

**WOMEN'S POWER IN MOLDOVA (14TH - 17TH CENTURIES).
GENDER STUDIES**

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Abstract: *The involvement of women in political history is a topic of great interest for our past and it gives us suggestions for a new view over the history. We need to equally mention that the purpose of this essay is to modify the accents of history, which means we tried to present the political history from the through the filter of the "feminine history". Regretfully, the feminine side of Romanian history has been ignored for many years and only in the last decade it is deeply researched by the colleagues from Romania. Without pretending to fully solve the problem, we consider that it is an indisputable fact that studying history without a holistic approach gives just a one-sided view of it. Thus, the presented study tries to approach a very delicate matter – the role of women in determining the ruling dynasties in the Medieval Moldavia, and the Ladies' regency. The documentary material of the time clearly reflects the situation and the statute of women. To a great extent, an important role was played by ladies in continuity of the ruling dynasties. Besides, the historical facts show that some of the Medieval Moldavia's Ladies were true personalities.*

Keywords: *Moldova, Ladies, rulers, political power, intrigue, dynasty, gender*

Rezumat: *Puterea femeilor în Moldova (secolele XIV-XVII). Studii de gen. Implicarea femeilor în istoria politică reprezintă un subiect de mare interes pentru cunoașterea trecutului și ne oferă sugestii pentru o nouă viziune asupra istoriei. În egală măsură, trebuie să menționăm că scopul acestui eseu este de a modifica accentele istoriei, ceea ce înseamnă că vom încerca să prezentăm istoria politică prin filtrul „istoriei feminine”. Din păcate, mulți ani la rând latura feminină a istoriei românești a fost ignorată și doar în ultimul deceniu a început să fie cercetată în profunzime de colegii din România. Fără a pretinde o rezolvare completă a problemei, considerăm că este incontestabil faptul că studierea istoriei fără o abordare holistică oferă doar o viziune unilaterală a acesteia. Astfel, studiul prezentat încearcă abordarea unei chestiuni foarte delicate - rolul femeilor în stabilirea dinastiilor la conducerea Moldovei medievale și regența doamnelor. Materialul documentar al timpului reflectă, în mod clar, situația și statutul femeilor. Într-o mare măsură, doamnele au jucat un rol important în continuitatea dinastiilor conducătoare. În plus, faptele istorice arată că unele dintre doamnele din Moldova medievală au fost adevărate personalități.*

Résumé : Le pouvoir des femmes en Moldavie (les XIV^{ème} – XVII^{ème} siècles).
Etudes de genre. La participation des femmes dans l'histoire politique représente un sujet intéressant pour notre passé et nous offrent des suggestions pour une nouvelle vision sur l'histoire. De même, on doit mentionner que le but de l'étude ci-jointe est de modifier les accents de l'histoire, c'est-à-dire que nous y essayâmes de présenter l'histoire politique par le filtre de "l'histoire féminine". Malheureusement, pendant plusieurs années, on rejeta la partie féminine de l'histoire roumaine ; seulement la dernière décennie, les chercheurs de Roumanie commencèrent y faire des investigations plus sérieuses. Sans avoir prétendu une résolution complète du problème, on considéra qu'étudier l'histoire sans un abord holistique offre seulement une vision unilatérale de celle-ci. De cette manière, l'étude présentée essaye d'aborder une question extrêmement délicate – le rôle des femmes dans la détermination des dynasties à la direction de la Moldavie médiévale et la régence des princesses régnantes. Le matériel documentaire de l'époque reflète, clairement, la situation et le statut des femmes. En général, les princesses régnantes jouèrent un rôle important dans la continuité des dynasties dirigeantes. De plus, les événements historiques montrèrent que quelques-unes des princesses régnantes de la Moldavie étaient des véritables personnalités.

INTRODUCTION

The modern historiography is characterized by an innovative concept of power and a more extensive comprehension of the "political influence". An expansive apprehension of the concept of power is central to the study of gender history, as it allows a full grasp of the issue regarding the ability of women to access and influence the institutions of authority and the levels of decision-making, notably during the Middle Ages and the Modern Period, when women legally deprived of any means of entry to influential positions.

The notion of "female power" has been encountered in a variety of works on gender history¹ and for researchers both in western-European² and Russian

¹ П. Репина, «Приватное/публичное» и «власть женщин» ["Private/public" and "women's power"], in *Women's factor in history*, Chişinău, 2012, p. 27-38.

² René Metz, *Le statut de la femme en droit canonique médiéval*, in "La Femme", Bruxelles, 1962, Vol. II; P. Grimal (coord.), *Histoire mondiale de la femme*, Paris, 1965, Vol. I; M. R. Beard, *Women as a force in history*, New York, 1971; Julia O'Faolain, Lauro Martines, *Not in gods image: women in history*, London, 1973; M. Rosaldo, L. Lamphere (coord.), *Women, culture and society*, Stanford, 1974; M. Piettre, *La condition féminine à travers les âges*, Paris, 1974; Josep Gies, Grances Gies, *Life in a medieval castle*, New York, 1974; J. A. McNamara, S. Wemple, *The power of women through the family in medieval Europe: 500-1100*, in "Clio's consciousness raised", New York, 1974; Eileen Power, *Medieval Women*, Cambridge University Press, 1975; Susan Mosher Stuard (coord.), *Women in Medieval Society*, University Pennsylvania Press, 1976; Marilyn French, *Women in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1978; P. Branca, *Women in Europe since 1750*, New York, 1978;

historiography³ it is a matter of great interest. The scientific inquiry aims at the influence of women on decision-making policies and political events, as well as their role in the economy and the social area of the community. Enjoying a

E. Power, *La femme au Moyen Âge*, Paris, 1979; Angela M. Lucas, *Women in the Middle Ages: religion, marriage and letters*, London, 1983; Amaury Reincourt, *Women and power in history*, London, 1983; F. Bertini, *Beyond power: men, women and morals*, London, 1985; Rosalind Miles, *Women and power*, London, 1985; E.L. Ranelagh, *Men on women*, London, 1985; Margaret Wade Labarge, *Women in medieval life*, London, 1986; Mary R. Lefkowitz, *Women in Greek myth*, London, 1986; M. Erler, M. Kowaleski (coord.), *Women and power in the Middle Ages*, Athens-London, 1988; Mary C. Erler, Maryanne Kowaleski (coord.), *Gendering the Master Narrative. Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, Cornell University Press, 1988; M. Rouche, J. Heuclin, *La femme au Moyen Âge*, Maubeuge, 1990; F. Bertini, *La mujer medieval*, Madrid, 1991; Joëlle Beaucamp, *Le statut de la femme à Byzance (IVe-VIIe siècle)*, Paris, 1992, Vol. II; E. Amt, *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe*, London, 1993; Frauen E. Uitz, *Die Frau in der mittelalterlichen Stadt*, Leipzig, 1993; Nancy F. Cott (coord.), *Historical articles on Women's lives and activities*, München, London, New York, Paris, 1992-1994, Vol. I-XX; Edith Ennen, *Frauen in Mittelalter*, München, 1994; Françoise Thélamon, *Écrire l'histoire des femmes*, Saint Cloud, 1998; Ana Rodrigues Oliveira, *As representações da mulher na cronística medieval Portuguesa (sécs. XII a XIV)*, Cascais, 2000; Anna Crabb, *The Strozzis of Florence: widowhood and family solidarity in the Renaissance*, University of Michigan Press, 2000; Madeleine Lazard, *Les avenues de Fémynie. Les femmes et la Renaissance*, Paris, 2001; Georges Duby, Michelle Perrot, *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, Paris, 2001-2002, Vol. I-V; Dominique Godineau, *Les femmes dans la société française, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 2003; E.C. Goldsmith. C.H. Winn (coord.), *Lettres de femmes*, Paris, 2005; Erin L. Jordan, *Women, Power, and Religious Patronage in the Middle Ages*, Palgrave Macmillan US, 2006; Anita Kay O'Pry-Reynolds, *Men and Women as Represented in Medieval Literature and Society*, in "Saber and Scroll", 2013, Vol. 2, no. 2, p. 37-45 (<http://digitalcommons.apus.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1048&context=saberandscroll>).

