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NORMATIVE LIMITS IN SOCIAL RELATIONS IN 17th CENTURY WALACHIA

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This contribution deals with the forms and the dimensions of normative restrictions that determined the relationship between dependent peasants and their seigniors in 17th century Walachia. I want to focus on the question as to what extent the seigniors had the power to control their dependent peasant's life, and if and how they were able to impose their will on them.

To answer these questions, the Walachian situation will be analyzed in a broader context. In the first part I will thus compare the forms of serfdom in the eastern part of the European continent. The second part will show how the situation existed in Walachia compared to this region.

Serfdom in early modern Eastern Europe, more precisely: in the areas east of the river Elbe¹, is characterized by a high

¹ Especially in German historiography, the river Elbe is viewed as an important frontier of European importance between two structurally different forms of peasant-landholder relations. See for example: Christoph SCHMIDT: *Leibeigenschaft im Ostseeraum. Versuch einer Typologie*. Köln etc. 1997; Heinrich KAAK: *Die Gutsherrschaft. Theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zum Agrarwesen im ostelbischen Raum*. Berlin etc. 1991; Holm SUNDHAUSSEN:

degree of dependence by the unfree peasants on their seigniors. As to the reasons of this high dependency we can distinguish typologically two ideal types: the first one is characterized by the growing power of the landholding elite (nobility) who succeeded in concentrating many elements of public power in their hands, thereby concomitantly weakening the central authority. This ideal type is best represented in the example of early modern Poland, where the middle and lower nobility became the dominant factor on the 16th century political stage. The immediate interest of the nobility was to increase their legal power over the peasants. By imposing their interests in the diets, they also extended their prerogatives over tax collection, police functions, royal jurisdiction and so on. The concentration of all these powers in the hands of one and the same nobleman gave him considerable potential to control all aspects of the lives of his tenants. In this position, he could for instance ask for increased unpaid labour services, imposing himself as the real master of the peasant, while the king was too weak to protect the peasants' freedom. A similar evolution, even though much weaker than in Poland and with specific characteristics, can be observed in Hungary as well, including Transylvania.²

„Der Wandel in der osteuropäischen Agrarverfassung während der frühen Neuzeit. Ein Beitrag zur Divergenz der Entwicklungswege von Ost- und Westeuropa“ In: *Südost Forschungen* 49/1990, pp. 15-56.

² Christoph SCHMIDT: *Leibeigenschaft im Ostseeraum. Versuch einer Typologie*, Köln etc. 1997, pp. S. 39-50; Jerzy TOPOLSKI: *The manorial economy in early-modern east-central Europe. Origins, development and consequences*, Aldershot 1994; Vera ZIMANYI: *Economy and society in sixteenth and seventeenth century Hungary (1526-1650)*, Budapest 1987 (=Studia historica academiae scientiarum hungaricae, 188), see especially pp. 27-48; Leonid ŻYTKOWICZ: “Directions of agrarian development in south-eastern Europe in 16th – 18th centuries”, In: *Acta Poloniae historica* 43/1981, pp. 31-73, here

In the other typological case, we deal by contrast with a very strong central authority. The central power is able to control all parts of the society, ruling alone over the country. But for practical reasons - especially to create a local administration in such a vast territory difficult to control - the central power ceded part of its competence to a stratum of loyal servants. This was the case in Russia, where the power of the czars was never jeopardized by a strong nobility. But the enormous distances and the relatively weak apparatus of administration were not able to control the whole empire effectively. On the other hand, the czar had to rely on his servants and the military, which was provided with estates. But lacking real power over the tenants of these estates, the servants of the czar were confronted with the problem of the non-subordination of its peasants. This often led to the situation that their capability to render service to the czar was in danger of becoming impossible because of the lack of a real income. It was this situation that led the czar to cede an important degree of control on the local level to his servants. They became the representatives of all public functions on their estates, taking over duties that were prerogatives of the central power. As a result, the czar voluntarily renounced to a significant part of his rule on the local level and especially to the control over the peasants in favor of his servants, the boyars, increasing at the same time his absolute power in the empire as a whole. The difference between the Polish and the Russian cases lies in the fact that the czar renounced part of his power in his own interest, whereas the Polish king was just too weak and was forced to give up his control over the peasants. In both

pp. 32-44; D[avid] PRODAN: "Die Leibeigenschaft in Siebenbürgen vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert", In: *Südostforschungen* 33/1974, pp. 62-84.

