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**Tradition and Modernity
in Romanian Culture
and Civilization,
1600-2000**

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cal crises, but it failed; b) the House of Habsburg supported an “Habsburgic myth” until the end, and the Transylvanian Romanian relationship with Francis Ferdinand has consequentially proved it, but it did not result in anything concrete; and c) Romania, that was perhaps less politically sophisticated, fostered the Transylvanian Romanian political elite to separate from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

The discursive construction of Romanian national unity has so often been a theme in both conventional and nationalistic historiography that I found impetuous to emphasize the necessary other side of the story. Having to position themselves on Hungarian, Austrian, and Romanian political scenes, Transylvanian Romanians have produced dichotomous discourses of political identity. Their logic of action was one of fission that constantly generated adversities and alternate links between political actions and the events as well as personages of the time. These links were both historically and culturally specific, and yet dependent on complex processes that are our challenge to decipher.

Self-Image and Self-Legitimation of the Wallachian Princes under the Organic Regulations (1834-1848)

Daniel Ursprung

The image of the Romanian princes during the time of the Organic Regulations (Alexandru Ghica, 1834-1842, and Gheorghe Bibescu, 1843-1848, in Wallachia, Mihail Sturdza, 1834-1849, in Moldavia) has been influenced by the general situation of the Romanian principalities in the decades three and four of the nineteenth century, namely the strong Russian influence upon the political life of Wallachia and Moldavia. For the generation who participated in the revolution of 1848, the princes were their main enemy, representing the embodiment of the subjugation of the principalities under one of the most conservative powers in Europe, hindering them in their free political, economic, and cultural development. A large number of publications, appearing throughout the two last thirds of the nineteenth century, many of them in the West, accused the princes of abuses and betrayal of their own nation, surrendering to the wishes of the imperial court in St. Petersburg.¹

This mainly negative view of the Romanian rulers under the Organic Regulations influenced the historiography about this epoch.

¹This is not the place to enumerate all the brochures, pamphlets, and satires published. See the bibliography in Ioan C. Filitti, *Donniile române sub Regulamentul Organic 1834-1848*. București, 1915, pp. V-XVIII. A more recent work, which concentrates on the Romanian-Russian relations, offers an extensive overview over the research of this period and lists also works of a more general character: Nikolaus Farca, *Russland und die Donaufürstentümer 1826-1856*. München, 1992, pp. 1-48. Some satirical writings about the princes are published in Gh. Georgescu-Buză, ed., *Satire și pamflete, 1800-1848*. București, 1968.

Apart from the princes themselves and the persons close to them, who also published a considerable number of writings,² Xenopol was the first to present a more balanced view of this epoch.³ After the fundamental work of Filitti,⁴ there was not much interest any more in the reigns of the Moldavian and Wallachian princes between 1834 and 1849, reflected in the small number of monographs.⁵

The role of the princes in this period is generally analyzed from the point of view of the political, cultural, or economic development in the Romanian principalities, according to the princes role as a conservative executor of Russian orders, allowing them the initiative to undertake some changes and to improve the situation of the country, but often they lacked the power to realize these ideas.

The discussion about the Organic Regulations and their effects upon the development of the Romanian society admits that they contained certain progressive elements, introducing some modern forms in the Romanian political life. Attention is paid, on the other hand as well, to the negative impact of the parts that allowed Russia to intervene in the internal life of the principalities.⁶ In fact, the Organic Regulations introduced for the first time the separation of powers between the prince and an assembly representing the interests of the great boyars. Since the distribution of the powers was not clearly regulated, conflicts were soon to appear. The opposition in the assembly used its right to complain of the princes to Russia. Under the Organic Regulations, some characteristics of the old estate system continued to exist, adapted to the needs of the cir-

²Sometimes ending in a real battle of words between the supporters and the enemies of the princes. See e.g. Const. Al. Ionescu, *Asupra Domniei lui Bibescu. Epilog la broșura "O execuțiune"*. București, 1900, attacking the work by G. Bibescu, *O execuțiune*, București, 1899, who himself criticizes how is presented the reign of his parent in the manual of Grigore Tocilescu, *Manual de Istorie pentru școlile primare de anurile șase*. București, 1889.

³A.D. Xenopol, *Istoria românilor din Dacia Traiană*. Vol. XI. 3rd edition, București, 1930.

⁴Filitti, *Domniile române*.

⁵To be mentioned here: D. Ciurea, *Moldova sub domnia lui M. Sturdza*, Iași 1947. A recent overview over the period of the Organic Regulations can be found in Anastasie Iordache, *Principatele române în epoca modernă (1831-1859)*. București, 1998.

⁶ See e.g. Gh. Platon, "Regulamentul organic — operă de progres sau instrument de opresiune socială și națională," in *Timpu istoriei*, II, București, 1998, pp. 125-149 and Anastasie Iordache, "Dominare politică sub imperativul modernizării principatelor române. Caracterul și scopul regulamentelor organice," in *Revista istorică*, Tom VII, 9-10/1996, pp. 665-684.

cumstances.⁷ The princes found themselves in a difficult situation between the supervision of their activities by the Russian consuls on the one hand, and the opposition of the assembly on the other hand, both of them restricting their freedom of action.

In this difficult situation, in which the head of the state was under the strict supervision of the consul of a foreign power, who controlled the political life, the princes found themselves in a strange position. If the Organic Regulations recognized the right of the country (i.e. the boyars) to elect the prince,⁸ in fact they were named by Petersburg, with the formal confirmation from the sultan. In 1834, both Sturdza and Ghica were not elected, a clear violation of the Organic Regulations; Bibescu's election was influenced in the interests of Russia. In the expression *cu mila lui Dumnezeu Domn...* ("with the grace of God prince...") the form of address did not reflect, given these circumstances, reality.