³ Н. Л. Пушкарева, *Женская история, гендерная история: сходства, отличия, перспективы* [Women's History, Gender History: Similarities, Differences, Prospects], in *Социальная история. Женская и гендерная история*, Москва, 2003, p. 9-45; Idem, *Гендерные исследования: рождение, становление, методы и перспективы в системе исторических наук* [Gender Studies: Birth, Formation, Methods and Perspectives on the System of Historical Sciences], in *Женщина. Гендер. Культура*, Москва, 1999, p. 16-17; Idem, *Гендерная теория и историческое знание* [Gender Theory and Historical Knowledge], Санкт-Петербург, 2007, p. 44-56; Idem (coord.), *Власть, этнос, семья. Гендерные роли в XXI веке* [Power, Ethnos, Family. Gender Roles in the 21st Century], Москва, 2010; Л. П. Репина, *Женщины и мужчины в истории: новая картина европейского прошлого* [Women and Men in History: The New Picture of the European Past], Москва, 2002; Л. П. Репина, В. В. Зверева, М. Ю. Парамонова, *Что такое гендерная история* [What is Gender History?] in *История исторического знания*, Москва, 2004, p. 254-262; Л. П. Репина, "Новая историческая наука" и социальная история ["New Historical Science" and Social History], Издание второе, 2009.

conventional type of authority, women retained “offstage” regulatory functions, namely through marital arrangements, prevention of men from accessing to power or ascending in their political careers, helping them to develop their political position, or thwarting the organization or the involvement in conspiracies, political uprisings, and coups. The researchers in the field look at these forms and instruments of dominion within the division of power framework, through both the public and the private ratio⁴. The interdisciplinary approach endorsed a more elucidated lecture of the historical material with regards to certain social and political aspects. The authors repeatedly refer to the subject of female leadership during the medieval era⁵. A number of studies have been devoted to this particular issue, which included inquiries regarding the question of matrilineal succession in Serbia and Bulgaria in the Middle-Age. The primary finding of the study in question was the confirmation of the women’s crucial role in securing the hereditary right to throne of a dynasty. Women represented the key vector for attaining powerful positions, albeit not being able to withhold it. The preeminent argument in harnessing the power and presenting a claim to the throne was through affinity unions⁶.

The focus of the present analysis is the demonstration of political contrivances Moldovan women possessed in the harnessing of power, during the

⁴ Л. П. Репина, “Новая историческая наука”, с. 208-211.

⁵ L. Zabolotnaia, *Les droits des femmes de Moldovie en Moyen Âge*, in “Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny”, Lublin-Radzyń Podlaski-Siedlce, 2005, Vol. II, p. 55-61; Idem, *Елена Волошанка в русской истории. Династический, генетический и политический аспекты* [Elena Voloshanka in Russian History. Dynastic, Genetic and Political Aspects], in *Пол. Политика. Поликультурность: гендерные отношения и гендерные системы в прошлом и настоящем*, Москва, 2014, Т. 2, p. 323-328; Idem, *Власть, конфликт, агрессия: гендерный аспект политической истории Болгарии XIII века* [Power, Conflict, Aggression: The Gender Aspect of the Political History of Bulgaria in the 13th Century], in *Женщины и женское движение за мир без войн и военных конфликтов*, Москва – Старый Оскол, 2015, Vol. III, p. 63-70.

⁶ L. Zabolotnaia, *Women and power in the history of the Asan dynasty*, in “Tyragetia”, Chişinău, 2012, Vol. VI [XXI], no. 2, p. 53-62; Idem, *The Impact of the Ottoman Factor on the Status of Women in the South-Eastern European Countries in the Middle Ages through Historiography Perspectives*, in “Codrul Cosminului”, Suceava, 2013, Vol. XX, no. 1, p. 127-141; Idem, *Женщина и власть в истории господствующих династий средневековой Сербии (Неманичей и Хребеляновичей)* [Women and Power in the History of the Ruling Dynasties of Medieval Serbia], in “Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia. Stereotypy Bałkańskie”, Instytut Historii UAM, Poznań, 2011, p. 86-98; Idem, *Женщины в истории царских династий средневековой Болгарии (XII–XIII вв.): общее и особенное* [Women in the History of the Royal Dynasties of Medieval Bulgaria (XIIth - XIIIth Centuries): General and Special], in *Relațiile moldo-bulgare: istorie și cultură*, Chişinău, 2016, p. 12-30.

Medieval Era. In addition, it attempts to render a historical issue through an anthropological point of view: the women's history. Furthermore, the addressing of the social status of women in Middle aged Moldova represents a scientific novelty. The essential drift of the article derives from the necessity of the women's history betterment for the Middle Ages and the identification of their legal freedoms, through the comparative approach. The perspective that considers the traditional history is made and written by men is not a new one. The narrative and documentary sources, as well as the context of the evolution of the society have encouraged this view⁷. Women have been systematically reduced to a statute defined as inferior, being condemned to an endless unflattering comparison to the male standards, to the perfect, ideal and incomparable image of the most complete man, their god⁸.

The life of a woman belonging to the medieval society had three main dimensions: family, marriage and religion. All along the middle ages, the women have abundantly fulfilled their procreating role. They were seen as inferior to men and did not enjoy their affection. The church was teaching them to be docile and obedient to men. We agree to the historians' statements referring to the social and juridical statute of women, in general. However, we may observe that the situation of women in the medieval Moldavia was very similar to that of the women of the rest of the Europe. There is no doubt womankind receded into private space and represented the conservatory side of the society. But research done in the last years brings some clarifications on this multilateral matter. We want to point out that the historical records obviously show that, in Moldavia, women - especially those belonging to the high society - had many more privileges than those of other European countries⁹.

Women of medieval Moldavia were enjoying a privileged and independent statute in the society and in the family; their juridical position was similar. The normative documents, the foreign travellers and others sources of the epoch bear witness about it. A confirmation of this fact is represented by the juridical documents stating that, unlike women of the East and West Europe, the women of Moldavia had the right to their own movable and immovable assets; they had also

⁷ Sorin Iftimi, *Ipostaze feminine între medieval și modern* [Feminine Hypostases between Medieval and Modern], in "Revista de Istorie Socială", 1999-2002, Vol. IV, p. 37.

