collaborated with Russia.<sup>105</sup> Whose subject was Nicolae Brâncoveanu? Where should he turn for help and protection? He had gone to Saint Petersburg and had met Empress Catherine II, to whom he had sworn obedience and loyalty, thus betraying his status as an Ottoman subject<sup>106</sup>; then he had chosen exile and Habsburg protection, betraying his oath of fidelity to Empress Catherine. The Habsburgs, however, had granted him far too little to survive, thus obliging him to head for Moldavia in search of economic resources. The only thing he could do in his 'captivity' in Iași was to write letters

103 In 1771, Nicolae Brâncoveanu mortgaged his estate at Sâmbăta de Sus to the merchant Dumitru Marcu for a period of five years. On 20 February 1794, the two were still engaged in litigation, the one demanding the return of the mortgaged estate, and the other, the repayment of the loan with interest. Urechia, *Istoria românilor*, VI, 562–567.

104 In his letter to Kaunitz, Nicolae Brâncoveanu complains that he has been in 'captivity' for nine months in Iași, detained on the orders of Count Pyotr A. Rumyantsev, commander of the Russian army, although the latter had promised him verbally and in writing that he would give him freedom to look after his estates. In order to be allowed to leave, Nicolae Brâncoveanu claimed that he was 'sujet de leur Majestés Impériales'. As Rumyantsev was not impressed by the claim, Brâncoveanu asked to be 'requested as one of the subjects of the Empire' in order to be able to return to Transylvania. HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 18–19, 11 September 1772.

105 Smiley, *From Slaves to Prisoners of War*, 26.

106 See the oath of subjecthood to Empress Catherine II taken by the Moldavian and Wallachian boyars in Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, VII, 7, 81, 21 August 1770.

to his protector, Chancellor Kaunitz, trying to establish his status as an 'imperial subject'. He was joined in this by his brother Emanuel, who had similarly been obliged to return to Wallachia both for financial reasons and because of litigation. Between 11 September and 24 October 1773, Kaunitz and Empress Maria Theresa were deluged with letters and gifts by which the Brâncoveanus' *subject* status in relation to the Habsburg Monarchy was fashioned. Their quality of imperial *subjects* was upheld by appealing to the uninterrupted *fidelity* shown by the brothers' ancestors, who had been attached to the values of the Habsburgs and had spilled their blood when it was called for, serving the empress whenever this was needed. The references are all general, not specifying any particular instances of loyalty.<sup>107</sup> Were these affirmations sufficient to justify their request for protection, asylum, loans, interventions, passports, and ultimately the recognition of their status of *subjects*? The empress had received other requests for asylum, protection, and even loans from the other refugee boyars in Braşov.<sup>108</sup> And while she had made a general offer of protection and asylum, she had diplomatically refused all other requests.

The Brâncoveanus' insistence bore fruit in the end, however, and on 29 April 1773, Emanuel was sent a passport and a report by the governor of Transylvania certifying that he was in litigation with his father-in-law Dimitrie Sturza and, as such, had to go to defend his interests.<sup>109</sup> It is in this context that Zoîta Brâncoveanu sent her thanks, offering Maria Theresa an 'oriental embroidery' and declaring herself the empress's 'faithful subject'. For his part, Emanuel Brâncoveanu, after receiving the passport, did likewise, signing this letter with 'le très humble et obeissant valet et sujet'.<sup>110</sup>

What was the significance of this passport? Did it automatically give him the quality of Habsburg *subject*? How did others interpret the *subjecthood* so much

107 On the nobility of the Habsburg Empire and its attributions, see Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 51–102.

108 On 7 October 1774, after the end of the war, the Wallachian boyars wrote a letter of thanks to Empress Maria Theresa for the 'asylum' she had provided. I find it interesting how the boyars reinvent their names in order to match the world of their exile. The signatures on the document identify them as: Thomas de Kretzulesculis (Toma Creţulescu), Demetréus de Racovitza (Dimitrie Racoviţă), Rodolphe de Vaccaresculi (Rudolf Văcărescu), Ioanes de Vaccaresculi (Ianache Văcărescu), George de Saul (Gheorghe Saul), and Ioanes de Iuliani (Ioniţă Iuliani). HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Vaccaresculi, f. 1–3.

