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**A STRANGE TALE: KING JOHN ALBERT’S MOLDAVIAN
CAMPAIGN (1497) IN MARINO SANUDO’S *DIARII****

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Despite of being a well-known topic for both the Polish and Romanian historiography¹, King John Albert’s “crusade” of 1497 still keeps us wondering why an expedition initially aimed against the Ottoman Empire ended eventually in a war against Moldavia, a Christian principality. It is acknowledged that after an unsuccessful attempt to conquer the principality’s capital, Suceava, the Polish army was ambushed on its way back and annihilated in the battle of Codrii Cosminului (26 October 1497). King John Albert’s change of mind was differently explained by

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¹ Natalia Nowakowska, *Poland and the Crusade in the Reign of the King Jan Olbracht 1492-1501*, in Norman Housley (ed.), *Crusading in the Fifteenth Century. Message and Impact*, Basingstoke-New York, 2004; Eadem, *Church, State and Dynasty in Renaissance Poland. The Career of Cardinal Fryderyk Jagiellon (1468-1503)*, Ashgate, 2012, p. 46-49 which resumed the Polish sources and historiography. For the Romanian perspective see Ștefan S. Gorovei, Maria Magdalena Székely, *Princeps omni laude maior. O istorie a lui Ștefan cel Mare*, Sfânta Mănăstire Putna, 2005, p. 319 ff.

the Moldavian² and Polish sources³ but both perspectives seem to have little impact on the way in which the Westerners perceived the event. For most of them, or at least for the Venetians, in 1497, the Ottoman Empire was attacked by a large Christian coalition forged by Poland, Hungary, Moldavia, and *Rossia*⁴, and supported and even led by the Tartars (!)⁵.

² Moldavian chronicles underlined that the King John Albert intentions were directed from the very beginning against Moldavia and that the so-called “crusade” was only a stratagem used to deceive the Moldavian prince. For an analysis of sources see Ștefan S. Gorovei, Maria Magdalena Székely, *Princeps omni laude maior* p. 319 ff. For the Polish chronicle Bernard Wapowski, the king undoubtedly intended to attack the Ottomans, but a rumor suddenly occurred according to which the real aim was to conquer Moldavia and to put Sigismund Jagello on principality’s throne. Only after Stephen’s casting out would the siege of Lycostomo and Moncastro have followed v. Bernard Wapowski, p. 24: “Interea temporis rumor incerto auctore increbuit, Albertum regem non in Turcos sed in Stephanum palatinum et Valachos infesta ferre arma eo consilio, ut Stephano inde pulso Sigismundum fratrem in Moldavia collocaret, Valachisque proficeret, quo facto, Turcis ex Albo Castro et Kilia deiectis, ripam Istri validis Polonorum presidiiis firmaret ac attentius custodiret”.

³ Natalia Nowakowska, *Church, State and Dynasty in Renaissance Poland*, p. 47, n. 57 published a letter of cardinal Fryderyk Jagiellon which states that “when the royal army reached Moldavian soil this ruler (i.e. Stephen of Moldavia), with his usual treachery, declared that he was an ally of the sultan and would help him in any way he could. The king was thus forced to turn against this miserable Moldavian, and take up his sword to clear a path for his army”. The cardinal’s point of view mirrors the “official” version on the events of the Polish kingdom. Nevertheless Stephen received in 1497 the Ottoman’s support and thus there is some ground for the Polish accusations. Other voices believed that John Albert intended to crush the Polish nobility and to impose a personal regime. Such allegations were strengthened by the legend of bad adviser (i.e. Filippo Buonaccorsi Callimachus) who inspired the attack on Moldavia; see W. Weintraub, *Renaissance Poland and Antemurale Christianitatis*, in HUS, III-IV, 1979-1980, part. II, p. 924-926.

⁴ It is difficult to guess what is hidden behind this name. Probably the news referred to the Great Duchy of Lithuania.

⁵ *I Diarii di Marino Sanudo*, a cura di F. Stefani, Venezia, 1879, I, col. 950: “Fo divulgato una nova come, per avisi abuti di Polana, che il re di Polana, il re di Hungaria et Boemia, Stefano Carabodam, il re di Rossia etc. havevano facto una liga insieme contra turchi. Havevano facto lhorò capitano el gran Cam. Quello seguirà scriverò”.