⁸ Rosalind Miles, *Cine a pregătit Cina cea de taină? Istoria universală a femeilor* [Who Prepared the Last Supper? The Universal History of Women], București, Editura Meteor, 2008, p. 135.

⁹ Lilia Zabolotnaia, *Dreptul la proprietate și la moștenire al femeilor din Moldova și țările vecine (secolele XIV-XVII). Studii și documente* [The Right to Property and Inheritance of Women in Moldova and Neighboring Countries. Studies and Documents], Chișinău, Editura Cardidact, 2015, p. 133-135.

the right to divorce, and to dispose of their own dowry, money, etc.

It is surprising that women of the medieval Moldavia had a certain influence on the reigning power. This is motivated by the following facts:

- two reigning dynasties, the Bogdănești – Mușatin family and the Movilești family, were determined on female line;

- the ladies had the right to rule until the minor sons (chosen as voivodes) reached the age that allowed them to reign over the country;

- the ladies held political prerogatives during the power struggles (of their husbands or sons);

- the voivodes' daughters became a „weapon” that could resolve political (international, inter-territorial, etc.) issues by means of internal or external dynastic alliances.

- the Moldavian tradition allowed the legitimate and natural children to get to the throne; in this case, the ladies obtained a special statute and were the ones to protect their children while reigning.

In the medieval Moldavia, the voivodes' succession to the throne was specific. The hereditary-elective rule of throne succession was applied right from the birth of the state. The voivode had to be a man, and to come from “a ruler's bone” (meaning to be the son of a ruler).

THE FEMALE THRONE SUCCESSION PROHIBITION

As Ștefan S. Gorovei states, “the right to reign was never transmitted on female line”¹⁰. Yet, in Moldavia, two reigning dynasties - Bogdănești-Mușatin and Movilești - were brought about on female line or through the “reigning blood”.

The Bogdănești-Mușatin Dynasty: The discussions on this matter have been lasting for quite a long time and did not end up to the present time. It is one of the most controversial problems of Romanian historiography. Some researchers support the opinion (rooted in the historical literature) according to which the first reigning dynasty was that of the Mușatins¹¹, while others consider that the Bogdănești-Mușatin dynasty is a more correct name¹².

¹⁰ Ștefan Sorin Gorovei, *Mușatinii*, Chișinău, 1991, p. 25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7-18; Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria Românilor. Pentru poporul românesc* [History of Romanians. For the Romanian People], Chișinău, 1992, p. 43-45; Alexandru D. Xenopol, *Istoria Românilor din Dacia Traiană* [History of Romanians in Traian Dacia], ed. a IV-a, București, 1986, Vol. II, p. 32-40.

¹² Constantin Rezachevici, *Polonia în vremea Jagiellonilor* [Poland in Time of Jagiellonian], in “Studii și articole de istorie”, Vol. XLV-XLII, 1980; Idem, *Cine a fost soția lui Ilie Voievod, fiul lui Alexandru cel Bun? Un episod dinastic moldo-polono-lituan* [Who was the Wife of Ilie the Voievod, the Son of Alexander the Good?], in “Arhiva genealogică”, II

The first opinion is supported by Nicolae Iorga¹³, Petre P. Panaitescu¹⁴, A. D. Xenopol¹⁵, Constantin Gane¹⁶, Vlad Georgescu¹⁷, Ștefan S. Gorovei¹⁸ et. al. Referring to this matter, N. Iorga stated: "Petru of Mușata, the wife of Stephen... was a legal ruler, as one who rooted, through his mother, from the founder's blood, from Bogdan's bloodline"¹⁹. Petre P. Panaitescu brought even more arguments and considered that, along with the death of Lațcu, the reign of the family of Bogdan the founder reaches its end. Lațcu had a sister, Margareta, also a catholic, named Mușata. She was married to a boyar named Costea, and their son, Petre, took over the throne after Lațcu's death: "Petre Mușatin, who is the son of Mușata, had gotten the right to the throne succession from his mother. In Moldavia, Petru Mușatin started a dynasty that lasted till the end of the 16th century and to which belong Alexander the Good, Stephen the Great, Petru Rareș"²⁰. C. Gane proposes another explanation of the dynasty's origin: "the well-known Mușata was a Moldavian Lady, the daughter of Bogdan the founder, the sister of Lațco... After the death of Bogdan and of his son, Lațco, Petru, the son of Mușata, has been given the country's throne so that it would not fall into foreign hands. Petru was also a ruler's son. We may regard him as the true founder of Moldavia. For his father, Mușata's husband, Ștefan was the Voivode of Șepenița. After Ștefan's death, his son Petru succeeded to the throne and when the Bogdănești dynasty ended, the Moldavians asked him to be a ruler for them too, as he was the son of Bogdan's daughter. This way, the Bogdănești dynasty has been continued on the female line and the reign of the Mușatins started in Moldavia; therefore, through this election, the true Moldavia was founded. Mușata, a voivode's daughter, was the mother of three rulers - Petru, Roman and Ștefan - and also the grandmother of Alexander the Good, the great-granddaughter of Stephen the Great and the ancestor of all the other voivodes - Petru Rareș, Alexandru Lăpușneanu, etc. This is why her baptismal name remained in our history as a patrimonial name, known by the entire Romanian

(VII), 1995, p. 11-19; Idem, *Cronologia domnilor din Țara Românească și Moldova. a. 1324-1881* [Chronology of Rulers of Wallachia and Moldavia. a. 1324-1881], București, 2001, Vol. I, p. 432-442.

¹³ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria Românilor...*, p. 43-45.

¹⁴ Petre P. Panaitescu, *Istoria Românilor* [History of Romanians], București, 1990, p. 85-86.

¹⁵ Alexandru D. Xenopol, *Istoria Românilor din Dacia Traiană...*, p. 32-40.

¹⁶ Constantin Gane, *Trecute vieți de doamne și domnițe* [Bygone Lives of Queens and Princesses], Chișinău, 1991, Vol. 1, p. 21-24.

¹⁷ Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria Românilor. De la origini până în zilele noastre* [History of Romanians. From Origins to Our Days], București, 1992, pp. 37, 45, 71.

¹⁸ Ștefan Sorin Gorovei, *Mușatinii...*, p. 7-18.

¹⁹ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria Românilor...*, p. 44.

²⁰ Petre P. Panaitescu, *Istoria Românilor...*, p. 85.

world for almost 600 years”²¹.