109 He was granted this passport in response to his application of 7 April 1773, in which he requested the following: a loan to be able to survive in Braşov until the end of the war, a passport, the right of asylum for his wife and four children for the period of his absence, and an attestation that he was an 'imperial subject'. HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 38–39.

110 Ibid.

invoked by the Brâncoveanus? In the late eighteenth century, the passport was still a valid instrument to ensure the possessor a safe journey from one named place to another named place. The fact of its being issued by an important person gave it weight.<sup>111</sup> In his reading of Casanova, Valentin Groebner notes that the passport rather offered 'prestige' to its holder, helping them to cross borders by partaking of the renown of the person who had issued the document.<sup>112</sup> Emanuel Brâncoveanu likewise emphasizes the prestige of the document he holds, writing to Count Pyotr A. Rumyantsev that his passport has been signed by Empress Maria Theresa herself: 'Her Majesty, my Sovereign, has been pleased to supply me with a passport signed with her own hand.'<sup>113</sup> The passport has not been preserved, so we cannot be sure what it looked like and what it may have contained. Most likely, it took the form of a letter specifying the name of the holder, the purpose of his journey, and the route. Nor do we know whether the document actually was signed by Maria Theresa. Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger has shown that the empress tried hard to direct her subjects to the local authorities, carrying out a series of administrative reforms to establish the steps to be followed in responding to a petition, and thus relieving the imperial chancellery of many requests that could be dealt with at local level.<sup>114</sup> Indeed Kaunitz (or rather his chancellery) noted in his responses that some requests fell within the competence of the local authorities and that he had thus sent them back to the government of Transylvania. Together with the passport, Emanuel Brâncoveanu had requested a certificate that he was a 'member and subject of this empire so as to be recognized as such'<sup>115</sup>; so had his brother Nicolae.<sup>116</sup> However, the certificate never came. For all that, the Brâncoveanus considered themselves 'imperial subjects' because this was the status that they needed at that moment. It is very interesting how individuals define themselves, interpreting power relations in response to aspirations, needs, and social and political circumstances. In this particular case, the

111 Martin Lloyd, *The Passport: The history of Man's Most Travelled Document* (Kent: 2008), 23. On this subject see also John Torpey, *The Invention of the Passport. Surveillance, Citizenship and the State* (Cambridge: 2000).

112 Valentin Groebner, *Who Are You? Identification, Deception, and Surveillance in Early Modern Europe* (New York: 2007), 227.

113 'Sa Majesté, ma Souveraine a bien voulu me munir d'un passeport signé de sa propre main.' HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 52.

114 Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, 'Maria Theresa and the Love of Her Subjects', *Austrian History Yearbook*, 51 (2020), 7–9. See also Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia. Die Kaiserin in ihrer Zeit. Eine Biographie* (Munich: 2017).

115 'membre et sujet de cet Empire afin d'être reconnu comme tel'. HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 19–20.

116 HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 18.

Brâncoveanus were also taxpayers in the Habsburg Empire by virtue of the properties they owned there, although they only very seldom resided on these properties. Up until 1770, however, they had emphasized only the prestige of the title they held of 'Prince of the Holy Roman Empire', a title that eased their way to doing business with the commercial elite of Transylvania, by serving to reinforce their credibility.<sup>117</sup> Their engagement in the process of self-definition was determined by the insecurity generated by the war and the need to adapt to the new power structures.