This strange perception was the result of the circulation and spread of news at the end of the 15th century. As usually, a large number of false, doubtful or distorted reports on the preparation, the aims, the development and the conclusion of the Polish expedition circulated along with trustworthy evidence. One can presume that, in many cases, those interested in the Polish “crusade” intermingled the news received from various senders and the result was a strange mixture of accurate and doubtful information. It is striking that precisely this kind of stories had a better circulation and a wider diffusion than the more accurate testimonies. For instance, many of the reports on the Polish “crusade” claim that the Christian forces achieved the goal of the expedition, i. e. the conquest of the ports of Kilia and Moncastro previously occupied by the Ottoman Empire in 1484⁶. It is useless to remind that even the king John Albert claimed that he intended to conquer the aforementioned cities, his army never approached their walls. Nevertheless the capture of Kilia and Moncastro was considered by many contemporaries a *fait accompli* and the starting point of a large offensive against the Ottoman Empire. Thus, according to a letter from Chios written on June 25th, 1497 an alliance was forged by Poland, Boemia and Hungary and, as a result, their combined armies

⁶ For the 1484 campaign see Nicoară Beldiceanu, *La campagne otoman de 1484; ses préparatifs militaires et sa chronologie*, RER, V-VI, 1960, p. 67-77; N. Beldiceanu, *La conquête des cités marchandes de Kilia et de Cetatea Albă par Bayezid II*, in SOF, 23, 1964, p. 63. The topic was recently re-opened due to the publication of new documents found in the Venetian archives. See Ovidiu Cristea, *Campania din 1484 în lumina unor noi izvoare venețiene*, in vol. *Ștefan cel Mare și Sfânt. Atlet al credinței creștine*, Sfânta Mănăstire Putna, 2004, p. 187-274; Idem, *Acest Domn de la Miazănoapte. Ștefan cel Mare în documente inedite venețiene*, București, 2004; Alexandru Simon, *Între porturi și cer. Chilia, Cetatea Albă, Istanbul și Veneția în vara anului 1484*, in “Acta Musei Napocensis”, 39-40, 2002-2003 [2005], 2, p. 229-271; Al. Simon, *Chilia și Cetatea Albă în vara anului 1484. Noi documente din arhivele italiene*, in SMIM, 26, 2008, 177-196; Nagy Pienaru, *Moldova și Imperiul Otoman. Solia lui Ștefan cel Mare din 1485*, in Putna, citorii ei și lumea lor, București, 2011, p. 85-98.

conquered various places of the Tartars along with Moncastro, Licostomo, “Lorexo”⁷ and other places up to Caffa (“è sta scritto como il re di Polana, Boemia e Hungaria, tres concordos fecerunt exercitum, et hanno preso luogi in Tartaria, i qual confina cum Pollana. Etiam Moncastro e Licostomo, et à preso el castello dicto Lorexo a la marina, et dice andarano scorando fino a Caffa”)⁸.

It is surprising that even Venice - the “capital” of the information in the 15th-16th centuries⁹ - seems to pay credit to such kind of inaccurate news. Almost all the letters related to king John Albert’s “crusade” which arrived in the city of St. Mark, were full of confusions, contrasting evidence, discrepancies. One can notice the ambiguity and the lack of accuracy concerning the protagonists involved in the events and the geography of the region. The name of the Christian rulers involved in the preparation of the Polish campaign are completely ignored with one exception – the prince of Moldavia, Stephen the Great; but even in his case it should be stressed the use of different versions for the same name: *Stefano Carabodam*¹⁰, *Stephano de Mondavia*

⁷ For this fortress raised at the Dniepr’s mouth see Ștefan Andreescu, *Moldavia’s Pontic Policy: Stephen the Great and „Illice” Castle*, in „Il Mar Nero”, III, 1997-1998, p. 179-187.

⁸ *I Diarii di Marino Sanudo*, I, col. 756-757.

⁹ Pierre Sardella, *Nouvelles et spéculations à Venise au début du XVIe siècle*, Paris, (f.a.) [Cahiers des Annales-1]; Hans J. Kissling, *Venezia come centro di informazioni sui Turchi*, in H. G. Beck, M. Manoussakas, A. Pertusi (eds.), *Venezia centro di mediazione tra Oriente e Occidente (sec. XV-XVI). Aspetti e problemi*, Firenze, 1977, p. 111-116; G. K. Hassiotis, *Venezia e i domini veneziani tramite di informazioni sui turchi per gli spagnoli nel sec. XVI*, in H. G. Beck, M. Manoussakas, A. Pertusi (eds.), *Venezia centro di mediazione*, p. 117-136; Eric R. Dursteler, *Power and Information: the Venetian Postal System in the Early Modern Eastern Mediterranean*, in *From Florence to the Mediterranean: Studies in Honor of Anthony Molho*, Firenze, 2009, p. 601-623; Eric R. Dursteler, *Describing or distorting the “Turk”? The Relazioni of the Venetian Ambassadors in Constantinople as Historical Source*, in “Acta Histriae”, 19, 2011, p. 231-248. For the 17th century see Filippo de Vivo, *Information & Communication in Venice. rethinking Early Modern Politics*, Oxford University Press, 2007.