It is of great interest to observe the monographic study of Ștefan S. Gorovei in which the author mentions: “The internal conditions in which the reign over Moldavia has been taken over by Petru I, in 1375, are unknown to us. We may only presume that the young prince – born around 1350, according to some simple genealogical and chronological calculations – lived at the court, mastering some of the secrets of government during the eight years of reign of his uncle, Lațcu. It is evident, as Lațcu had an only child – a girl, Anastasia, who could not have inherited the throne. Petru was regarded as the incontestable successor of Lațcu, for he was educated in this regard and the throne was passed from one to another without conflicts or struggles... In the *Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia*, Petru is presented as the son of Mușata. It has been considered for a while that this formula could indicate the origin of the ruling rights of Petru I; in this case, Mușata should have been the daughter of Bogdan I. Yet, our entire history proves that, from the 14th to the 16th century, the right to power was never transmitted through women. Next, a wrong understanding of texts has resulted into the idea that the chronicle's indication should be translated as “the son of Mușat”, accepted as a patronymic! In order to put things back to their places, we must state that, in reality, the term of Mușatin – in the above-mentioned context of the *Anonymous Chronicle* – means nothing else than «of Mușata»”²². In another study, Ștefan S. Gorovei mentions: “As for the discontinuity of the Bogdănești dynasty, there is no question of it. Lațcu did not have male successors (for the Romanians did not allow succession to be transmitted on female line), the throne was naturally taken over by a son of his brother, the nephew of Bogdan's son, ensuring the natural continuity of the dynasty”²³. In the process of explaining this controversial matter, an essential input of historical literature belongs to Constantin Rezachevici: Lațcu was followed to the throne by the son of his brother, Petru, named in the internal chronicles of the 15th - 16th centuries²⁴ “the son of Mușata” because his father had died without getting to reign, while his mother (a well-known figure), was probably very involved in the political life of Moldavia during the reign of her both sons (Petru and Roman) who succeeded to the throne, one after the other, during the last quarter of the 14th century.

In the first half of the 17th century, Grigore Ureche wrongly translated from the Slavonic language “the son of Mușata” as “the son of Mușat”. During the second

²¹ Constantin Gane, *Trecute vieți de doamne și domnițe...*, p. 21-22.

²² Ștefan Sorin Gorovei, *Mușatinii...*, p. 25.

²³ Idem, *Întemeierea Moldovei. Probleme controversate* [Founding of Moldova. Controversial Issues], Iași, 1997, p. 305-307.

²⁴ Constantin Rezachevici, *Cronologia domnilor...*, p. 432.

half of the same century, Metropolitan Dosoftei mentions that "Pătru the voivode, named Mușatin, came next to the throne and led the country rightfully", a form that also appears, around 1770, in the translation of the Putna Chronicle by the archimandrite Vartolomei Măzăreanu of the Solca monastery. It is well known that this onomastic name imperceptibly became a last name – Mușatin – and was imposed to a great extent on the literary way, "in the prejudice of the correct form: the family or the dynasty of Bogdănești, which I prefer, have used and will continue to use ... in spite of an erroneous tradition!"²⁵. In this respect, we bring arguments from the time's documents. *The Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia*, written in the Slavic language and containing the history of this principality from 1359 to 1507, may serve as an example: "and the son of Mușata, Petru the Voivode, ruled for 12 years. And after him, his brother, Roman the Voivode, ruled the country for 3 years"²⁶. The *Putna Chronicle* no. 1 or the *Short History on the Rulers of Moldavia*²⁷ contains the history of this country from the moment of its founding, 1359, to the year 1526: "Petru the Voivode, the son of Mușata, ruled for 12 years and died. And after him, his brother, Roman the Voivode, ruled the country for 3 years"²⁸. The *Putna Chronicle* no. 2²⁹ presents the period from 1359 to 1518, when "the son of Mușata, Petru, reigned for 16 years. And then his brother, Roman, ruled for 3 years"³⁰. The *Russian-Moldavian Chronicle*³¹ mentioned: "Petru the Voivode, the son of Mușata" who, reigned for 16 years³². The *Polish-Moldavian Chronicle*³³ states: "Peter the son of Mushata ruled eight years. After his reign, his son, Roman, ruled for another eight years. Then Stephan Roman's brother reigned for seven

²⁵ *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI* [Slavic-Romanian Chronicles from 15th to the 16th Century], București, 1959, pp. 14, 44, 48, 55, 61, 168, 177; Constantin Rezachevici, *Cronologia domnilor...*, p. 446-447.

²⁶ *Anonymous Chronicle of Moldavia*, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, pp. 6, 14.

²⁷ It was discovered in Kiev, by Ion Bogdan, and was published in the volume *Vechile cronici moldovenesti până la Urechia* [The Old Moldavian Chronicles until Urechia], București, 1891.

²⁸ *The Putna Chronicle* no. 1, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, p. 48.

²⁹ It was discovered by Ion Bogdan in the public library of Saint Petersburg.

³⁰ *The Putna Chronicle* nr. 2, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, p. 61.

³¹ Or *The Chronicle of Moldavia* that forms an appendix to the Russian chronicle *Воскресенская летопись*, a compilation of texts gathered during the 17th century. The *Chronicle of Moldavia* has a separate title: *Povestire pe scurt despre domnii Moldovei, de când s-a început țara Moldovei* [Short Story about Moldavian Rulers, since the Moldavia was founded].

³² *The Russian-Moldavian Chronicle*, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, p. 157.

³³ *The Polish-Moldavian Chronicle*, written in the Polish, presents the history of Moldavia from 1352 to 1564. It is most probable that the chronicle was written in Moldavia, based on a Slavic manuscript of the time. The author remains unknown, but we presume he was a Pole who lived in Moldavia for a certain period of time.

years (“Potim sin Mussaczinow, Petr, bil hospodarem 8 lat. Potim sin Petrow, Roman bil hospodarem osm liat. Potim Romanow brat, Stephan, bil hospodarem 7 liat”)³⁴. As this text shows, the fact that Petru Mușatin is named as “the son of Lady Mușata”, and not mentions the name of his father, is indisputable. The single discrepancy between these sources is the period of Petru Mușat's reign, but this matter should constitute the subject of a separate research. Into the same train of ideas, we may bring the document of May 1, 1384, issued in the town of Hârlău, indicating that Petru Mușat, the Voivode, gives the earnings of the fair of the Siret town to the “John the Baptizer” church, founded by his mother, Margareta: “We, Petru the Voivode, by God's mercy, duke of the Moldavian country, taking into consideration that our bright and venerable Lady Margarita, our beloved and honourable mother, through her faith in God and out of love for her blessed mother, Maria, started to found and build a church and a sanctum for the preacher monk brothers, in the town of Siret. Written in the fourth Sunday, when Jubilation is sung... in the town of Hârlău, at the court of our beloved mother”³⁵.

If we put together all the opinions, we may conclude that all the researchers support the idea that Mușata played a special role in the naming of the reigning dynasty that entered history as the “House of Bogdan-Mușat”.

ALEXANDRU LĂPUȘNEANU – THE FIRST “BESSARABIAN” RULER OR THE CONTINUER OF THE BOGDAN – MUȘAT DYNASTY ?

We consider it necessary to bring an argument in favour of women in the story of Alexandru Lăpușneanu's accession to the throne. It is known that “Petrea the Steward..., dubbed Alexandru Lăpușneanu”³⁶, „an illegitimate son of Bogdan the Voivode”, married the daughter of Petru Rareș, Ruxanda, after getting to the throne. This event is described by Grigore Ureche: “When Alexandru Lăpușneanu the Voivode came to the country – after cutting the nose of Joldea and sending him to monkhood – married Roxanda, the daughter of Petru the Voivode, who should have married Joldea, to be his lady... So, he and Roxandra wedded and had their wedding ceremony”³⁷. This chapter raises a lot of questions; first of all – as C. Rezachevici states - what was pushing the ambitious widow (Elena Ecaterina - L.Z.) to support Joldea, “who did not belong to a ruler's family and was not even

³⁴ *The Polish-Moldavian Chronicle*, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, p. 168-169.