The gift offered by Zoița Brâncoveanu did not remain without a response either: in the name of the empress, Kaunitz thanked her for the gift and offered her a porcelain box and 500 ducats to purchase 'whatever may please her', with the justification that 'Her Majesty does not know the princess's tastes.'<sup>118</sup> Reciprocity of gifts and services was one of the keys to the maintenance and proper functioning of relations of patronage.<sup>119</sup>

Russia, through its representatives in Bucharest and Iași, was not impressed by the status of Habsburg *subjects* claimed by the Brâncoveanus. Nicolae was kept in 'captivity' in Iași, while his brother Emanuel wrote energetically requesting freedom of movement by virtue of his quality as a *subject*, pleading his blamelessness ('I have no secret correspondence and nor have I been involved in the movements of either the imperial Russian army or the Ottoman one'), and invoking the alliances between Austria and Russia, which should ensure him 'an inviolable asylum in his homeland.'<sup>120</sup> Count Rumyantsev wrote back drily, and only after the third letter, from the camp on the Ialomița, that if Emanuel fulfilled 'the duties of a good citizen,' he would be protected.<sup>121</sup> However, Rumyantsev only responded after an entire arsenal of connections and influences had been set in motion. Again, Kaunitz had been approached to put in a good word with Baron Vincent Freiherr von Barco,<sup>122</sup> with the Russian ambassador in Vienna, Dmitry Mikhailovich Golitsyn, with the commander of the Russian army, Prince Alexander Mikhailovich Golitsyn, and with Rumyantsev.<sup>123</sup>

117 In a letter to the imperial chancellery, Emanuel Brâncoveanu provides details about his financial deals in Vienna and his money deposited in Viennese banks. See HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 44, 3 July 1773.

118 HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 46, August 1773.

119 Sharon Kettering, 'Gift-Giving and Patronage', 131–51.

120 HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 14 July 1773, Brâncoveanu to Rumyantsev. See also his letter to the same of 12 June 1773.

121 HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 26 July 1773.

122 General in the Austrian imperial army. In 1772, he was in Iași, sent to take part in the peace negotiations that took place in Focșani and Bucharest.

123 HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 25, 26, 27, 30, 32.



In the summer of 1774, the Russian–Ottoman war ended with the signing of the peace treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca. The actors involved over the last six years (1768–1774) were now negotiating the positions they would occupy in the new structures.<sup>124</sup> The Wallachian boyars as a group had requested a special status within the Ottoman Empire similar to that of Ragusa, but Russia's interests in the region were quite different.<sup>125</sup> Thus, the Principalities returned under Ottoman domination, even if they had obtained certain regional advantages.<sup>126</sup> The fate of the boyars too was shaped by the new political circumstances created by the peace treaty. Mihai Cantacuzino went into exile, paying the price of his fidelity to Russia<sup>127</sup>, while Ianache Văcărescu returned to Bucharest, where he would long occupy the political stage. As for the Brâncoveanus, on 9 October 1774, Emanuel thanked Chancellor Kaunitz and Empress Maria Theresa in his usual bombastic style for the protection and help they had given him: 'I leave these states, my heart penetrated by the most vivid gratitude, leaving my rights under the protection of Your Majesty.'<sup>128</sup> Although they had properties in Transylvania, the Brâncoveanus only used them as a place of refuge for limited periods of time. Thus they did not hold the status of residents of the Empire. Moreover, we do not know how and to what extent they paid taxes for these properties, or whether they enjoyed certain privileges on the basis of having the title of 'Prince' and thus belonging to the aristocracy.<sup>129</sup> Under these conditions, their relations were built not with the Empire that should have protected them in their quality as subjects and taxpayers, but on

124 For the peace negotiations, see Virginia Aksan, *An Ottoman Statesman in War and Peace: Ahmed Resmi Efendi, 1700–1783* (Leiden: 1995), 167–169.

125 Taki, *Limits of Protection*, 22–23. See also Brian L. Davies, *The Russo-Turkish War, 1768–1774. Catherine II and the Ottoman Empire* (London: 2016).

126 Viorel Panaite, 'Wallachia and Moldavia according to the Ottoman Juridical and Political View, 1774–1829', in Antonis Anastasopoulos and Elias Kolovos (eds.), *Ottoman Rule and The Balkans, 1760–1858. Conflict, Transformation, Adaptation* (Rethymno: 2007), 21–44.