¹⁰ *I Diarii di Marino Sanudo*, I, col. 950.

*Charabodam et ducha Ulacho*¹¹, *Ulacho Charabodam*¹², *Charabodam zoè ducha Ulacho*¹³, *Carabodam*¹⁴ or simply *il vlaho*¹⁵. The recurrence of the word “Charabodam/Carabodam” - a corrupted form of the Turkish name of the Moldavian principality (*Karabogdan*) - suggest that, no matter the origin of the news, it followed a route which passed by the Ottoman territory. Moreover the title assigned to the lord of Moldavia combines different terminologies. The Turkish *Karabogdan* is, in one case, set along with the usual name of the principality in a slightly altered form - Mondavia (instead of Moldavia), or, in other cases, is put together with the surname *Ulacho* (“the Wallachian”) because the Polish chancellery usually used the term Wallachia for the Moldavian principality¹⁶.

The same lack of precision can be found in the case of the toponyms; Kilia and Moncastro, the bone of contention between the Poles and the Ottomans in 1497 appeared in various forms and there is sometimes confusion between them in the news gathered by Sanudo. This is the case of the letters sent by Domenico Malipiero which placed Moncastro (Cetatea Alba, Bialgorod) at the Danube’s mouth (“su la bocha dil Danubio sul Mar Mazor”), an obvious confusion with Kilia. It is a striking mistake since one can assume that the Venetians were accustomed with the Black Sea trade centers.

One can obviously ask why the Venetians perceived the event in such a distorted way, and why the more accurate information was ignored or left aside. An answer to these questions could be sketched due to the famous Marino Sanudo’s *Di-*

¹¹ *Ibidem*, col. 740

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Ibidem*, col. 744

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, col. 800

¹⁶ A hypothesis on the “confusion” Wallachia-Moldavia in the Polish documents was recently formulated by Liviu Pilat, *Vocabular politic și consecințe teritoriale ale omagiului de la Liov (1387)*, in SMIM, XXIV, 2006, p. 253-261.

aries, which gathered a number of 15 reports related to the Polish expedition. Although this evidence is well-known in the Romanian historiography, no one has ever tried to explain why the reports copied by the Venetian nobleman mirrored the Polish campaign in a such distorted way¹⁷. Furthermore it is difficult to understand why Sanudo, who himself expressed doubts on certain pieces of information¹⁸, seemed to have complete confidence in the news concerning the Polish crusade.

Some clues for an explanation could be suggested by taking a closer look to the way in which Venice collected the information from the Ottoman Empire at the end of the 15th century. First of all, it should be emphasized that even if, in the previous years, the Venetians established diplomatic contacts both with Poland and Moldavia, the evidence about these distant

¹⁷ For instance Eugen Denize, *Ștefan cel Mare în „I Diarii” lui Marino Sanudo* (Stephen the Great in Marino Sanudo's Diaries), in SMIM, XXII, 2004, p. 137-151 seem to pay credit to all the data gathered by Sanudo. On this point see the critic remarks of Șerban Marin, *Addenda et corrigenda*, SMIM, XXIII, 2005, p. 320-326. For a more elaborate discussion on Moldavia in Sanudo's Journals see Șerban Marin, *Moldavia and Wallachia in Marino Sanudo's Diaries: 1496-1500*, but even this author fails to offer an explanation for the distorted way in which the Polish campaign is mirrored in Sanudo's *Diarii*. He is right stating that there are a lot of misspellings, confusions and contradictions but seems to believe that all of these are the result only of "the lack of interest for the Romanian geographical area" and of the "sinuous evolutions" from one informant to another (*ibidem*, p. 159). As I'll try to argue there are several other factors which should be taken into consideration when we try to approach Sanudo evidence about Wallachia and Moldavia.

¹⁸ For instance in November 1497 according to certain news received from Savoy the King of Hungary - Ladislas II - was dead; few days later other news claimed that the aforementioned king was alive and in very good health see *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, I, col. 819: "*se intese di la morte dil re Ladyslao di Hungaria et Boemia, la qual morte de li si sapeva per certi squizari venuti dal campo del dicto Hungaro era a l'incontro dei Turchi. Et non lassoe heredi perche non havea moglie (...)* Ma pocho da poi se intese esser san, ne haver hauto mal niuno sichè de la sua morte non est loquendum. Pur pareva si tratasse trieve con dicto re et collegai et el Turcho, al qual erano soi ambadori".