In this situation, the princes found themselves confronted with the problem how to legitimate their power. They had to auto-define their role, rather vaguely defined in the Organic Regulations, which offered Russia the possibility to use the assembly to weaken their power.

The present paper attempts to analyze the self-image and self-legitimation of the princes during the time of the Organic Regulations. It will be limited to the two Wallachian princes Alexandru Ghica and Gheorghe Bibescu. It will not insist on the political development and the events during their reigns, already examined in detail,⁹ but will research the role of the princes from their own, idealistic point of view, asking for the way in which they define and legitimate their position, power, and attributes, shown this time from a different perspective. The paper reflects the somehow ambiguous political thinking of the princes in this period of transition, asking for the degree of traditional and modern elements in the concepts and ideas they had about the role of the *domnie*.

⁷Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Sfatul domnesc și achimarea stărilor în principatele române*. București, 1995, p. 261.

⁸Article 26 of the Wallachian Regulations, article 27 of the Moldavian Regulations. See Paul Negulescu/ George Alexianu, ed., *Regulamentele organice ale Valahiei și Moldovei*. Vol. 1, București, 1944, pp. 5-6, 178.

⁹Filitti, *Domniile române*. For the reign of Ghica: Anastasie Iordache, *Principii Ghica. O familie domnitoare din istoria României*. București, 1991, pp. 136-177. A very detailed chronology of the reign of Gheorghe Bibescu is included in Georges Bibesco, *Règne de Bibesco. Lois et décrets 1843-1848*. Tome 2, Paris, 1894, pp. 537-592.

After the Wallachian Organic Regulations, elaborated by the great boyars under the influence of Russia, came into effect on 31 July 1831, the Russian administration under General Kiseleff continued to administer Wallachia for almost three years. Only in 1834 was Alexandru Ghica, brother of the former Prince Grigore Ghica (1822-1828), named as the first Wallachian prince under the Organic Regulations. Named in his function by Turkey, but with the consent of the Russian court, in April 1834, Alexandru Ghica accepted, together with Mihail Sturdza, the sultans's invitation for the ceremony of investiture in the Turkish capital. They stayed there for almost three months, while Ghica succeeded in getting some advantages for Wallachia as far as trade facilities and the recognition of his own flag were concerned. In the speech on the occasion of the ceremony of his accession to the throne in Bucharest, Ghica proudly presented his successes. He mentioned that this set Wallachia in a position similar to that of the most favored nations.¹⁰ Even before returning to Bucharest from Giurgiu, where he had to spend some days of quarantine, he spoke in a letter about the results of his stay in Constantinople. He expressed the conviction the people will receive him with pleasure as a son of the country, that ever endeavoured to be loved and appreciated, which will not change after his designation as prince.¹¹

An anonymous brochure that characterizes the prince in a very negative manner mentions that Ghica has always tried to appear friendly to everybody. He showed noble feelings and presented himself as generous and modest. He evoked his love to public interest, that he was ready to make every sacrifice for his country and spoke a lot about freedom and the beautiful days that were to appear on the horizon. But this self-representation would be only to hide his real ambitions by feigning virtues that he did not possess.¹²

In any case, the fact that Ghica himself as well as his enemies mention the effort of the Wallachian prince to be appreciated and to appear as generous and charitable, shows us that Ghica in his self-image liked to present himself in such a light. On different occasions, he showed himself as a friend of the poor. When the Dâmbovița flooded Bucharest, the prince immediately went out to the affected *mahalale* (suburbs) and

¹⁰*Buletin. Gazetă Oficială*, No. 34, 14 October 1834.

¹¹*Buletin. Gazetă Oficială*, No. 24, 23 July 1834.

¹²[J.A.] *De la situation de la Valachie sous l'administration d'Alexandre Ghica; suivi de l'adresse de l'assemblée générale de Valachie*. Sixième Édition, Bruxelles 1842, pp. X-XI.

ordered the authorities to protect the people. Like a father, he consoled those affected by giving advice and sent boats and food to those who had their houses flooded.¹³

When on 11 January 1838 an earthquake interrupted a theatre representation, and the audience became panic-stricken, the prince refused to use a special exit. On the contrary, he went into the middle of the crowd to share the dangers with them and to leave the building when everyone had left. His example encouraged and calmed the confusion. The prince, after he saw for himself that everything was in order, left to visit the most affected places. Hearing later that prices for materials for reconstruction works had risen, he ordered that they be maintained at the level before the earthquake. He offered his own help to the poor to reconstruct what was damaged.¹⁴

This rather idealized image about the behavior of the prince tells more about what he wanted to appear like in public opinion than what really happened during and after the earthquake. This cultivated image shows him in a very positive light. Even in a moment of danger he cared more about others than about himself; also, he seemed to be the only one able to calm the people. Caring about order, he left the place only when he had convinced himself that everything was all right. Again, it seems that his presence helped very much. And again, afterwards he showed that he stood on the side of the simple people, giving order to maintain the prices. The message he wanted to transmit was that in a situation of danger and disorder he was able to reestablish peace and order.

In the spring of 1841 a drought affected agriculture. The prince, together with Metropolitan Neofit, ordered to take out the relics of Saint Dimitrie and the miracle-making icons. When the relics came out, the sky started to cloud over, and when the prince arrived and started to pray, together with representatives of the boyars and the clergy, it started to hail and the aridity was overcome. "You see," he concluded, "what brings about the holy belief in God and in the ruler who, as a father, cares about the luck of his sons."¹⁵

Obviously, the prince liked to be seen as a generous ruler who cared about his people. His name-day (30 August) was celebrated every year as a public event and described in detail in the newspapers *Buletin. Gazetă*

¹³*Cantor de avis și comers*, No. 24, 21 July 1837.