cases, a stratum of particular masters concentrated in their hands all forms of public power at the local level.³

The situation in the Balkans, i.e. in our context the European part of the Ottoman empire, was different from the two ideal types discussed until now. Here, the central power never renounced, either forcibly or voluntarily, its theoretical claim of absolute power over the land and the peasant. For military and administrative services, it needed to rely on servants that were provided with the income of estates, which remained in the possession of the state. This differs from the Russian and Polish case in that the sultan never ceded public rights to his servants. Even though, in fact, from the end of the 16th century onwards many servants succeeded in increasing their power over the peasants as a result of usurpation, this situation was never legally sanctioned or recognized. The central power was in many instances not able to protect the peasants against the abuses committed by the landholders, but at least these arbitrary actions remained abuses and were not considered as part of the legal power of the landholder. The sultan remained, at least in theory, the one authority that effected power on the local level; he never gave up its rights to intervene in the relationship between landholder and peasant. That is why in the Ottoman Empire a legally sanctioned form of serfdom never existed, even though different forms of de facto serfdom developed in some parts of the Balkans.⁴

³ Christoph SCHMIDT: *Russische Geschichte, 1547-1917*, München 2003, S. 141-145; Jan KUSBER: „Leibeigenschaft im Russland der Frühen Neuzeit. Aspekte der rechtlichen Lage und der sozialen Praxis“ In: Jan KLUSSMANN (Hg.): *Leibeigenschaft. Bäuerliche Unfreiheit in der frühen Neuzeit*, Köln etc. 2003, S. 135-154, see especially pp. 142-146; Jerome BLUM: *Lord and peasant in Russia. From the ninth to the nineteenth century*, Princeton 1961, see especially pp. 247-268.

⁴ Halil İNALCIK, Donald QUATAERT (Ed.): *An economic and social history of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914*, Cambridge 1994,

Now I want to focus the attention on Walachia to argue with which of these very simplified forms of social organization it shares most similarities, and what impact this had on the social control and the preservation of traditional forms of behavioural control. If we analyse the documents from the 17th century, we see that the prince played an important role in the question of jurisdiction.⁵ We have more than one example of dependent peasants who appealed to the court of the prince to be given the status of free peasants. They contend that they were in fact free people and not dependent as considered by their seigniors, or that they had been demeaned to the status of dependence by force. One example is that of the inhabitants of the village of Prodilești who in the year 1644 stated that they had never been dependents of the monastery of Strîmbul.⁶ The prince Matei Basarab gave them the possibility to prove their case, but when he saw they were lying, he not only decided they should belong to the monastery

pp. 103-111, 447-451; Bruce McGOWAN: *Economic life in Ottoman Europe. Taxation, trade and the struggle for land, 1600-1800*, Cambridge 1981, pp. 52-79; Halil İNALCIK: *The Ottoman empire. The classical age, 1300-1600*, London 1973, pp. 107-118; Halil İNALCIK: "Village, peasant and empire", In: *Ibid.: The middle east and the Balkans under the Ottoman empire*, Bloomington 1993, pp. 137-160; John R. LAMPE, Marvin R. JACKSON: *Balkan economic history, 1550-1950. From imperial borderlands to developing nations?* Bloomington 1982, pp. 33-39; Leonid ŻYTKOWICZ: "Directions of agrarian development in south-eastern Europe in 16th – 18th centuries", In: *Acta Poloniae historica* 43/1981, pp. 31-73, here pp. 56-68.

⁵ *Judecata domnească în Țara Românească și Moldova (1611-1831)*. Partea I. Organizarea judecătorească. Volumul I (1611-1740). București 1979, pp. S. 27-30, 40, 46-47, 76-77.

⁶ *Catalogul documentelor Țării Românești din arhivele statului*. Volumul V: 1640-1644. eds. Marcel Dumitru CIUCA, Doina DUCATINCULESCU, Silvia VATAFU-GAITAN, București 1985, No. 1493, p. 621 [30th November 1644].

as hitherto. Because of their lies he ordered that they be beaten. Another similar is Neacșu, belonging to the Sfânta Troiță monastery.⁷ In 1635, he stated to the same prince Matei Basarab, that he had never been dependent peasant. But the prince did not believe him and decreed that Neacșu should remain a dependant peasant of the monastery. After this decision, Neacșu came to an agreement with the monastery by paying a sum to obtain his freedom. When the prince heard about this deal, he became furious over the fact that Neacșu had come to his court cheating and lying. He not only confiscated the money paid by Neacșu to get his freedom and reiterated his order that Neacșu should belong to the monastery, but he also punished the liar with one hundred strokes with the stick.