³⁵ *Documente privind Istoria României* [Documents on the History of Romania], A. Moldova, București, 1954, Vol. I (1384-1475), doc. 1, p. 1-2.

³⁶ Grigore Ureche, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* [The Chronicles of the Land of Moldavia], in *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei*, Chișinău, 1990, p. 86.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

considered a nobleman?"³⁸; the second question is: why did Elena Ecaterina not propose her youngest son, Constantin, aged 12 at the time, as a successor to the throne? And one last question: why did Alexandru Lăpușneanu insist to marry Roxanda, his cousin?

In our opinion, we must look for an explanation while examining the political ambitions of both parts. Elena Ecaterina was desperate after her two sons, Ilie and Ștefan, ended their reign; the first "rejected his faith and converted to Islam, a repudiation that was considered a "shame on the country", and his name has been removed from the churches' diptychs and front porch motives. Ștefan Rareș had a disturbed mind and "therefore the boyars killed him"³⁹. It is most probable that, at this time, Elena Ecaterina did not dare to propose her youngest son as a successor to the throne, and therefore, to get to be a regent. She wanted the reign to be obtained by a person who would have been able to administer and manage the power, and later on (after Constantin would have reached an age that would have allowed him to reign) to be able to remove him from the throne. Roxanda was her only possibility to keep the power in her hands.

As for Alexandru Lăpușneanu's purpose, we consider that he also wanted to put forth his right to throne succession, through marriage. It is surprising that, even if he had already obtained the power through the political-military support from the Poles, he also needed additional guarantees that would have been able to offer him a bit of "a ruler's blood".

While analysing this matter, it is necessary to get a closer view of a few episodes of the ruler's life. Since he was the illegitimate son of Bogdan III, he was younger than Ștefăniță (1517-1527)⁴⁰, „the first son of Bogdan III, born of an illegitimate relationship with a certain Stana"⁴¹; therefore, Alexandru Lăpușneanu was born approximately between the years 1509-1517. At the beginning of the '50s of the 16th century, he was around 40 years old. It was a considerable age, quite advanced for the time, and it is strange that no mention can be found in any document of the period about his life before his reign, excepting the mentions about his mother. It might be that he had no family or children, especially since he had been a steward at the court, before getting to the throne, and it is exactly at this age that he had decided to fight for power. These facts make us believe that he led quite an active political life. The information about his wedding to Ruxanda is quite controversial. While Grigore Ureche writes that the wedding took place

³⁸ Constantin Rezachevici, *Cronologia domnilor...*, p. 613.

³⁹ Petre P. Panaitescu, *Istoria Românilor...*, p. 155.

⁴⁰ His date of birth was not mentioned in the chronicles, as the contemporaries' opinions about his age are approximate: 1503, 1506, 1508, or 1509.

⁴¹ Constantin Rezachevici, *Cronologia domnilor...*, p. 553.

exactly at the beginning of his reign, the *Chronicle of Azarie*⁴² states that the event happened two years later: “After the second year of his reign, he married the orthodox lady (*Tsaritsa!* – the princess) Roxanda, the daughter of Petru the Old, the Voivode”⁴³. We think that the wedding might have been delayed because Lady Elena Ecaterina refused the marriage between the cousins. The *Chronicle of Eftimie*⁴⁴ gives us more details about the wedding, at Alexandru Lăpuşneanu's bidding: “... the great ruler, Alexandru the Voivode, after naming all the governing boyars under his power... the Voivode set up a brilliant feast and was rejoicing from all his heart... together with his beloved mother, Anastasia, the orthodox lady, and with all his boyars and all his people from the palace”⁴⁵. As the source shows, speaking about Alexandru Lăpuşneanu's enthronement ceremony, his mother Anastasia is described through the most beautiful words of love and called “*gospodja*” or “the Lady” (sic! – L.Z.)⁴⁶; yet, nothing is mentioned about Ruxandra and her mother, Elena Ecaterina.

Another document of the time - the *Polish-Moldavian Chronicle*⁴⁷- is of special interest in order to clarify the events. It mentioned that in 1552 “Sigismund August, the king of Poland, enthroned Alexandru, of Moldavian blood, as the Voivode of Moldavia. As for Joldea, he has been caught by the Moldavians who cut his nose and sent him to the monastery. This Alexandru, after getting to the throne, strangled the old wife of Petru the Voivode, and married her daughter, who had been engaged to Joldea”⁴⁸. It is also intriguing that the author names Alexandru Lăpuşneanu as “Moldavian blood” (*Tesz narodu voloskiego*)⁴⁹, without any mention of some noble/ruler's blood. It is possible that this document inspired Nicolae Iorga to name Alexandru Lăpuşneanu as “the first Bessarabian Voivode (by his mother)”⁵⁰. Aside from this opinion, the historiography also presents the view that, together with the death of Ştefan Rareş, the House of Muşat also died,

⁴² The *Chronicle of Azarie*, written in Medio-Bulgarian, comprises the history of Moldavia from 1551 to 1574. It continues the *Chronicle of Macarie* in a complete form that goes up to year 1551. We know nothing about the author of the chronicle except for what he himself writes in his chronicle, that “he was the youngest apprentice” of Macarie, the bishop of Roman. Azarie, as his monastic name shows, was a monk.

⁴³ *The Chronicle of Azarie*, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, pp. 126, 130.

⁴⁴ Eftimie was an official annalist of the Voivode Alexandru Lăpuşneanu. The chronicle is written in the Slavic language and presents the events of the history of Moldavia taking place from 1541 to 1554.

⁴⁵ *The Chronicle of Eftimie*, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, p. 124.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.124.

⁴⁷ *The Polish-Moldavian Chronicle*, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, pp. 164.-167.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Nicolae Iorga, *Opere economice* [Economic Works], Bucureşti, 1982, p. 611.

and Alexandru Lăpușneanu “began a new Moldavian reign”⁵¹.

These opinions might be wrong, as Alexandru Lăpușneanu sprang from two reigning bloodlines: the Bogdănești-Mușatini bloodline, through his father (he was the nephew of Ștefan cel Mare/Stephen the Great) and the Drăculești line, through his paternal grandmother, Maria Voichița, the daughter of Radu the Fair⁵². It is possible that his mother belonged to a boyar bloodline, as he was recognized and supported by a certain group of boyars from Moldavia and Poland. In the *Word about the Foundation of the Pângărați Monastery* it is shown that Alexandru Lăpușneanu had been chosen to be a ruler “from his mother’s womb, to be the *hospodar* of the Moldavian land”⁵³. Alexandru the Voivode (or former Petru the Steward) was the natural son of Bogdan III and Anastasia of Lăpușna⁵⁴. He had therefore a “ruler’s blood”, and it was not necessary to mention his maternal origin while acceding to the throne⁵⁵. A confirmation of this has been revealed by Constantin Rezachevici. Even before his arrival in Moldavia, Alexandru Lăpușneanu took an oath of fidelity to the Polish king. In the text of the homage and of the oath of fidelity, written on September 5, 1552, in Bakota, Alexandru named himself “I, Petru Alexandru, Voivode of the Moldavian and Wallachian Principalities”⁵⁶. More than 60 Moldavian boyars and 23 Polish noblemen attended the oath ceremony. Among the nobles, there was Stanisław Zamoyski, the hunter of Helm (the father of the well-known Jan Zamoyski)⁵⁷. As representatives

⁵¹ Idem, *Alexandru Lăpușneanu – primul domn basarabean (după mamă)* [Alexandru Lăpușneanu - the First Bessarabian Prince (After his Mother)], in “Revista Istorică”, 1918, Vol. IV, no. 1-3, p. 3; Idem, *Istoria Românilor...*, p. 102.