¹⁴*Buletin. Gazetă Oficială*, No. 4, 18 January 1838.

¹⁵*Cantor de avis și comers*, No. 36, 6 May 1841.

Oficială and *Cantor de avis și comers*. The whole capital used to be illuminated, free sweets and drinks were distributed to the population, the prince pardoned a number of condemned people. On the occasion of Ghica's name-day in 1838, two Frenchmen published a play in honor of the prince. The pretty simple story on the background of the construction of Alexandria, the southern Wallachian town founded at the beginning of Ghica's rule, evokes the positive role of the prince. He is not only praised for the foundation of the town, but also for the freedom his people enjoyed, for the help to unlucky and badly treated individuals, as well as for the support he accorded to industry and commerce and the establishment of thousands of schools.¹⁶

During the years of Ghica's rule, the reports in press about his name-day insisted more and more on the impact this event had on the population, and the prince was praised in a more fantastic way. In 1840, the *Cantor* mentioned that this day was a day of happiness for every patriotic Romanian. The 2 million of Romanians would remember this day they looked forward to with ardent feelings for long years. Every inhabitant of the principality was celebrating this "national holiday;" the streets were full of music and expressions of happiness, Bucharest was illuminated in the evening, and the prince organized a ball in richly decorated rooms, offering his guests expensive specialities.¹⁷

We see that Ghica liked to be appreciated and celebrated by the whole nation. The way in which these events are presented shows they were used to legitimate the position of the prince. If the 2 million inhabitants of Wallachia were happily celebrating his name-day, praising the prince, there had to be reasons for this; he had to be a good prince. With the occasion of the fifth anniversary of his ascend of the throne, the prince was praised for the wise administration, for the good condition of the schools, the flourishing of commerce, the state of the villages, roads, and bridges, the reconstruction of monasteries, the development of hospitals, the fact that everyone gets his right, and many other things. Even the Roman Emperor Trajan was then evoked to witness the happy situation of the country. If the Roman emperor could see his great-grandsons in their situation, he would be happy as an old father seeing his sons and

commerce in the best conditions. Now, it was only to God to give the prince long and healthy years for the greatness of the nation, the joy of the Romanians, and the consolation of the poor.¹⁸

There was another public event which offered Ghica every year the possibility to present himself in a positive light. At the beginning of July, the prince assisted in the distribution of prizes at "Sfântu Sava" College. He used this opportunity to express his thanks to the professors for their work and to assure himself of the progress of the pupils. As a father, he wanted to direct the young people to accept his rule and to fear God. For these purposes, the prince, together with the department of schools, printed books and encouraged the young to study.¹⁹

After seeing how Ghica imagined his idealistic role as a good, generous prince, we would like to look at what he thought about the reality of the times. A valuable source consist in the letters he addressed to Russia and its consuls. In 1836, he writes a detailed report about the current situation of the Wallachian government. He explains that his aim when he came to power was to continue the path of progress the Russian administration followed by respecting the Organic Regulations. But he realized soon that he was not a powerful representative of the emperor, as his predecessor, but simply a functionary, more an observer than a ruler. He complained about his powerless position and the abuses of the nobility who controlled the administration. The opposition of this nobility, their privileges, and the limited funds the prince disposed of, as well as the restrictions on his power paralyzed his reign. Not only did the prince find himself unable to influence the administration or jurisdiction, but in the eyes of the population, it was he whom they made responsible for every injustice. If the nobility was interested only in maintaining its privileged situation, guided by ideas of parliamentary omnipotence, he, Ghica, described his mission as protecting equally the interests of all classes and to oppose the reintroduction of privileges. He pointed out some of the weaknesses of the Organic Regulations, including the introduction of a regular assembly that was not called to meet by the prince, making a systematic opposition possible. Together with the fact that the competence

¹⁶H. Buvelot/ G. Storhas, "Aujourd'hui ou la St. Alexandre. A propos-vaudeville," in idem, *Souvenir du 30 Aout 1838. Dédicé à S. A. Sér. A. D. Ghika Prince régnant de Valachie*. București, 1838, pp. 74-75, 96-98.

¹⁷*Cantor de avis și comers*, No. 92, 30 August 1840 and No. 93, 3 September 1840.

¹⁸*Cantor de avis și comers*, No. 17, 17 October 1839.

¹⁹See e.g. *Cantor de avis și comers*, No. 23, 17 July 1837. Compare also: Mirela-Luminița Murgescu, *Între "bunul creștin" și "bravul român". Rolul școlii primare în construirea identității naționale românești (1831-1878)*. Iași, 1999, pp. 45, 53, note 81.

of the assembly was not specified, the prince remained without any real power.²⁰

The poor situation of the finances consisted a real problem. Ghica not only inherited the deficit the provisional Russian administration left, but he was also indebted for the high expenses caused by his stay in Constantinople to be introduced in his function by the sultan. The prince was very worried about this situation and considered it necessary that, as the head of state, he should dispose of a larger sum than the one at his disposal. This, Ghica mentioned in a letter to Butenev, the Russian consul in Constantinople, was important to ensure the government an independent position in the interior and to maintain the prince's dignity, especially after the powerful Russian administration who disposed of much more funds.²¹ To Minciaky, the Russian general consul in Bucharest, Ghica explained that in fact he had to choose between raising taxes on the population or seeing the administration blocked because of a lack of funds. Nothing what concerning his person would ever consist the object of his complaints; he wanted only to protect the people from suffering and was, at the same time, scared of finding the administration paralyzed in his hands.²² He also wrote to Neselrode, the imperial chancellor, arguing that the demand of some members of the assembly to reduce his civilian personnel could only lead to weaken his power, subjecting him to dangerous influences, ending with neglecting public representation or returning to the old habit of embezzling public funds.²³