The harsh punishment clearly demonstrates that in both cases the peasants transgressed the acceptable manner of behaviour, or "good custom". But it is important to underline that the punishment was not applied because the peasants were acting against their seigniors. It was ordered because of a violation of the good behaviour against the prince, i.e. the fact of deceiving the prince by lies. Thus, the limit of acceptable behaviour towards the prince was transgressed, leading to the mentioned punishment. It is important to emphasize here that the simple fact of addressing a plaint against his seignior by a peasant was not seen as a violation of the custom, but was accepted as legally admitted possibility of defending his rights.

As we can see from the cited examples, it was not impossible for an unfree peasant to institute legal proceedings, addressing

⁷ Documenta Romaniae Historica. B: Țara Românească, Volumul XXV (1635-1636). Eds. Damaschin MIOC, Maria BALAN, Ruxandra CAMARASANU et. al. Bucuresti 1985, No. 423, pp. 465-467 [5th December 1636].

themselves to the prince in order to get a confirmation of their status as free peasants. Further, we have seen that such cases were considered as an admitted right.

Thus, not only in theory, but often in practice as well, the princely court had the competence for the last decision in disputes between peasants and their seigniors. As an arbiter, it was he (the prince) who set the rules, limiting the abuses of the seigniors and correcting transgressions of the admitted customs in the relationship between peasant and seignior. In a society where written norms had a very slow impact on social life and where their place was taken by traditions and customs (*obiceiul*),⁸ there always existed the risk that the stronger party interpreted the custom in its own interest. It becomes clear that it was the function of the prince to limit the free will of the landholders by intervening in their relationship with the peasants, giving a more impartial interpretation of the custom. In this perspective, we can see in the prince an institution who was a warrant of the “correct” (or better: traditional) interpretation of custom, correcting arbitrary interpretations by the seigniors.

That the prince in fact decided sometimes in favour of the peasants is shown by the next example. Gherghina, a free peasant from a village in the district of Gorj, together with other peasants, had to borrow money from Necula, a boyar, to be able to pay taxes. When they wanted to pay back their duties to Necula, the latter refused the money and asked Gherghina and his fellows that instead of the owed money, they should bring him a certain amount of wax. But only three peasants, Gherghina, Neagoe and Oprea, were able to fulfil this demand. The reaction of Necula the boyar was very harsh:

⁸ Cristina CODARCEA: *Société et pouvoir en Valachie (1601-1654). Entre la coutume et la loi*, București 2002, p. 19, 185.

he imprisoned all the peasants, indifferent to whether they had paid their duty or not, and wanted to revert them to the status of dependent peasants. He did not even spare their wives, who were also taken away and brought to his house. Some of the villagers were able to escape, but Oprea, terrified and frightened, as a document informs us, drowned in the river Jiu: "Deci alalți sătēni au scăpat cine cum au putut, iar Oprea, de groază și de frica armașilor, se-au necat în Jiu".⁹ Gherghina now appeared in court, demanding a just treatment. The prince decided in his favour: he and his fellow Neagoe who had paid their duties should be granted their freedom. The boyar was even put to prison himself because he caused the death of Oprea who drowned in the river, and he was sentenced to pay the corresponding *deșugubina* (the *wergild*), a fine for the death of Oprea. The other villagers, who had not yet paid their duties, should be allowed to pay, but would be given their freedom later on.¹⁰

This case is not unique in 17th century Walachia. Often, boyars made use of the insolvency of free peasants and paid their taxes and duties towards the prince, trying to bring them in this way under their dependence.¹¹ But, as we have seen, the individual peasant was not entirely helpless toward this form of abuse. He could seek the prince's help against the boyar. The decision taken in our case indicates that the behaviour of Necula, the boyar, was a clear violation of the

⁹ So the other villagers have escaped, everyone as he could, but Oprea, terrified and frightened by the *armaș*, has drowned in the [river] Jiu.