Christian countries remained scarce in the Venetian political circles¹⁹.

Moreover, in 1497, the Republic of Saint Mark had no diplomatic representative at the Ottoman court. This situation was the result of a diplomatic incident occurred in 1492, when the Venetian *bailo*, Girolamo Marcello, was accused of spying and, consequently, expelled from Constantinople by the sultan Bayezid II²⁰. Thus, all the regular *dispacci* written by the Venetian representatives in the Ottoman capital ceased to be sent in the lagoon. Consequently, as the sultan had cut the main and the most reliable source of information for the Venetian government, the Republic depended only on secondary evidence. Sanudo used private letters, reports written by the Republic's representatives placed in the proximity of the Ottoman Empire or documents elaborated by Venetian citizens or foreigners who one way or another got information from the Ottoman territory. The reliability of such documents should be questioned as their authors (merchants, navigators, spies, diplomats) had few means to verify the credibility of the information received. This state of affairs lasted until the Venetian-Ottoman peace settlement of 1503 and had a direct impact on the accuracy of the information directed to the Venetian government. King John Albert's expedition make no exception.

All the 15 reports holding information on the event were written by Venetian representatives or by random informants. The list includes the Venetian consul of Chios, Giovanni (Zuam, Joanne) de Tabbia (in 4 cases); the *Serenissima's* secretary, Alvise Sagundino, sent to negotiate some frontier issues with the

¹⁹ Paolo Morawski, *Notizie delle future „Indie d'Europa”: Polonia, Lituania e Moscovia nei Diarii di Marin Sanudo. Anni 1496-1519*, in "Annali della Fondazione Luigi Einaudi", XXI, 1987, p. 43-88.

²⁰ For the episode see Carla Coco, Flora Manzonetto, *Baili veneziani alla Sublime Porta*, Venezia, 1985, p. 26 and 56

Ottomans²¹ (3 *dispacci*); the captain general of the fleet, Marchio Trevisan (2 letters); the *provveditore* of the fleet Domenico Malipiero (2 reports). Another 4 reports belong to different senders such as the *provveditore* of Lepanto, Andrea Foscarini; the *provveditore* of Cattaro, Francesco Zigogna; the *bailo* of Corfu, Francesco Nani and, finally, two citizens of Florence arrived in Venice from Poland.

The last informants were mentioned twice by Sanudo – in October and in December 1497²² – and it is hard to believe that they were actually different persons. In fact this double occurrence points out a methodological problem. Due to the amplitude of his work, Sanudo was unable to update his previous information concerning a certain event. As a result, in many cases we deal with similar versions of the same testimony.

Moreover, as for the Polish expedition in Moldavia, the discrepancies between the reports received from different senders didn't seem to have bothered Sanudo. These differences were the result of the specific parameters of each document (private or official report, source of information, itinerary of the news, speed of news from the departure until their arrival in Venice, etc.) none of which seeming to embarrass Sanudo. He simply copied the evidence received without any effort to check its accuracy or to put it in a chronological order. In this later respect he sometimes mentioned only the *dispaccio's* day of departure and of arrival in Venice, but even so the diarist data are fragmentary. For instance, for the Polish expedition of 1497, Marino Sanudo gave the aforementioned details only in two cases: the report of Alvise Sagundino written on 17th September 1497 (arrived in Venice *via* Corfu on October 14th)²³ and the letter of

²¹ Sagundino accomplished three missions in the Ottoman Empire in 1493, 1496 and 1497 see Maria Pia Pedani, *Elenco degli inviati diplomatici veneziani presso i sovrani ottomani*, Venezia, 2000, p. 17.

²² *I Diarii di Marino Sanudo*, a cura di F. Stefani, Venezia, 1879, I, col. 800 and 845-846

²³ *Ibidem*, col. 809

Giovanni de Tabbia sent from Chios on 24th October (arrived in Venice on December 13th)²⁴.