⁵² G. Pungă, *Țara Moldovei în vremea lui Alexandru Lăpușneanu* [The Land of Moldavia in the Time of Alexandru Lăpușneanu], Iași, 1994, p. 37-39.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.198-199, 306; P.Ș. Năsturel, *Cuvântul pentru zidirea mănăstirii Pângărați* [The Word for Building the Pângărați Monastery], in “Buletinul Bibliotecii Române”, Freiburg, 1983, p. 392-399.

⁵⁴ Sorin Iftimi, *Un model cultural oriental: soțiile ale domnilor români (secolele XVI-XVII)*, [An Oriental Cultural Model: The Wives of the Romanian Rulers (16th-17th Centuries)], in *De Potestate. Semne și expresii în Evul Mediu românesc* [De Potestate. Signs and Expressions in the Romanian Middle Ages], Iași, 2006, p. 324-325; Ștefan Sorin Gorovei, *Mușatinii...*, p. 98.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98-106.

⁵⁶ Constantin Rezachevici, *Cronologia domnilor...*, p. 617-619.

⁵⁷ The oath ceremony was attended by the Polish noblemen Matias Włodek, the Captain of Caminitza, Bernard Prethfici, starosta of Trębowla, Ioan Kamieniecki, the Voivode of Podolia, N. Sieniawski, the Voivode of Bełz, Stanislaw Tarło, Cristofor Widogłowski, the Commander of the pedestrian army, and others. Among the Moldavian boyars we may mention: “Negrilă, the great hetman, Dan the treasurer, Mogâldea the steward, Ion Moțoc, the eqquery, Neagu, starosta of Soroca, Toader, starosta of Hotin, Spancioc, the

of the Moldavian boyars we may mention Ion Movilă, Lord Steward of Suceava, married to Maria, the daughter of Petru Rareș and the (paternal) sister of Ruxanda, the wife of Alexandru Lăpușneanu. The newly enthroned ruler of the Moldavian Principality, Alexandru Lăpușneanu, was the brother-in-law of Ion Movilă (the father of Ieremia Movilă)⁵⁸ Erasm Otwinowski, who passed through Moldavia as an emissary, wrote in his work *The relation of the travel through Moldavia and Dobruja* (1557) about the brother of Alexandru Lăpușneanu: "I spent the night on the hills in front of Lăpușna, the town of the Voivode's brother, a turnpike man"⁵⁹.

As the documentary sources of the time shows, it is most probable that Alexandru Lăpușneanu came from a boyar's family and had close relatives, a mother and a brother. Nothing is known about his personal life before his marriage to Ruxandra, the daughter of Petru Rareș. But we may state, this marriage was performed out of political interest. As Sorin Eftimi wrote: "Ruxanda, Alexandru Lăpușneanu's wife, was a lady by birth, not only by marriage"⁶⁰, and she specified in the description on the tombstone (that she built for her brother, Ștefan the Voivode, at the Probota monastery, in 1552) that she is "the daughter of Petru Rareș the Voivode, and the lady of Alexandru the Voivode"⁶¹.

The marriage to the ruler's daughter doubled the reigning chances of Alexandru Lăpușneanu, as well as their descendants'. It is possible that the wedding did not take place initially because of Elena Ecaterina, firstly, because she hoped that her youngest son, Constantin, would come to the throne, and secondly, because she was against a marriage between close relatives. It is intriguing that this fact is not mentioned in any document of the time, even though marriage between cousins was prohibited by Church in the Medieval Moldavia, and no other similar case is known. Constantin Gane wrote about this marriage: "willy-nilly, she was to be his wife, even though they were cousins-german. But the metropolitan saw fit to state that, according to the dogmas, they were not related, as Rareș și

bailiff of the Iași district, etc.", according to Constantin Rezachevici, *Cronologia domnilor...*, p. 620; G. Pungă, *Țara Moldovei...*, p. 197-199.

⁵⁸ Eudoxiu Hurmuzachi, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor* [Documents on the History of Romanians], București, 1897, Vol. I, p. 185-186.

⁵⁹ *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign Travelers about the Romanian Countries], București, 1970, Vol. II, p. 120.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 324-325; Idem, *Doamnele și puterea. Statutul doamnei în Țările Române* [Women and Power. Status of Lady in the Romanian Principalities], in *De Potestate. Semne și expresii...*, p. 298.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 303; Nicolae Iorga, *Studii și documente* [Studies and Documents], București, 1903, Vol. V, p. 652.

Lăpuşneanu were only natural children”⁶². We do not agree with these mismatched statements that do not seem convincing enough. Moldavia was the only country in Europe where natural children had the same rights to reign as the legitimate sons. The case of Petru Rareş and Alexandru Lăpuşneanu serves as a confirmation, while they were the rulers' children, born by their legitimate wives and not by concubines. They both got to the throne at an advanced age and were able to fight for power thanks to their descent that could be even exclusively confirmed through their mothers and then recognized by the society.

As a conclusion, we presume that women (mother and wife) played a crucial part in the political career of Alexandru Lăpuşneanu. His mother was a “lady” who gave birth to a “ruler's son”, and this statute allowed Petru the Steward to claim the throne and become a ruler - „Alexandru the Voivode, dubbed Lăpuşneanu”⁶³. His marriage to Ruxanda was also a political instrument of affirmation as a Voivode, on “a ruler's bloodline”. As he was born from “a ruler's bone” and related to a lady having “royal blood”, Alexandru Lăpuşneanu was, in all certainty, the successor of the house of Bogdan-Muşat.

THE MOVILEŞTI DYNASTY

One of the most pointy and controversial matters of the historical literature is the origin of Ieremia Movilă and his right to reign. Historians have dedicated a series of scientific articles to the given matter, but, regretfully, up to this time there is no such thing as a synthesis work on the topic. Historiography records various opinions, and one of them is based on Ion Neculce's statement that the Movileşti family roots come from the Purice Usher, the saviour of Stephen the Great in the battle of Şcheia (1486)⁶⁴. Ştefan S. Gorovei, in a special study *From “Purice-Movilă” and “Barnovschi-Moghilă. Two (not only) genealogical explanations”*, brings convincing arguments that the Movilă family was not related to the Purice family and that “in the word of Neculce we can find a reflection of the tradition of the Movilă family, and not of the Purice family”⁶⁵. According to his statement, the

⁶² Constantin Gane, *Trecute vieţi de doamne şi domniţe...*, p. 63.

⁶³ Grigore Ureche, *Letopiseţul Ţării Moldovei...*, p. 86.

