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The Ottoman Empire and Wallachia's finances (1700-1800)

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ABSTRACT

In this scientific project I analyze the main effects of the relationship between the Ottoman Empire, the central power elites, and Wallachia, understood as a peripheric province of the Empire, upon the fiscal system of the latter, during the 18th century (although I will make also references to 16-17th centuries and to the beginning of the 19th century).

In the first chapter I discuss the evolution of the historiography regarding Wallachia's public finances. Among the most important contributions to this subject are those of foreign travelers in 18th and at the beginning of 19th century – von Bauer, Sulzer, Carra, Raicevich, Reinhard, Wilkinson and others – or those of Mihai Cantacuzino and Dionisie Fotino; before 1945, the specialized studies of Iorga, Xenopol, Colescu and Filitti; in the communist period, the research of Berza, Mioc, Columbeanu and Papacostea; as well as the recent studies of Bogdan Murgescu.

For a better understanding of the imperial context in which the power elites of Wallachia acted, the recent studies of Ottomanists like Şevket Pamuk, Metin Coşgel or Thomas Miceli are essential. They challenge the paradigm of Ottoman decline by stressing on the diversity, flexibility, resilience and the adaptability of the Ottoman policies as factors for explaining the continuity of the empire. The relations between the imperial central and Wallachia can be viewed in a comparative framework of the politics of difference towards every province, piece by piece.

In the second chapter I analyze the way in which the Porte viewed and put into practice the principle of protecting the tax-paying subjects and, therefore, the fiscal potential of Wallachia in the eighteenth century. The Porte was directly involved in protecting and confirming not only its direct resources, like tribute and provisions, but also the ones entrusted to Wallachian princes, like salt mines, customs and taxes paid by neighbors for pasturing their livestock in Wallachia. The principle of protecting the wealth of the state was imposed also as the duty of the appointed princes, who risked losing their position if they disturbed the fiscal system, by oppression and heavy taxation. These aspects reveal the intensification of the actions undertaken by the Porte in 18th century to control the periphery.

In chapters 3 and 4 I try to quantify the expenditures towards the Porte and, respectively, the total revenues of Wallachia. In general, in the 18th century, over half of the revenues went, officialy and unofficialy (to privates), to the Porte. The remainder of the revenues was spent usually between administration and personal expenditures of the prince. At the beginning of the 19th century, more money was spent on public salaries and the postal system.

The total volumes of Wallachia's revenue in 18th century were impressive, especially if we relate them to the rest of the Ottoman Empire: about 7-11% of the total revenues of the Ottoman Empire (excluding the tributary provinces) in 1750 and 14-24% in 1780. The total revenues per capita, expressed in grams of silver are even more telling: 9-13 grams of silver per capita in 1750 and 6-11 in 1780, at the imperial level; 45 grams in 1750 and 48 in 1780, in Wallachia.

Overall, despite the dominant paradigm of Ottoman decline in 18th century, we can conclude that the Porte preserved its fiscal interests in Wallachia. Through efforts to protect the subjects and the resources of Wallachia from the abuses of Ottoman elites in the Danube area and through politics that pushed the princes to ensure the stability of the fiscal system, the Porte contributed to the continuity of this system in the 18th century, without the outbreak of a revolution or a major rebellion, in spite of the fiscal overloading of Wallachia.