The sender was sometimes nothing but an intermediary as he simply forwarded to Venice the information received from elsewhere. It is the case with the letters sent from Pera on July 2nd 1496, arrived at Chios and than forwarded to Venice on July 18th²⁵ where they finally arrived in September. Other news which pursued a similar path was sent on December 12th 1497 from Constantinople, forwarded from Chios on February 8th 1498 and arrived in Venice in March²⁶. If we compare this data with other news which circulated on the route Constantinople - Venice *via* Chios their irregularity becomes obvious. The news from the Ottoman capital were one of the main responsibilities of the Venetian *bailo* but after 1492, when the sultan Bayezid decided to expel the Venetian representative, no one could replace his role of gathering the information from the Ottoman Empire. This suspension of the *bailo*'s activity had also influenced the speed of news slowing them down considerably. It took two or even three months for a letter to arrive from Constantinople at its destination while, according to Pierre Sardella's calculation, the average speed for the 16th century consist of 37 days²⁷. An exception was the report sent by the Venetian ambassador, Alvise Sagundino, which covered the distance Constantinople - Venice in 31 days²⁸ in all likelihood due to the special status of the sender.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, col. 846.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, col. 295: "Ancora vene lettere di Syo de Zuam de Tabia consolo, de 18 lujo, come havia lettere di Pera di 2 dito per lo ritorno di l'ambasador di maonesi da poi consignato il tributo al Turco".

²⁶ *Ibidem*, col. 909.

²⁷ Pierre Sardella, *Nouvelles et spéculations*, p. 56. According to the same author it took the slowest news 81 days to arrive from Constantinople to Venice while the fastest covered the same distance in 15 days.

²⁸ *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, I, col. 644: "A di 5 zugno, vene lettere di Alvixe Sagodino secretario nostro, date in Constantinopoli a di 4 mazo". Less than a month was necessary for the letters send by the same Sagundino on

All the aforementioned news seem to follow the maritime route. The land route was obviously less secure and in the absence of a permanent Venetian resident in Constantinople, the maintenance of regular couriers by the *Serenissima* was impossible. The exception was the information brought by two Florentines who left the Polish camp on August 5th 1497, arrived in Buda and then continued their journey to Venice where they arrived on December 5th 1497. In this particular case the speed of the news was the same with the speed of their carriers who covered the distance in an usual way, not as special couriers.

The differences in the speed of news explain some contradictions of the information gathered by Sanudo. Data about the preparation of the Polish campaign and its objectives – the reconquest of Kilia and Moncastro – interfered with later news which arrived sooner in Venice and which stated that the two cities were actually occupied by the Christian forces. But, if one pays attention to the chronology of the Polish campaign, one can easily notice that, according to the reports received in Venice, the fall of the aforementioned cities preceded the beginning of the war! For instance, in August the conquest of Moncastro was taken for granted²⁹ but in that moment the king John Albert's

September 17th, 1497 which arrived in Venice on October 14th (*I Diarii*, I, col. 809). In both cases the reports contain information about the special issues between the Porte and the *Serenissima* and this fact could explain their speed.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, col. 740: Per lettere di Corfu di Alvixe Sagundino secretario nostro, el qual andava ai Signor Turcho per le cosse di Zupa, con la galia soracomito Lorenzo Loredam. Come, in quella note, che era a di 3 avosto, si doveva levar et navegar al suo viazo. Et che de li si verificava quello che, za alcuni zomi, per lettere dil capitano zeneral nostro da mar se intese, che Stephano de Mondavia Charabodam et ducha Ulacho, con ajuto dil re di Rossia, havia tolto per tratado Moncastro loco fortissimo situado su la bocha dil Danubio sul Mar Mazor, el qual el Turcho possedeva, et era sta suo. Per la qual cossa, el Signor havia fato comandamento a molta zente die dovesse cavalchar a la Porta.

army was still in Poland³⁰. The information brought by the two Florentines in December 1497 didn't seem to change the Venetian perspective since Sanudo continued to transcribe news which stated that the Polish crusade was a great success and that the sultan was trembling in terror in Constantinople.

This false perception was probably directly connected to the source of information. An analysis of the 15 reports which contain evidence about the Polish expedition underlines the fact that the most accurate testimonies were those who bypassed the Ottoman Empire. On the contrary, the reports originated in the Ottoman territory gave a very distorted image on the situation and suggested that the Porte was confronted with a serious crisis. For instance in October 1497 - in a moment when the real intention of King John Albert to attack Moldavia was unveiled - a report based on Ottoman informations sent by the *bailo* of Corfu, Francesco Nani, claimed that the Turks: *haveano auto una gran rota da li prediti polani el vlachi etc., presi et morti 5 flambulari. Et per altre vie, se intese esser stali roti et morti turchi 20 milia. Per le qual novità, el Signor era in gran spavento, et renovava il ...*³¹ *a le sue zente, perchè il voleva andar in persona in campo*³². The next occurrences seem to follow the same pattern. In December 1497 the Florentine's testimony estimated the Polish army at 100 000 men and added that the king John Albert requested to Stephen the Great the permission to cross the Moldavian territory. This report was the only one who tried to give a broad perspective of the Polish expedition; the two Florentines gave also the information that, in parallel with king John Albert's preparations for war, Hungary negotiated a