127 Here is Mihai Cantacuzino's statement: 'Mihai Cantacuzino, who alone had remained responsible for looking after his house and his brothers, knowing after these two congresses what followed, how Moldavia and Wallachia would remain again under the Turks, and considering that their families would not be able to live in Wallachia without fear and without danger, decided they should go to Saint Petersburg and try their luck.' Cantacuzino, *Genealogia*, 190–206.

128 '[J]e pars de ses Etats, le cœur pénétré de la plus vive reconnaissance, en laissant mes droits sous les auspices de Votre Majesté.' HHStA, Moldau-Walachei I/26, Brancovan, f. 64.

129 On the fiscal system in the Habsburg Monarchy, see Peter Rauscher, 'Comparative Evolution of the Tax Systems in the Habsburg Monarchy, c. 1526–1740: The Austrian and the Bohemian Lands', in Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), *La Fiscalità nell'economia Europea, secc. XIII–XVIII / Fiscal Systems in the European Economy from the 13th to the 18th Centuries* (Firenze: 2008), 291–320.

an individual basis, as they cultivated well-chosen relations with certain key figures in political life, whose protection and influence they managed to enjoy as clients.<sup>130</sup> This protection and the status of imperial subjects helped them to survive at a very difficult moment, enabling them to keep their families safe in wartime. Concern for the protection of their families is reiterated obsessively in the writings of all the actors involved in the political events of the moment. The family was the principal factor of support in the political arena, and the protection of one's progeniture ensured a future.<sup>131</sup>

The experience of exile did not end in 1774, however. Back in Wallachia, Nicolae and Emanuel Brâncoveanu took advantage of the relative peace in the region to get involved in political life. During the eight-year reign of Prince Alexandru Ipsilanti (1774–1782), they were among many who received posts in the Divan: Nicolae was raised to the rank of grand *vistier*, while his brother was appointed grand *vornic*.<sup>132</sup> A new war in the region (1787–1792) and the eccentric policies of Prince Nicolae Mavrogheni (1786–1790) led to the exile of boyars suspected of having other political visions. Thus, the Brâncoveanu brothers, together with other boyars, arrived in Nikopol, offered as a sort of hostages by Mavrogheni to the Ottoman Empire. They made use of their Braşov experience to weave new networks of protection. In exile in Nikopol, they directed their correspondence and their leverage towards Istanbul. Taking advantage of his relations with Alexandru Ipsilanti, who had been appointed Prince of Moldavia, Emanuel Brâncoveanu managed to obtain an order (Tk. *buyuruldu*) of Prince Selim (the future Sultan Selim III) permitting him to withdraw together with his family and a doctor (Djurdjaki by name) to Arnabud (Arbanasi) in the region of Târnovo, where they could live, troubled by no one, till the end of the war.<sup>133</sup>

130 By their reforms, both Maria Theresa and Joseph II contributed to the redefinition of the subject, providing the legal levers for the transformation of the individual into a 'citizen'. At the same time, loyalty went through the same process of evolution, with political writings linking it to the homeland and to the assumption of civic responsibilities. See Judson, *The Habsburg Empire*, 49–51; R.J.W. Evans, *Austria, Hungary, and the Habsburgs. Central Europe c. 1683–1867* (Oxford: 2006), 60–62.

131 Nicolae Brâncoveanu lost his only son in Braşov; he died at the age of about two. Nicolae was to have no other children. Dan Berindei, 'Urmaşii lui Constantin Brâncoveanu și locul lor în societatea românească. Genealogie și istorie', in Paul Cernovodeanu, Florin Constantiniu (eds.), *Constantin Brâncoveanu* (Bucharest: 1989), 275–285.

132 Theodora Rădulescu, *Sfatul domnesc și alți mari dregători ai Țării Românești din secolul al XVIII-lea. Liste cronologice și cursus honorum* (Bucharest: 1972), 118, 120–122, 128–129, 299, 301, 304, 322.