The problem continued to keep the prince busy. In 1837, he mentioned in another letter to Butenev that he was still waiting for the money the assembly accorded him in 1834 for the expenses of his stay in the Turkish capital. The prince showed that this journey was not voluntary, that it was not in his own, but in the interest of the country. Paying the debts of his own would mean to take him the funds for representing the government. His position as hospodar forced him to spend a lot of money for purposes such as alms or public representation, restricting his personal expenses to those of a private man, less even than a simple boyar. To exercise his task in agreement with the wishes of the Russian

²⁰*Exposé de la situation actuelle du Gouvernement en Valachie*. Biblioteca Academiei Române, secție manuscrisă (BAR, msse), Fond Alexandru Ghica, III, acte 215.

²¹*Ibidem*, acte 58, 6 December 1834.

²²*Ibidem*, acte 42, 16 October 1834.

²³*Ibidem*, acte 60, 9 December 1834.

court, he considered it necessary to be free of worrying about the finances.²⁴

As we have seen, the arguments of the prince concentrates on evoking the public interest in increasing his civilian personnel. A strong position of the prince was in this perspective just a necessary element for the good functioning of the state, but never an aim in its own. Especially the care for the simple population and the poor he mentions again and again. This shows us once more that he saw his role as a generous and good father for his people, taking special care of the lower classes of society.

Ghica also complains about the opposition from the privileged class of the society. In a way, he explains, it was clear that they were not on his side, since he represented the interests of all the classes and was against the reintroduction of the old privileges.²⁵ In his speech to the assembly on the occasion of the opening of the session of 1840/1841, he mentions that there are people who wanted to disturb the public peace and order. Making it clear that this could not be tolerated, he referred to the Organic Regulations. But on the other hand, he remarked, it was only a small group of foreign intriguers and their spirit was not accepted in the Romanian community, finding only a few uneducated and uncouth followers. The prince was also very pleased with the numerous expressions of public satisfaction.²⁶

In its address to the prince, the assembly informed the latter about the great amount of dissatisfaction in the country. The peasants were more than ever the booty of the administration. Arbitrary fines or pressure on the peasants to sell their products for cheap prices were just some of the committed abuses. The assembly assumed responsibility for this situation for not having respected its duties and loyalty to the prince. Abuses had been committed in all branches of the administration in recent years and the assembly considered it was its duty to inform Ghica about this. It even admitted that the nobility was the main party guilty of the grievances.²⁷ This address, unanimously adopted by the assembly, reflects the point of view of the prince.²⁸ Whenever he heard about an

²⁴*Ibidem*, acte 326, 6 September 1837.

²⁵*Ibidem*, acte 215.

²⁶*Analele Parlamentare ale României*. Tomul X, partea 1, București, 1899, p. 70, 9 December 1840.

²⁷²⁸“Adresse de l'assemblée générale de Valachie,” in [J.A.] *Situation de la Valachie*, pp. 1-22.

injustice, he troubled himself to remove it. He ordered, already at the beginning of his reign, that everyone could report abuses directly to him twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays, between 12 p.m. and 2 p.m.²⁹ For the purpose of finding out how the public institutions worked and if there were any irregularities, Ghica also undertook journeys throughout the country.³⁰ The improvement of the situation of the population was, as Ghica mentioned in his address to the assembly on the occasion of the opening of the session in 1837, a natural result of the introduction of the new institutions and their supervision by the government.³¹ For Ghica, the Organic Regulations were the most important point of reference when he described his rule, it showed him the way he wanted to follow. He described it as an altar, around which everyone who named himself a true Romanian would meet. For his person, he assured that he would not fail to take care so that the seeds of this wise work would come to bear fruit.³²

Ghica presented him as a reformer, being attacked by the boyars who wanted to defend the old order. Himself respecting the Regulation, he was fighting for progress, defending the positive elements of the new regime represented by the Organic Regulations. There were still abuses committed by the boyars, but the fact that the prince let him become “informed” about these abuses and express his dissatisfaction meant that he wanted to show not only that he was not involved in such practices himself, but also that, if he had not reacted until then, it was simply because he did not know what was happening. As an impartial ruler, he was ready to help the lowest classes of the society, hearing the complaints of everyone and trying to find out about the real situation in his principality. In a similar way, a number of Jewish merchants expressed their thanks for the protection of their rights and interests under the paternal care of the hospodar, who managed in a difficult time, with many disasters, to maintain justice, calm, and freedom.³³

²⁸Ibidem, p. XVII.

²⁹*Buletin. Gazetă Oficială*, No. 27, 20 August 1834.

³⁰So e.g. in August 1835 through the districts of Ialomița, Brăila, Râmnicu, and Buzău. *Buletin. Gazetă Oficială*, No. 28, 23 August 1835.

³¹*Analele Parlamentare ale Românilor*. Tomul VII, partea 1, București, 1896, p. 86, 18 March 1837.

³²*Buletin. Gazetă Oficială*, No. 34, 14 October 1834.

³³*Cantor de avis și comers*, No. 45, 3 February 1838.