³⁰ The beginning of the Polish-Moldavian war could be placed around 20 August 1497 when the Moldavian emissaries were arrested by the king's order. For the chronology and the analysis see Ştefan S. Gorovei, Maria Magdalena Székely, *Princeps omni laude maior*, p. 319-330.

³¹ Omission in the original.

³² *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, I, col. 800.

new truce with the Porte – an action perceived as very harmful for the Polish interests.

In March 1498 the Venetian perception on the Polish “crusade” seems to suffer a radical change; the conquest of Kilia and Moncastro, announced as a great success in the previous year, gave place to a different and more realistic perspective. According to Giovanni de Tabbia, the Polish king gathered a great army at the Ottoman borders and was determined to start the war; but eventually he became ill and was forced to withdraw³³. As a result the Ottomans also demobilized their army.

This new version on the events, even much more realistic, ignores completely the dramatic turn occurred in the “anti-Ottoman projects” of the Polish king. After passing the Moldavian border, John Albert revealed his true intentions. The arrest of the Moldavian envoys (sometimes around 20th August 1497) was followed by an unsuccessful attack directed towards Suceava, the Moldavian capital, and finally by the Polish defeat at Codrii Cosminului on the way back to Poland. This new course of action was motivated, from a Polish perspective, by the Stephen the Great’s “treachery”, who joined the Ottoman camp and refused his support for the king’s “crusade”, but all these details were completely ignored in Venetian *dispacci*, obviously because the information received were silent on the issue.

Moreover, this version on the events seems to have been overshadowed by previous stories that circulated in 1497. In April 1498 Sanudo copied another letter which resumed some news from Poland. Once again the news announced the preparation of an expedition against the sultan: *il re di Polana, il re di Hungaria et Boemia, Stefano Carabodam (sic), il re di Rossia*

³³ *Ibidem*, I, col. 950; Eugen Denize, *Ștefan cel Mare în „I Diarii”* p. 141 points out that the news completely ignored the Polish-Moldavian conflict but offers no explanation of the fact.

*etc. havevano facto una liga insieme contra turchi. Havevano facto lhor capitano il gran Cam*³⁴.

It is hard to explain how, five months after the Polish defeat by the Moldavian forces, someone still insisted on the idea that the Poles prepared a large scale attack against the Porte with the support of a large regional coalition. Sanudo notes only that the news came from Poland, giving no other detail concerning their sender. The news gives only the name of the prince of Moldavia and ignores those of other Christian rulers. This fact and the mention of the Tartar khan as a leader of the anti-Ottoman league seem to suggest that either the sender was confused by the news gathered or, on the contrary, he intended to create confusion by spreading false data about the event.

One can presume that the Venetians tried to collect reliable information but it is highly probable that all the data they received came from Ottoman subjects. In one case we have the proof for this assumption: the above mentioned letters of Domenico Malipiero depended on data offered by two *bazarioti* (men of bazaar) a term which suggests that the two informants were Muslim merchants. This detail strengthens the hypothesis that almost all the news concerning the Polish crusade of 1497 were biased by the Ottomans, who intended to project a distorted image on their empire. All the informations arrived in Venice considered the Polish preparations of war as a first step of a crusade, even if the Polish crown made no request in this respect to the pope Alexander VI³⁵.

Another strange thing is the perspective adopted by the Venetian *dispacci* towards the consequences of the “Polish crusade”. According to such evidence, in 1497, as a result of Christian offensive, the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of the catastrophe. Obviously such informations transmitted to Venice were highly exaggerated but similar perspectives are to be found

³⁴ See *supra* note 5.

³⁵ Natalia Nowakowska, *Poland and the Crusade*, p. 134.

whenever the Ottomans were confronted with a difficult situation. For instance, in 1461-1462 a defeat of an expedition led by Mahmud pasha against Walachia generated, according to a Venetian chronicle, a widespread panic. The fear was so great that even the capital became deserted³⁶. In 1494-1495 many voices claimed that Charles VIII's expedition in Italy provoked a great terror in the European provinces of the sultan. According to such views, many Ottoman subjects from *Schiavonia*, *Albania* and even *Caramania* believed that the French king was preparing to launch an attack against Constantinople and hastily abandoned their places³⁷. Several Venetian ships amplified the alarm as they were mistaken for Charles VIII's fleet.