133 Document of 26 September 1788, *Documente turcești*, II, 310.

A few years later, in order to feel 'in safety within the High Devlet', Nicolae Brâncoveanu bought a house at Arbanasi. With the help of Prince Alexandru Moruzi (1793–1796), on 27 July 1793, he obtained a *berat* by which he was granted a series of privileges as recognition of 'service and devotion' shown to the High Devlet. For the length of his stay in Arbanasi, he and his sons (if he had sons in the future) would be 'exempt from the *cizye* required by *shari'a* law and from the *variz* and from the ordinary taxes and corvées'; they had the right to wear whatever clothes they wanted and yellow footwear or whatever slippers they wanted; their house could not be used as a billet for soldiers and no one had the right to enter it by force; they and their servants enjoyed the right to travel freely in the Empire keeping their clothing; and in dangerous places they were entitled to the assistance of local chiefs.<sup>134</sup> The Brâncoveanus continued to orient themselves according to the political context and their needs, trying to protect themselves by invoking loyalty and subjecthood, even if the patrons were different.

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Local elites fought a bitter struggle for political supremacy. Their attempt to remain in the political arena, to hold onto their privileges, or to participate in the redistribution of resources inevitably led to their involvement in all sorts of conflicts and political struggles. For this reason, all too few families managed to escape imprisonment, exile, persecution, or confiscation of goods. Of course the fate of the political elites of Moldavia and Wallachia was not unique in the region.<sup>135</sup> In this struggle for supremacy, boyars sought to expand their networks and to increase the number of their patrons in the regional competition for power. Some of them sought to oscillate between different subjecthoods that they could invoke as required, while others displayed multiple allegiances in order to protect their families, their wealth, and implicitly their interests. The search for a home and a stable environment, propitious to personal development, was not based on chance. The examples given above are more than eloquent. Not only 'Greeks' felt the need for a 'homeland' where they could build a future in safety'; so did Wallachians and Moldavians. Iordache Ruset, Ion Neculce, Nicolae Brâncoveanu, Emanuel Brâncoveanu, and Mihai

<sup>134</sup> Documente turcești, III, 48–50.

<sup>135</sup> For a comparison, see Dean J. Kostantaras, 'Christian Elites of the Peloponnese and the Ottoman State, 1715–1821', *European History Quarterly*, 43, 4 (2013), 628–656; Martha Pylia, 'Conflicts Politiques et Comportements des Primats Chrétiens en Morée, avant la Guerre de l'indépendence', in Antonis Anastasopoulos and Elias Kolovos (eds.), *Ottoman Rule and The Balkans, 1760–1858. Conflict, Transformation, Adaptation* (Rethymno: 2007), 137–148.

Cantacuzino pragmatically analysed the opportunities offered by the powers in the region. While Iordache Ruset found or managed to create the necessary conditions for rooting his future in Moldavia, the same cannot be said of Ion Neculce and his future in Russia. Neculce made a practical comparison of the Russian and Moldavian worlds and the place that he could occupy in each of the two societies. Embracing a military career did not seem an adequate future for his sons.<sup>136</sup> He understood that only collaboration with the Phanariot princes would bring wealth and peace, summing it all up in the sentence: "I have seen no boyar thriving of those who put themselves in conflict with the prince."<sup>137</sup>

Nor did the Habsburg Empire turn out to be the 'homeland' the Brâncoveanus were seeking. Rather, the advantages obtained from the protection it offered operated better at a distance than through direct enrolment in a strict subject–ruler relation. The Cantacuzinos, on the other hand, like the Cantemirs seventy years previously, chose the 'soldier's life' offered by the Russian Empire, while at the same time negotiating their positions and status.

I opened this chapter with a line from a play written (around 1821) by the great boyar Iordache Golescu: *'The Prince has died and at his mourning we should rejoice.'*<sup>138</sup> The line illustrates better than anything the tensions between the Phanariot princes and the ruling elite at the end of the eighteenth century. The change of rulers might be a bad moment for those already in power, but it could be a new beginning for all the rest.

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136 On the Russian elite and its rights and obligations, see John P. LeDonne, *Absolutism and Ruling Class. The Formation of the Russian Political Order, 1700–1825* (Oxford: 1991).

137 Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, 656.

138 Iordache Golescu, *Scrieri alese*, 132.