¹⁰ *Documenta Romaniae Historica*. B: Țara Românească, Volumul XXXII (1647). Eds. Violeta BARBU, Gheorghe LAZAR, București 2001, No. 4, pp. 2-3 [2nd January 1647].

¹¹ See for example *Documente privind istoria României*. Veacul XVII, B: Țara Românească. Volumul III (1616-1620), No. 501, pp. 560-562 [19th June 1620].

tolerable attitude a boyar could take towards his debtors. Against common practice, the prince intervened here in favour of the peasants against the boyar's bad behaviour and stated that it was unacceptable to imprison the peasants, using violence even against women, to suppress them to the status of unfree peasants and ordered them set free. Although in other cases, the peasant's debts were the first step into the dependence form a boyar, it seems there still existed some limits to protect the peasant from abuses that went much too far. If the traditional rules of behaviour were violated in a clear manner, the prince was able to sanction and punish not only peasants, but sometimes boyars as well. The example of Gherghina and Neacula shows that a fixed idea existed about the norms of boyar-peasant relationship and that despite of their social position, the boyars could not commit arbitrary acts without limits.

The relationship between peasant and landholder was not reduced to a merely private sphere; the prince had, at least in theory, the right to intervene on behalf of one or the other party. Often, as it was the case in the presented example, the prince was himself interested in the limitation of the abuses committed by the boyars, since that threatened the collection of taxes. The importance of the peasantry consisted mainly in the fact that they were the principal contributors to the treasury and had to be protected for this reason. If the boyars ruined the free peasantry and used force even against those who were able to pay their duties, this meant that the treasury would loose a part of its income. Like this, it was not so much justice that conducted the prince to decide in favour of Neacșu, but his own fiscal interests, and it was this interest in the collection of taxes that protected the peasants from the heaviest forms of subjugation by the boyars. This protection worked as long as

the peasant remained a decisive factor in strengthening the power of a prince, who depended to a great degree on means, because the princes had to buy their position and the support against their enemies from the Sublime Port. It was, after all, in the interest of the Sublime Port as well to have a prince that could restrict the avarice of the boyars, since a completely subjugated peasantry was of no interest for it.

Even though the Ottoman influence was not as direct as it was in the other parts of South Eastern Europe, it indirectly lead to the situation that the freedom of the peasant in Walachia was not restricted in the same degree as it was the case in Poland or Russia, or even in Hungary, including Transylvania. A clear indication in this direction is the fact that the unpaid labour services peasants had to render was of just a few days (normally not more than 12) a year.¹² Compared with the situation in Transylvania, where corvées of up to three days a week were not exceptional¹³, unpaid labour services were of no real importance in 17th century Walachia.¹⁴ We can consider thus that the situation of the Walachian peasantry shows most similarities with the situation of the peasantry in the Ottoman Empire. This is not to say that there did not exist some similarities to the situation of the peasantry in other regions of Eastern Europe, but the most similarities on a

¹² Documente privind relațiile agrare în veacul al XVIII-lea. Volumul I: Țara Românească. București 1961, No. 7, p. 187 [9. July 1700]; Matei D. VLAD: Colonizarea rurală în Țara Românească și Moldova (secolele XV-XVIII), București 1973, p. 136.

¹³ D[avid] PRODAN: Iobăgia în Transilvania în secolul XVII, București 1986, see e.g. p. 223, 243.

¹⁴ Henri H. STAHL: Contribuții la studiul satelor devălmașe românești. Volumul III: Procesul de aservire feudală a satelor devălmașe, București 2¹1998, p. 106-107; Daniel CHIROT: Schimbarea socială într-o societate periferică. Formarea unei colonii balcanice, București 2002, p. 119.

structural level can be distinguished in comparison with the Balkans under Ottoman rule. Here as well as in Walachia, the heaviest duties of the peasants lay in the contributions to the treasury and not in the services rendered for particular masters, especially the *corvée*.

The central power kept an important part of its theoretical right to intervene directly in favour on behalf of the peasants in his own hands and did not cede it to loyal servants or the nobility. Rather the boyar's function consisted in collecting taxes and not in exercising real power on local level.¹⁵ Many "public" functions continued to be a duty of the village communities, as e.g. the responsibility in case of crimes.¹⁶ The direct interference on the peasant's everyday life, on the mode of organization of work or family by the boyars remained thus relatively slow, since the latter didn't interfere with the process of production. Instead of using peasants as unpaid labour force on their manors as e.g. in early modern Poland, the boyars collected a part of the income of the peasants. Coercion was needed in this way just temporary (when collecting taxes), but not permanently (to organize unpaid labour services).