⁶⁴ Matei Cazacu, *A existat aprodul Purice?* [Did the Purice Usher exist?], in “Magazin Istoric”, 1970, Vol. IV, no. 4, p. 69; Idem, *Pierre Mohyla (Petru Movilă) et la Roumanie: essai historique et bibliographique*, in “Harvard Ukrainian Studies”, 1984, Vol. VIII, 1, no. 1-2, p. 193-195; Idem, *La famille et le statut de la femme en Moldavie (XIV-XIX siècles)*, in “Revista de Istorie Socială”, 1999, Vol. II-III, p. 1-16; M. Ciubotaru, *De la Vilneşti la Movilă lui Burcel. Observaţii onomastice şi istorice* [From Vilneşti to Burcel's Movilă. Onomastic and Historical Remarks], in “Arhiva Genealogică”, 1994, Vol. VI, no. 1-2, p. 143-149.

⁶⁵ Ştefan Sorin Gorovei, „Din Purice-Movilă” şi „Barnovschi-Moghilă”. Două explicaţii (nu

origin of the Movilă family – that roots “in the bloodline of the old times' Voivodes” – must be looked up for in the ascent on the female line of the Movilă family⁶⁶.

In a special study, Gorovei analyses the genealogy of Ieremia Movilă's mother and confirms that Maria, the wife of the great Chancellor Ion Movilă and the mother of the three sons: Ieremia – the ruler of Moldavia, Simion – a “passenger” on the throne of both Principalities, and Gheorghe, the Metropolitan of Moldavia, was the daughter of Petru Rareș, probably the eldest, born of a previous marriage to Maria (†1529)⁶⁷. Dumitru Nastase shares the same opinion, that confirms, in one of his articles: “... *the definitive conclusion is that the father of Maria Movilă is the “despot”* (according to Ștefan Bogdan) Petru Rareș⁶⁸.

There are several hypotheses on the origin of Maria⁶⁹ but all the scientific debates lead to the only and indisputable conclusion that the determining part in choosing the Moveștei dynasty as the ruling family was played by the maternal line, as Maria belonged to an authentic ruler's bloodline⁷⁰.

The opinion of the renowned researcher I. C. Miculescu-Prajescu is also intriguing. He led a profound analysis on the documents related to the enthronement of Ieremia Movilă and noticed a very interesting detail: “a significant detail must be

numai) genealogice [From “Purice-Movilă” and “Barnovschi-Moghilă”. Two (not only) Genealogical Explanations], in “Arhiva Genealogică”, 1996, Vol. III (VIII), no. 3-4, p. 329.

⁶⁶ Idem, *Pe marginea unei filiații incerte: Maria Movilă – fiica lui Petru Rareș* [An Uncertain Descendant: Maria Movila – Petru Rares's Daughter], in “Cercetări istorice”, 1980, Vol. XI, p. 325-330; Nicolae Iorga, *Doamna lui Ieremia Vodă* [Wife of Jeremiah Voda], in “A.R.M.S.I.”, 1910, Vol. XXXII, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Ștefan Sorin Gorovei, *Pe marginea unei filiații incerte...*, p. 326.

⁶⁸ Dumitru Nastase, *Maria, mama lui Ieremia Movilă, fiică a „despotului” Petru Rareș* [Maria, the Mother of Jeremia Movila, the Daughter of the “Despot” Petru Rares], in “Arhiva Genealogică”, 1996, Vol. III (VIII), p. 303-306.

⁶⁹ C. Gane considered that the mother of Maria, “Ruxanda, was the daughter of Brâncovici, the king of the Serbs, the sister of Lady Elena of Petru Rareș. Therefore, Ruxanda, Lăpușneanu's Lady (the daughter of Petru Rareș and Elena Brâncovici) was the cousin of this Maria Movilă. It is easy to understand that the children of Ion and Maria, nephews of the cousins of Lăpușneanu, quickly switched up their statute – especially on the time of a reign that had cut down all the old boyars, in order to bring up new ones” (Constantin Gane, *Trecute vieți de doamne și domnițe...*, p. 124). The Polish historian Zd. Spieralski, based on unmentioned sources, writes that Maria was a younger sister of Ruxanda Lăpușneanu, so she was another daughter of Elena Brâncovici and she had been first married to Ion Joldea and then (in 1555, at the latest) got married, again, to Ion Movilă (Zdisław Spieralski, *Awantury moldawskie* [Moldavian Adventures], Warszawa, 1964, p. 116-117). The Polish historian Wl. Dworzaczek, in his study *The Genealogy* mentions that Ion Movilă had gotten married in 1553/1555 to Maria,, “a possible daughter of Rareș, the widow of an unknown man” (Władisław Dworzaczek, *Genealogia* [Genealogy], 1959, Warszawa, p. 89).

⁷⁰ Ștefan Sorin Gorovei, *Pe marginea unei filiații incerte: Maria Movilă...*, p. 330.

revealed: it is no longer spoken of “*descending from a ruler's bone*” but from “*ruler's blood*” ... for the first time in the Moldavian history, not only paternal descent is taken into consideration but also the maternal one”⁷¹.

No matter the political, social, moral prestige of Ieremia Movilă, it would not have been sufficient in order to ensure the enthronement of the Movilești family as a dynasty, at a time we know there were other descendants from „*a ruler's bone*” who were also striving for getting the throne in Iași, for example: Ion Bogdan, the son of Ștefăniță; Bogdan, the son of Iancu Sasul (*Sas = Transylvanian Saxon T/N*); Wolfgang, the son of Rareș. I. C. Miculescu-Prăjescu highlights the fact that most of the rulers of the Moldavian country were descendants born from extramarital relationships. “If we were to look into the Voivode line, from Stephen the Great to the enthronement of Ieremia Movilă in 1595, we find that, among the 21 rulers that succeeded each other on the throne of Moldavia for 90 years, there are only 4 legitimate sons that follow their father's reign. In more than 75% of the other cases, the throne goes to sons born out of wedlock, brothers or sons of the predecessors”⁷². The father of the Voivodes Ieremia and Simion was the Great Steward Ion Movilă from Hudești, on the river Bașău, in the Dorohoi region. The Hudici boyar bloodline had no relation to the “*ruler's bone*” and the reigning origin of the Movilă family “must not be searched for in this direction, but rather exclusively on the line of their mother, Maria”, the Princess of the Great Steward Ion Movilă who was the daughter of Petru Rareș⁷³. The author confirms that the political prestige of Ieremia Movilă was not sufficient in order to bring him to his enthronement, in 1595. It is clear that the naming of Aron the Voivode as the throne successor took place due to the tradition of a “*ruler's bone*”, or at least, of a “*ruler's bloodline*” descent, and we can reason that by the following facts: 1. “I did not name a no account, imaginary offspring as your ruler, but rather a pure blood Moldavian boyar” (*The proclamation of Chancellor Jan Zamoyski*); 2) Ieremia... “from the blood of the old voivodes” (*The French report of March 4, 1596*); 3) “Ieremia is born in that country from the oldest and the most noble family” (*King Zygmunt III Waza's Diploma, March 25, 1597*); 4) “Ieremia di casa reale” (*The Holy See instructions of 1596*)⁷⁴.