There is therefore no surprise that in 1497 the news of a Polish crusade could have been provoked similar reactions. It is a *topos* amplified by the Venetians' wishful thinking. The Venetian reports exaggerated the Ottomans preparations for war and the fright (*gran spavento*)³⁸ provoked by the forthcoming crusade. The preparations of war were interpreted as a sign of alarm and even as a sign of weakness, while they were simply a

³⁶ The text was published by Nicolae Iorga, *Acte și fragmente cu privire la istoria românilor*, III, Bucharest, 1897, p. 13: "in quell tempo mi ritrovai in Constantinopoli; era quella città e Pera nuda de Turchi fugiti ad quella banda della Natolia". For the analysis of the event see Matei Cazacu, *Les Ottomans sur le Bas-Danube au XVe siècle. Quelques précisions*, in SOF, 41, 1982, p. 37-39; Ștefan Andreescu, *Vlad vodă Țepeș și Mahmud pașa Grecul: pe marginea unui izvor controversat*, în Idem, *Izvoare noi cu privire la istoria Mării Negre*, București, 2005, p. 84-85; also Theodor Stavrides, *The Sultan of Vezirs. The Life and Times of Ottoman Grand Vizir Mahmud Pasha Angelović*, Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2001, p. 140-143, although the author mistakes Vlad Dracul ("the Dragon") for his son Vlad Tepeș ("the Impaler"). Sergiu Iosipescu, *La începutul confruntării Țării Românești sub Vlad Țepeș cu Imperiul Otoman*, in *In honorem Ștefan Andreescu*, ed. by Ovidiu Cristea, Petronel Zahariuc, Gheorghe Lazăr, Bucharest, p. 59-78 ignores Andreescu's and Stavrides' contribution while his reconstruction and the chronology of the episode is highly improbable.

³⁷ See Nicolae Iorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des croisades au XV^e siècle*, V (1476-1500), Bucharest, 1915, doc. 256, p. 233

³⁸ *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, I, col. 800.

measure of caution³⁹ or a response for Stephen the Great's pleas for help⁴⁰.

One can wonder why the Venetians preferred to delude themselves. A possible answer is that the "delusion" was not self-conscious. It is true that the Venetians were often blamed for the distortion of information⁴¹ but one can hardly assume that they could misinform themselves. It is more probable that in 1497 the lack of a Venetian *bailo* had a significant impact on the quality of the reports sent towards Venice. The informants had few possibilities to verify the news received and, as the majority of the information about the Polish crusade passed by the Ottomans territories, they were influenced by Ottoman intents and mirrored more or less the same ideas.

Moreover, the Venetian "delusion" was a consequence of the Republic's relations with the Porte. As the peace was undermined by distrust and tense situations⁴², any war waged by the sultan against other monarchs considerably diminished the pressure on the Ottoman-Venetian border. Such statements are explicitly formulated by Marino Sanudo when he sums up the news about the Polish expedition. He considered that such news were very good not only for the *Serenissima* but also for the en-

³⁹ Natalia Nowakowska, *Poland and the Crusade*, p. 131: in January 1497 the Polish ambassador to Istanbul, Michal Strzezowski, demanded expressly Licostomo and Moncastro.

⁴⁰ Ștefan S. Gorovei, Maria Magdalena Székely, *Princeps*, p. 325. I agree with the authors that Stephen asked for Ottoman help before the war with the Poles broke out; otherwise it would have been impossible for the Turkish troops to attend the Moldavian camp in due time.

⁴¹ See for instance the opinion of the Milanese informant Luca Luppo, in N. Iorga, *Acte și fragmente*, III, București, p. 57-58; a similar blame appears in the Chronicle of the Florentine Benedetto Dei. According to Dei the Venetians spread lies about a defeat inflicted to Mehmed II by the Ak Koyunlu lord, Uzun Hassan see Ovidiu Cristea, *La chronique de Benedetto Dei sur la guerre moldo-ottomane, 1475-1476*, in RESEE, XXXII, 1994, 3-4, p. 375 and n. 2.