Moreover the Walachian boyars never emerged as powerful, independent nobility based on a set of written privileges as it was the case of the Hungarian *nobiles* or the Polish *szlachta*. At least in theory, all temporal power was

¹⁵ Henri H. STAHL: Contribuții la studiul satelor devălmașe românești. Volumul III: Procesul de aservire feudală a satelor devălmașe, București 21998, p. 75.

¹⁶ See e.g. Documenta Romaniae Historica. B: Țara Românească, Volumul XXIII (1630-1632). Eds. Damaschin MIOC, București 1969, No. 104, pp. 192 [22nd May 1630] and No. 389, pp. 585-586 [2nd June 1632].

given by God to the Prince. If he ceded a part of it, he could revoke it at any time: the cession of power was not seen as a problem of a contractual agreement, but as an arbitrary act of grace that did not limit the prince's prerogatives in any way.¹⁷

This does not mean that the princes had an effective control over the peasants than in exceptional cases and special circumstances, as in the case of Gherghina and Necula presented above. Actually, the princely administration was too weak to penetrate the whole territory and to exercise an efficient control of the social life. Its de facto power was limited and fragile, its impact was more exemplary than comprehensive.

The fact that on the one hand the central power was often far away, but on the other hand the power of the landlords was limited, resulted in a form of power vacuum. The Ottoman Empire had no interest to decide the fight for power between

¹⁷ Radu G. PAUN: « La circulation des pouvoirs dans les Pays Roumains au XVIIe siècle. Repères pour un modèle théorique », In: *New Europe College Yearbook 1998-1999*, București 2001, p. 263-310, here p. 275; Cristina CODARCEA: « Rapports de pouvoir et stratégie de gouvernement dans la Valachie du XVIIe siècle », In: *New Europe College Yearbook 1996-1997*, pp. 129-150, here pp. 131-133; Henri H. STAHL: Contribuții la studiul satelor devălmașe românești. Volumul III. Procesul de aservire feudală a satelor devălmașe. București 1998, see especially pp. 139-143; Valentin Al. GEORGESCU/Petre STRIHAN: Judecata domnească în Țara Românească și Moldova (1611-1831), Partea I. Organizarea judecătorească. Vol. I (1611-1740). București 1979, pp. 27-30, 40, 46-47, 76-77; Manole NEAGOE: Problema centralizării statelor feudale românești Moldova și Țara Românească, Craiova 1977, pp. 163-175; Nicolae GRIGORAS: "Imunitățile și privilegiile fiscale în Moldova (De la întemeierea statului și pînă la mijlocul secolului al XVIII-lea)". In: *Revista de istorie* 27/1974, No. 1, pp. 55-77, here p. 61; Valentin GEORGESCU: « L'idée impériale byzantine et les réactions des réalités roumaines (XIVe-XVIIIe siècles) » In: *Byzantina* 3/1971, pp. 311-339, here p. 327.

the central power and diverse factions of boyars, establishing a clear regulation of how the power should be exercised and shared. A permanent contestation of the princely power by the boyars as well as a limitation of the boyar's zeal to impose their will on the prince was the main interest of the Ottoman Empire, assuring that no party would emerge as a potentially powerful force that could contest the Ottoman sovereignty. Nevertheless, the prince played an important role for the Sublime Porte as a guarantee of the internal stability and the delivery of the tribute to the Ottomans.¹⁸

The unstable power-balance between prince and boyars, created by the Ottoman interference in internal affairs of Walachia, made it also impossible for either of the parties to create the necessary means of coercion that would have made possible an effective control over the peasants. As a consequence, an explicit (written), generally accepted agreement about the status and the duties of the peasants could not emerge than very late by the reforms of Constantin Mavracordat in the middle of the 18th century. Even these regulations were a consequence of Ottoman interests, in a moment when the prince had become more a representative of the Ottoman power than a real monarch. The massive wave of peasants who escaped tax-paying by running away after the end of the Ottoman-Austro-Russian war (1739), due to the heavy burden of sums that had to be paid, diminished the amount of taxes collected. This loss of income was the driving force for Mavracordat to set clear rules in the relationship