Maintaining peace and order in Wallachia was an aim of his reign that he presented time and again to Russia. He tried to assure Petersburg of the fact that he was able to maintain order and peace in Wallachia. Reporting to Butenev in 1837 about the unrest in the assembly, he added that since his installation as hospodar, public order had not been threatened and never would be as long as he was in office.³⁴

Nevertheless, subordination to his rule was not always respected in the way in which Ghica hoped. Toward the end of the thirties, he was increasingly confronted with opposition. He saw his role as moderating the radical attempts of those young spirits who wanted to push reforms too far.³⁵

The impression of some of Ghica's enemies that he liked subordination and was power hungry seems to be influenced too much from their personal interests to be taken without modification. In fact, one of the first things he did when he came back to Wallachia from Constantinople was to abolish the old tradition of kissing the hospodar's hand as a sign of special honor and subordination. He considered that adequate respect toward his person could be better proved by actions and fulfilling one's duties and showing true love toward him.³⁶

He also considered the possibility of abdication to live a quiet life without the problems of a prince who had to fight not only against the so-called protecting power, but also against his own assembly. His enemies, on the other hand, regretted that he was only talking about his abdication instead of doing it, doubting about the seriousness of such plans.³⁷

After he was forced to leave the Wallachian throne, he wrote from Brașov to Metternich and expressed his regret at this decision of the two powers, but not because of his personal loss of power. The worst thing was that the principality lost its main guarantee of peace and welfare, returning to the old principle of short reigns with their negative consequences.³⁸

The regret of the former hospodar seems honest. Now, after having lost the throne, he was no longer under pressure to show an idealized

³⁴BAR, msse, Fond Alexandru Ghica, III, acte 756, 17 August 1837.

³⁵Ibidem, acte 215.

³⁶*Buletin. Gazetă Oficială*, No. 24, 23 July 1834.

³⁷[J.A.] *Situation de la Valachie*, p. XIII.

³⁸BAR, msse Fond Alexandru Ghica III, acte 720, 3 November/ 22 October 1842.

image of his intention to Russia or his own people. Rather, these thoughts confirm what we have observed before: he really cared about the condition of his country and was willing to serve it and its population to ensure stability, peace, and order. He saw his role as a good father who cared equally about all classes of society. That meant not only alms for the poor, but sometimes also conflicts with those who wanted to maintain a privileged situation to disadvantage of the lower classes. He was a prince who cared equally for every class of the society. He liked public support, seeing that he was appreciated by the great mass of the population, reducing the number of his enemies to a insignificant number. He liked to be praised and celebrated for the progress his administration introduced. Basing his rule on strict observance of the Organic Regulations, as the most important element in all his actions, he wanted to be a reformer who renounced the negative consequences of the old regime. In every branch of public life he portrayed himself as a great reformer who introduced new, useful institutions and did many good things for his country, be it through the construction or reconstruction of streets and bridges, the foundation of schools, bringing justice and fighting for the observance of the laws against those who wanted to continue the abuses of the old regime.

In a way, his self-image contains many elements of a typical traditional patriarchal view of a good, powerful ruler who does not abuse his power and protects his subordinates. Still, there can be also distinguished some modern elements. The idea of a public interest (*hinele obștească*) that did not include only a privileged class, but all the inhabitants, was a relatively new concept that appeared in the third decade of the nineteenth century.³⁹ Ghica expressed this concept throughout his reign, not only in public, towards the population and his rivals, but also when he wrote to Russia to explain the needs of the country.

The election of Ghica's successor, Gheorghe Bibescu, was the first and last election of a prince during the period of the Organic Regulations. The right to elect a native prince, which had been ignored for two centuries, was now accepted. But the election was directed in a way to prevent the election of a prince belonging to the national party. With the election of Bibescu, Russia once more had influenced the decision about the new Wallachian prince.

³⁹Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria ideilor politice românești (1369-1878)*, München 1987, pp. 185-186.

On the occasion of his accession to the throne, Bibescu stated that he would spare neither expenses nor pains in carrying out his duties and assuring the welfare of the country. He described himself as prince as the man known before as minister and deputy of the assembly: just to everyone, rewarding the good, punishing the evil. He concluded his speech by requesting that the audience tell his thoughts to their families, reminding them to respect the law and the authorities.⁴⁰

Like Ghica, Bibescu cultivated an image as benefactor caring about the needs of his people. On Easter-Sunday in 1847 (23 March), a fire caused great damage in Bucharest. The prince went immediately out on his horse to the affected places, "as a second Providence." He went to all the points where there was danger and fought, with tears in his eyes, against the fire. Along with God's will, it was also thanks to the prince's efforts that parts of the town threatened by the fire were not affected. The people who saw the prince in this crisis witnessed his deeds. All together, the prince remained 14 hours on his horse without eating, encouraging even the most fearful to work like men, and he risked, more than once, his own life. His wife, on the other hand, ordered that the relics of Saint Dimitrie be brought out and prayed incessantly to God for His mercy.⁴¹ Being informed after the fire that there was price speculation with materials for reconstruction, he intervened and forbade any increase in prices, fixing them at the levels they were before the fire.⁴²

Compared with the image that was cultivated about Alexandru Ghica on the occasion of disasters, we see a similar pattern concerning the prince and his role as protector, placing public interests before his personal ones. Yet, we can distinguish some different elements. In general, the image is more emotional, glorifying Bibescu's acts of heroism more than those of Ghica. With the allusion to the second Providence, the prince appears in an almost religious, mythic light. As well, the prince was actively involved in the work to limit the effects of the disaster, whereas Ghica consoled and calmed people. For the rest, the latter did not contribute actively in the works, except by giving orders and distributing alms. The prince's readiness to accept privations and dangers is stressed and illustrated with concrete examples. The more passive role is taken over here by the prince's wife.