⁴² Ovidiu Cristea, *La pace tesa: i rapporti veneto-ottomani del 1484*, "Annuario. Istituto Romeno di Cultura e Ricerca Umanistica", V, 2003, p. 277-286

tire Italy because the sultan will be forced to prepare himself for the attack and abandon any idea of invasion⁴³. It is worth mentioning that in 1496-1497 a significant number of sea clashes occurred between the Ottoman and Venetian ships, a sort of prelude to the war which broke out in 1499. In such a context it is possible that the sultan deliberately amplified the news and rumors about King John Albert's expedition. On one hand Bayezid II tried to diminish the tension in the relations with the Republic and to convince the Venetians of his good will towards them. On the other hand the great number of reports about the Ottoman setbacks was aimed to create the image of a vulnerable empire and of a weak sultan unable to take action against the infidels.

Obviously such hypothesis is hard to prove, but there is some evidence in its support. Such is the case of the *relazione* of the Venetian ambassador, Alvise Sagundino, who in 1497 was present in the Ottoman Empire to solve some border issues. According to Sagundino, Bayezid II was a partisan of peace, as he was mainly interested in food and all sort of pleasures rather than in war⁴⁴. Moreover, the ambassador added, Bayezid was a true friend of Venice and his reticence towards the establishment of a permanent *bailo* in Constantinople was not sign of hostility but an intention to keep the secrecy about the Ottoman affairs⁴⁵. One can be astonished by such self - confidence expressed by a member of the Venetian elite which based his *relazione* on his own recent experience. In contrast to Sagundino's testimony, the tension increased continuously in the Ve-

⁴³ *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, I, col. 740: "La qual nova saria perfectissima per la Signoria nostra e tuta Italia, accio el Turcho atendesse a caxa soa et non li venisse pensier altrove".

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, col. 397: [the sultan is] "amador de paxe debito più presto a la golla et altre volupta che a la Guerra".

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, col. 399: „e amico molto di questa Signoria; ma non vol haver baylo li per non haver spion che avisi de qui quello in quelle parte si fanno".

netian-Ottoman relations from 1494 onwards. In 1496 three heavy Venetian galleys commanded by Bernardo Cicogna were in the pursuit of an Ottoman pirate. The Ottomans, in their turn, prepared in the same year an expedition to hunt the Venetian corsair Niccolò Sommaripa⁴⁶. Along with these naval clashes there were also suspicions in Istanbul about the *Serenissima's* support of the French expedition in Italy. All these minor incidents, rumors and doubts amplified the distrust of both sides and anticipated the conflict which broke out in 1499.

Besides the numerous confusions, distortions and inaccuracies there is also significant silence in the news about King John Albert's expedition gathered by Sanudo. Hungary seems to be completely ignored or mentioned only as a "small player" in the political context of the year. No wonder that Moldavia's role is even less emphasized. Sanudo's *dispacci* describe Stephen the Great as a member of a large anti-Ottoman coalition but totally ignore the evolution of the Polish-Moldavian relations and the subsequent conflict. It was only in February 1499, after no less than 16 months from the battle of Codrii Cosminului, that news there was received in Venice about the Polish defeat. According to a report arrived *via* the island of Veglia, the King of Poland was defeated because he was betrayed by the prince of Moldavia. Stephen preferred to reach an agreement with the Turks and, with their help, surrounded and crushed the Polish army⁴⁷. As Veglia was a key point in the circulation of news at least between Buda and Venice, one can assume that the news came from the kingdom of Hungary. The mention of Stephen the Great's treason suggests that it was based on a Polish letter or, at least, a source which supported the Polish "official" perspective. More important than the origin of the information is the fact that an

⁴⁶ The documents concerning these episodes in N. Iorga, *Notes et extraits*, V, doc. 250, p. 230 and doc. 253, p. 231.

⁴⁷ *I Diarii di Marino Sanuto*, II, col. 420: "questo perché Stephano de Valachia havia tradito il re di Polana et uno vayvoda di turchi si accordò con lui, et miser polani in mezo et fono roti".

alternate perspective on the events of 1497 arrived in the lagoon with a very long delay. For more than a year the only perceptions on the Polish expedition remained those based on reports arrived from the Ottoman Empire and which were probably strongly biased by the Ottoman perspective.

Venice was indeed the capital of the news in the Middle Ages and the early modern period and was famous namely for the quality of information about the Turks, but sometimes – and the episode of 1497 is only one example – was trapped by the weaknesses of the system of gathering and re-transmission of information. If the role of Venice in the circulation of news was underlined by the historians it should be stressed that the Ottomans were in their turn very interested in the political and military events from all other the world. Thus they were able to shape the events according to their goals and to use the information as a weapon. Sometimes as a currency to buy trust or receive in turn valuable information; sometimes to mislead the enemies or the potential enemies.