¹⁸ Cristina CODARCEA: « Le caractère de l'état valaque. Quelques considérations », In: *Pouvoirs et mentalités*. Eds. Laurențiu VLAD à la mémoire du Professeur Alexandru Duțu. București 1999 (=Studia Politica, 4), pp. 71-87, here p. 87.

between landholder and peasant, hoping to bring the escape of the latter to an end.¹⁹

Missing clear settlements of the relationship between peasant and landholder, combined with the lack of institutional power and means of coercion that the boyars could use to force the peasants, alternative forms of social regulations were necessary. This led to a conservation of traditional forms of conflict regulations. The relatively weak penetration of an external force with the possibility to impose its rules created a certain lack of security that had to be compensated. As can be observed in many Balkan territories ruled by the Ottomans (especially in mountainous regions as northern Albania or Montenegro), the Sublime Port effected often a very slow and indirect rule. It was satisfied merely by the formal recognition of its domination and the payment of a tribute. Otherwise, the social structure, local customs and power elites were not fundamentally changed. This had an influence even in the domain of family structures in this part of Europe: the landholders did normally not intervene in the system of family relations and heritage. The situation was very different compared to that in Western Europe, where instead of a

¹⁹ For the reformes of Constantin Mavrocordat see. Pavel V. SOVETOV: "Sorokaletnjaja reforma i ograničenje sudebnogo immuniteta v Moldavii konca XVI – načala XVIII v". In: *Social'no-ekonomičeskaja i političeskaja istorija jugo-vostočnoj Evropy do serediny XIX v*. Kišinev 1980, pp. 140-156; Șerban PAPACOSTEA: "La grande charte de Constantin Mavrocordato (1741) et les réformes en Valachie et en Moldavie", In: *Symposion i epochi ton fanarioton/Symposium l'époque phanariote*, 21-25 octobre 1970. A la mémoire de Cléobule Tsourkas. Thessaloniki 1974, pp. 365-376; Florin CONSTANTINIU: « Constantin Mavrocordato et l'abolition du servage en Valachie et en Moldavie », In: *Ibid.*, pp. 377-384.

tributarian system as in Southeastern Europe, prevailed a manorial system of agrarian relations.²⁰

In this context, customs and traditions in Southeastern Europe were preserved in a higher degree than in other societies, where the enforcement of serfdom (that means for example unpaid work for the seignior) needed a certain amount of organization and thus intervention of the master in the lives, the traditions and customs of their serfs. Intervention in family-related issues (as marriage restrictions) was an important part of the landholder's power in Western Europe and was explicitly regulated. Walachia in this context presents elements from either the Western as well as the south eastern European type of agrarian relations, even though all together the latter prevailed. Nor were regulations between landholders and peasants as elaborated as in the western type, nor was the direct influence of the landholders as weak as in the Ottoman Balkans. Rather Walachia presents itself as a "missing link" between a more "Western" and an "Ottoman" type of agrarian relations.

As we have seen, in Walachia the prince limited a too strict intervention of the boyars in the lives of their peasants, assuring in a way the application of traditional norms, finding their expression in good and bad mores. His function was, in the last consequence, the one of a representative of the Sublime port. His position would be stable only as long as he was paying the tribute to Istanbul, whereas the refusal or the impossibility to pay the tribute meant after a shorter or longer while his

²⁰ Karl KASER: „Familie und Geschlechterbeziehungen“, In: *Ibid.*, Siegfried GREUBER, Robert PICHELER (Ed.): *Historische Anthropologie im südöstlichen Europa*. Eine Einführung. Wien, Köln, Weimar 2003, pp. 153-174, here p. 156.

removal. The protection of the peasant for fiscal reasons against a total enserfdom was absolutely fundamental for the survival of the prince. For this reason, we can identify in the Ottoman supremacy an important factor in the uncomplete subjugation of the peasant by particular landholders, contrasting to the situation in Russia, Poland or Hungary.

To conclude, Walachia can be identified in this context as belonging predominantly to a typical "Balkan" pattern of social relations with a relatively loose direct control and a weak penetration of seigniorial power into the everyday life of the peasants. This left an unsatisfied need for an authority that assured the security and the functioning of the society. This gap in formal authorities, of written laws and its application, was filled with a high degree of informal social control, characterized by the use of normative traditions and customs that sanctioned bad and rewarded good behaviour.