⁴⁰Georges Bibesco, *Règne de Bibesco*, p. 21.

⁴¹*Vestitorul românesc. Gazetă semi-oficială*, No. 24, 27 March 1847.

⁴²Georges Bibesco, *Règne de Bibesco*, pp. 276-277.

A long poem edited the same year describes the fire as the worst calamity in living memory. Here again, the prince's personal struggle against the blaze is praised. Under his wise command, the fire-brigade managed to save many places from fire. The prince, seeing the damage caused by the fire and people who lost everything, gave a large sum of his personal monies to help those who lost their goods. Many others also decided to offer help by giving money, following his example; the prince as a father who went with his son to help the poor and to use the occasion to teach his son also. The tears of thousands of people could be dried like this, and as a result they praised him and wished the prince many years on the throne.⁴³

Here the prince's role as benefactor is stressed as well as his wisdom, used not only by ordering the fire-brigade, but also by teaching the right path to follow. This portrayal cultivates an image of a prince with a high sense of responsibility, through which only good is possible. He is always on the side of the poor and the powerless. He was aware of the negative role the boyars played in the Wallachian society and their abuses caused the population of the villages to suffer. The prince, on the other hand, was from the first day of his rule on the side of the peasants and tried to stop these abuses. He insisted that the laws had to be observed.⁴⁴ Bibescu declared his intent to do everything to ensure that the laws would be respected and that public officers do their duties. If abuses were still committed, he was open to receive everyone to help him to solve the problem. At the same time, he expected the inhabitants of the principality to do their duties, respect the laws, as well as the public officers, and to obey the government's orders.⁴⁵

Bibescu also cared about the fate of the condemned. For humanitarian reasons, he relieved the plight of prisoners and those forced to work in the salt-mines. Bibescu, who accompanied Kiseleff in 1832 on a visit to a salt-mine, was, along with the Russian administrator, deeply impressed by what he saw there. Kiseleff's intention to improve conditions could not be realized before he left; but Bibescu, remembering his ideas, could realize them. Not only were barracks and hospitals constructed and pris-

⁴³Anton Pann, *Memoria Focului Mare în București Din ziua de Paști, Anul 1847 Martie 23 și Generozitatea Prca-inălțatului nostru Prinț Gheorghe D. Bibescu VVod*, București, 1847, pp. 13-14, 19-20.

⁴⁴Bibescu B. Brîncoveanu, *Prințul Gheorghe D. Bibescu înaintea opiniei publice*, București, 1858, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁵Georges Bibesco, *Règne de Bibesco*, pp. 15-17

oners allowed to go out every day for fresh air, but also the mining methods were modernized.⁴⁶

Better known is his act freeing the Gypsy slaves belonging to the Church. Bibescu is again presented as a mild prince, a lover of humanity. Slavery was against modern civilization, so he decided to abolish it. But since the wealth of many families consisted almost solely of slaves, the prince first liberated only the slaves held by the Church. With the taxes those freed had to pay, the prince planned to compensate the private owners for the freeing of their slaves.⁴⁷ Bibescu is presented here not only as a good prince with humanitarian feelings, even towards the lowest social class, but also as a wise one, taking into account the negative consequences of his action and finding a Solomon-like solution.

The inauguration of the fountains in the garden named after Kiseleff gave Bibescu the possibility to express his national feelings. The park was decorated with flags in the national colors, and the prince stressed his emotions to those present. Despite all the difficulties and limited possibilities, there were moments of pride and joy. These moments were not when he was alone; in these situations he felt a strong desire to see his much loved country happy. His moments of joy were, as he continued, when he saw the happy representatives of the people around him, coming to the conviction that they appreciated his efforts and his ideas. In such moments of unlimited happiness he forgot all difficulties and pains, despite his life full of unceasing labor, because the only thing that mattered was the happiness of the people and that, for the future, when he would no longer be there, he could leave to the country signs of his love and to create the destiny he wished for it.⁴⁸ These very pathetic words of the hospodar had the aim of presenting himself as a good patriot, a ruler interested much more in the country and his inhabitants than in his own personal benefits.

A similar event was the inauguration of a bridge over the Olt River on 7 September 1847. The prince mentioned that he came there not in his function as prince, but as a Romanian to share in the general happiness. To stress the importance he accorded to the public interest, the day of the inauguration was the name-day of the prince's wife.⁴⁹ Bibescu in

⁴⁶Bibescu B. Brîncoveanu, *Bibescu înaintea opiniei publice*, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁷Ibidem, p. 39.

⁴⁸*Vestitorul românesc. Gazetă semi-oficială*, No. 75, 23 September 1847. Published as well in Georges Bibesco, *Règne de Bibesco*, pp. 164-165.

general cared much about the development of the roads. As his son mentioned, Bibescu knew about the importance of the improvement of roads, understanding that the development of public works is a sign of an enlightened administration.⁵⁰

On the celebration of his name-day in 1845, the prince once more stated that the only aim of his reign and the best thanks for his efforts was the public display of love showed toward him. Incessantly, his soul was occupied by the wish that something would remain after him, so that posterity would say: it was he who made it, together with those who were in his time.⁵¹

Reopening the assembly in 1846, more than two years after it was dissolved by him for its opposition, Bibescu delivered a speech. He mentioned that he had been giving everything to the country, being worried at the same time that he was not able to do more. Even if he made mistakes, one could see in them that he loved his country and cared for its welfare. The audience was very impressed by his speech, which also mentioned the achievements that had been realized as by a miracle, as expressed by the prince's son.⁵²

Obviously, he wanted to be seen as a modernizer, who gave his country something useful. He repeatedly stressed his sacrifices for the public welfare and the development of the country.

But development was not always easy to achieve. In his speech during the celebration of the giving out prizes at the "Sfântu Sava" High School, Bibescu mentioned that he was aware of the limited possibilities of public instruction, but hoped that, nevertheless, there would be some results. He especially thought about the moral parts of education. This would be, in his opinion, to teach religion, the basis for the well-being of every society, love for the country, and obedience to authority.⁵³

Caring about the supervision and guidance of the growing number of Romanians who went to study in France, at an age when the impressions of the family and the country were not yet strong enough, Bibescu preferred to introduce French schools into Wallachia. French professors

⁴⁹*Vestitorul românesc. Gazetă semi-oficială*, No. 73, 14 September 1847. Published as well in Georges Bibesco, *Régne de Bibesco*, p. 610.

⁵⁰Bibescu B. Brîncoveanu, *Bibescu înaintea opiniei publice*, p. 20.

⁵¹*Vestitorul românesc. Gazetă semi-oficială*, No. 34, 1 May 1845.

⁵²Bibescu B. Brîncoveanu, *Bibescu înaintea opiniei publice*, p. 35.

⁵³*Vestitorul românesc. Gazetă semi-oficială*, No. 53, 5 July 1845.

were invited to teach; the prince considered that the Romanian language could not be introduced in the schools for another ten years, when there would be enough people capable of teaching in this language and when enough books would be printed.⁵⁴ In a similar manner, the prince expressed his thoughts in a letter to a French professor, revealing his project of the public instruction. The Romanian language, still very poor, without a literature of its own and translations, was not suited to enlighten when it had to be enlightened itself. Romanian was not to be used in high schools before there were enough books and teachers capable of using this language.⁵⁵ Here, the prince seems to anticipate Maiorescu's ideas, expressed in the famous phrase "*forme fără fond*."

Another subject used by Bibescu was evoking personalities from Romanian history. We have already seen that he liked to cultivate his image as a patriot. Entering Bucharest on a white horse on the day of his enthronement, he presented himself in the costume of Michael the Brave.⁵⁶ In a poem about this event, he is described the *gugiuman* with a feather, the white cap made of sable skin, worn by the Romanian princes of earlier times. By asking rhetorically if this was Voivode Radu Negru or Mircea (cel Bătrân), calling for a victory or a triumph, Bibescu is presented afterwards as a new, even greater leader, who was not yet mentioned.⁵⁷

A more direct comparison between Bibescu and Michael the Brave mentions that one could imagine Bibescu really was Michael the Brave, who went off with his men to achieve victory, sacrificing his rest.⁵⁸

The comparison with Michael the Brave was not just a mood of Bibescu, but was systematically cultivated. A journey of the prince to some of the historical places of Wallachia offered the perfect occasion to insist on the connection between these two rulers. His arrival in Târgoviște, the former residential town of the Wallachian princes, is pre-

⁵⁴Bibescu B. Brîncoveanu, *Bibescu înaintea opiniei publice*, pp. 40-41.

⁵⁵Letter of the prince to D.D. ..., teacher at the college Louis-le-Grand, 14 May 1847, in Gheorghe Bibescu, *Domnia lui Bibescu. Corespondința și documente 1843-1856*. Tom 1. Romanian translation of the French original, București 1893, pp. 335-337.

⁵⁶Dimitrie Bolintineanu, *Domniile regulamentari și Historia celor trei ani de la 11 februarie pînă astăzi*, București 1869, pp. 24, 41 and Mirela-Luminița Murgescu, "Din trecutul osanalelor la români," in *Magazin istoric*, seria nouă, Nr. 1 (358)/1997, pp. 65-68.

⁵⁷Constantin C. Aristia, *Prințul român. Stanțe epice închinare românilor*, București 1843, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁸*Ibidem*, p. 64.

sented as the return of a lost son to his parents' home. Seeing the ruins of the former princely court, the prince became very sad and ordered to rebuild the walls so as to remind the peasants of the heroes who constructed them, as well as to encourage future generations by reminding them of what had been and what could be again if they believed in God and loved the public welfare.

From Târgoviște, the prince went on to visit the Dealu Monastery, where the head of Michael the Brave is buried. This monastery was also to be rebuilt. In the church, Bibescu prayed and remained, full of emotion, near the stone that covered the head of Prince Michael, and a tremor of awe overcame him, one that is a divine privilege of great men. The description of these events is followed by an enumeration of the virtues of Michael the Brave.⁵⁹ Its clear that this rather idealistic description of the former prince was used in fact to praise the present-day prince, to present him as a new Michael the Brave, profiting from his positive image, transmitting his signs of power to Bibescu.⁶⁰

Continuing his journey from Târgoviște to Câmpulung, the way is described as a triumphal procession, the inhabitants coming to bring crowns of flowers to the prince. The inhabitants of Câmpulung made a great effort to decorate the town for the reception of the princely visitor. One evening, the prince offered everyone the possibility to tell him of their pains and to ask for recovery.⁶¹

If we compare this image to that of Alexandru Ghica, we see once more that the image of Bibescu is much more detailed and pathetic. Trajan, who was evoked as an imaginary witness to the welfare of the people under Ghica's reign, was neither directly compared to Ghica, nor were his virtues mentioned. The comparison with the Roman emperor remains more implicit and careful, while the connection between Bibescu and the Romanian voivods is a clear, direct one and explicitly expressed and manifested by the prince himself.

Bibescu expressed his patriotism also towards Neselrode in the beginning of his reign, assuring at the same time his subordination under Russia. He explained him that he loved his small country as much as Neselrode could love his great and glorious country, and that he would sacrifice his last drop of blood to give it such a great destiny. At the same

⁵⁹ *Vestitorul românesc. Gazetă semi-oficială*, No. 68, 29 August 1844.

⁶⁰ Mirela-Luminița Murgescu, "Din trecutul osanalelor," p. 67.

⁶¹ *Vestitorul românesc. Gazetă semi-oficială*, No. 69, 2 September 1844.

time, he assured Neselrode that his patriotism did not blind him to see what was possible and what was not. He just wanted to try to do everything possible for his country with the conviction that he would be supported by Russia.⁶²

Bibescu's speech on the occasion of the reopening of the assembly in 1846 is full of self-satisfaction. He enumerated the successes of his reign and in general the good conditions of the country. The internal situation was better than it had been at any time before. The prince was assuring himself of this by his many inspections throughout the principality, and he found only confidence and affection toward the government. The public order was not disturbed once since he came to power, and security in the country was as high as in the largest and best organized states, although punishments were less severe than in every other place and capital punishment was practically abolished. Also the abuses, especially those which the peasants had been suffering, could be stopped, and if some were still committed it was because morals could not be changed in such a short time. In conclusion, he stated that the results obtained encouraged the continuing of everything that he had begun, and that people should not be discouraged by the long time and the sacrifices that were necessary.⁶³

Even in January 1848, a few months before his abdication, addressing himself to the assembly, the prince once again spoke about the situation of happiness, order, and security in the country. He saw that the country was on a good path and the future held great promise.⁶⁴

About the abdication of Bibescu, his son mentions that the prince was surrounded on 5 February 1848 by public sympathy and that the assembly supported him. When he left the country about four months later, nothing had changed in the principality, but everything in Europe. The prince himself stated, when he abdicated, that his reign was for the country one of its happiest epochs. He also hoped that his name and the things he did would be remembered in a positive way.⁶⁵

⁶² Gheorghe Bibescu, *Domnia lui Bibescu*, p. 87.

⁶³ Bibescu B. Brîncoveanu, *Bibescu înaintea opiniei publice*, pp. 51-64. Published as well in Georges Bibesco, *Règne de Bibesco*, pp. 185-194.

⁶⁴ Bibescu B. Brîncoveanu, *Bibescu înaintea opiniei publice*, p. 75. Published as well in Georges Bibesco, *Règne de Bibesco*, pp. 337-341.

⁶⁵ Bibescu B. Brîncoveanu, *Bibescu înaintea opiniei publice*, pp. 45-46.

Obviously, he wanted to see the population united around him, praising his decisions. Even confronted with the revolution, he did not admit any errors; he had to leave not because the people were not satisfied, but because the international circumstances had changed.

In general, we have seen that the self-image of Bibescu is quite similar to that of Alexandru Ghica. Both princes insist on the love of the population toward them. For this, they present themselves as generous, helping people when necessary. Bibescu seems to have had much clearer ideas about this role of benefactor, offering a more detailed image about his help and according of alms. An important element of their legitimation was to show everyone that they were the only ones able to maintain peace and order, defending the simple population from the boyars and their abuses.

Differences consist in the more pathetic way the image of Bibescu is presented. He stresses very much his national feelings. The way he used the national symbols, especially historical figures, reveals to us an already modern national thinking. Ghica's ideas about the nation seem to be much more general and unclear, he expresses himself in a more moderate way. Also, Bibescu's ideas of reforms and the development of the infrastructure seem to be much more concrete and detailed than those of his predecessor.

One of the most important points seems to be the idea of public welfare. This concept is expressed by both princes on different occasions. Despite the conservative ideas about the position of the prince and his power, this is a genuine modern concept. Not as much the reality of their actions, but more the consciousness and acceptance of the existence of a public welfare must be seen as the key element of modern political thinking.

Chestiunea orientală și Principatele Române în percepția diplomaților americani în Rusia la începutul secolului al XIX-lea

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Sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea, dominat neîndoiește de seismele revoluționare localizate pe ambele țărmuri ale Atlanticului, mai întâi în Lumea Nouă, apoi și în cea Veche, a marcat o reducere, până la tăcere, a interesului american pentru problemele Europei Orientale, cuprinsă însă și aceasta de sulful înnoitor al ideilor revoluției franceze. Efectele acesteia din urmă, judecate într-un plan mai larg, războaiele napoleoniene și blocada continentală instituită de noul împărat al Franței împotriva eternei sale rivale, ca și conflictul anglo-american de la începutul secolului al XIX-lea vor fi monopolizat, deopotrivă, atenția factorilor politici și a opiniei publice americane, iar diminuarea considerabilă a volumului schimburilor de mărfuri între cele două lumi, cauzată de blocada britanică asupra coastei americane va fi afectat, cu siguranță, libera circulație a ideilor, implicit a informațiilor.

Singurul lor canal de scurgere rămânea cel diplomatic, iar întâiul prilej pentru noul secol l-a oferit aceeași chestiune orientală¹, redeschisă prin războiul ruso-turc din anii 1806-1812, când Principatele Române

¹Pentru geneza și emergența chestiunii orientale până la începutul secolului al XIX-lea, vezi îndcoșbi: Albert Sorel, *La question d'Orient au XVIII^e siècle*, Deuxième édition, Paris, 1889; Edouard Drirault, *La question d'Orient depuis ses origines jusqu'à la paix de Sèvres*, Paris, 1921; Jacques Ancel, *Manuel historique de la question d'orient*, Paris, 1926; J.A.R. Marriot, *The Eastern Question; an Historical Study in European Diplomacy*, Oxford, 1940 ș.a.