Out of all the scientific debates, we may conclude that the female line played the decisive part in the accession to the throne of the Movilești dynasty. Maria, the

⁷¹ I.C. Miculescu-Prăjescu, *Noi date privind înscăunarea Movileștilor* [New Data on the Enthronement of the Movila Family], in “Arhiva Genealogică”, Iași, 1997, Vol. IV(IX), no. 1-2, p. 166.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.160.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.167; *Documente privind Istoria României* [Documents on the History of Romania], București, 1953, A. Moldavia, Vol. II (1606-1610), pp. 41, 100.

⁷⁴ I.C. Miculescu-Prăjescu, *Noi date privind înscăunarea Movileștilor...*, p. 173.

wife of the Great Steward, Ion Movilă, and the mother of the three sons – Ieremia, Simion and Gheorghe – had a pure ruler's blood. The members of the Movilești family came into prominence as a reigning dynasty on female line, and the dynasty kept its continuity on the same way. The male line of Ieremia Movilă died out after the first generation; none of Ieremia Movilă's sons was married or left any heirs. And it is only through his daughters, married to Polish dignitaries, that Ieremia Movilă's descendants – the nephews, nieces, grandsons – became kings of Poland, politicians, poets, military in the royal suite, etc., being related to notorious royal families of Europe⁷⁵.

THE LADIES' REGENCY

From the Medieval documents, we may observe that the wives of the Voivodes of Moldavia and of Wallachia exerted their power almost constantly, and, according to the customs, either by replacing their husbands in their absence or by fostering their minor sons. This Romanian custom gives the lady the right to rule the public affairs. The Lady made resolutions and shared the justice, advising with the high dignitaries, when the ruler was at war or went on a distant travel. The Lady exerted the expected obligations when the ruler did not leave a regent in his place; but, even when a regent was appointed, the Lady was still the one to hold the ruling power. This was the public custom that gave women public right duties, quite largely⁷⁶. In critical situations, when it was needed, the reigning ladies were determined and decisive and they actively participated to the political life, supporting their husbands and children.

As I have mentioned above, no case of ladies' succession to the throne is known, but the ladies were able to be regent while their sons, chosen to be rulers, were still minor. The regent Lady had the right to participate to the country's council and to make decisions referring to matters of major importance, related to internal or external politics. The Lady had the right to sign internal or external documents, to be involved in the country's management and was responsible for governing and administrating the country.

According to the opinion of Șarlota Solcan, "once involved in the power struggle for the right to succession of their sons or sons-in-law, the Ladies tried to

⁷⁵Lilia Zabolotnaia, *Movilencile și descendenții. Pagini necunoscute. Unele contribuții la genealogia descendenților lui Ieremia Movilă* [Movilences and Descendants. Unknown Pages. Some Contributions to the Genealogy of the Descendants of Jeremiah Movila], in "Tyragetia", 2008, Vol. II (XVII), 2008.

⁷⁶George Fotino, *Pagini din istoria dreptului românesc. Antologie, introducere, note și bibliografie* [Pages in the History of Romanian Law. Anthology, Introduction, Notes and Bibliography], București, 1972, p. 59.

both orientate in the internal political thicket in order to insure the support of a certain group of boyars, as well as to get external support. Generally, they demonstrated a lot of political realism... The widow ladies' activity, dedicated to ensuring the reign of their sons was rarely mentioned in the chronicles. Their attention was rather held by the role of these ladies after their sons got to be rulers, and they got to be regent. The measures taken during the regencies of these ladies, as well as personal relations of the relaters with the ladies in question strongly influenced their image that the relaters created and left to posterity"⁷⁷.

The case of Elena Ecaterina and of his daughter, Ruxandra, may serve as an example, especially since they are worth to be compared, being in contradiction. Both ladies, the mother and the daughter, got manifestly involved in the country's governing process in order to ensure the succession of their descendants to the throne. The contemporaries give a fair image of Elena Ecaterina, while writing about the education of their sons and describing it as rather negative, and accusing her of ruling "*without any council and any rules*"⁷⁸.

In *The Chronicle of Azarie*, comprising the period starting from the beginning of the reign of Ștefan Rareș (1551), there is an unfavourable description about the reign of the eldest son of Petru Rareș. The author was contemporary to the events narrated in the *Chronicle* and his name is Macarie, Bishop of Roman. He was the apprentice of Teoctist II, the Metropolitan of Moldavia (1508-1528), for whose teachings and character he gives out words of praise in his chronicle. "And, according to the advice of the bishops and of the entire council, he was raised to reign, on the throne of his father, Iliăș (1546-1551), a man of soft heart and weak soul; he was in no way similar to his father, as if he would not have been his son, but he affected and changed everything, that is the holy churches' institution and the ruling laws, and he had no mercy on the poor, accounting himself for a very wise man and boasting about his bird-hunting skills. And occupying himself with all these vanities, this conceited man listened to Agar's sons during the day, and during the night he gave his ears and heart to the unclean Turkish girls, until the devil got a definitive dwelling in him; for he never wanted to see in front of his eyes people of good thought...

But I will tell you about lord Iliăș, about the way he left everything, his sceptre and his mother, together with his brothers and, attracted by the desire for the Turkish vanities he left... and the throne did not remain without a master, for they at once... gave the sceptre to Ștefan (1551-1552) the brave-hearted one, that

⁷⁷ Șarolta Solcan, *Femeile din Moldova, Transilvania și Țara Românească în Evul Mediu* [Women from Moldova, Transylvania and the Romanian Country in the Middle Ages], București, 2005, p. 227.

⁷⁸ *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, p. 120.

had earlier been destined to reign, of the same blood as Iliaş, but having very different habits... and proved himself to be a bright-souled ruler, and had a good and beautiful face”⁷⁹.

The *Chronicle of Eftimie* also speaks about these facts: “In May 1544, Petru sent his eldest son, Iliaş, to Țarigrad (Constantinople, T/N) to the great emperor and the only ruler, at the imperial Gate and he was accompanied by Petru the Voivode himself and by Lady Elena and all the great boyars and all the bishops and all the Moldavian abbots, to the Danube river.

For in his childhood he had been taught the Christian sacraments, but, later on, he liked the Arabian and Muslim law of Muhammad better, so he abandoned the right faith... and chose some Agarians (Turks. The legend says that the Turks are the descendants of Agar, mentioned in the Bible) as his counsellors... he sent his servants to buy some unclean Turkish whores, with a lot of thousands of aspres and golden ducats and brought them to him, and he, the unclean, started, to keep himself from wine and pork... On Wednesdays and Fridays and during the 40 days lent he eat meat, just like during the other holy Lents.

After all these, at the urge of his mother, Lady Elena, he became a torturer and a people murderer... So, the boyars, seeing it is so bad... started to run away from the country.

And they have also chased the most holy and the bright father of the priests and the teacher of Moldavia, Macarie, the bishop of Roman (1531-1558), away from his throne, unfairly and without any council or rule, following the advice and urge of his mother (*gospodja* – L.Z.), Lady Elena, and of Nour, and of Mitrofan⁸⁰, who had been a bishop”⁸¹.

Besides the insults and the accusations against Lady Elena, regarding the bad governing of the country by her son, the author writes that the latter also “shed badness” around him: “11 of July, 1551, Ștefan the Young, the Voivode, got the sceptre of Moldavia's reign. He was the second son of Petru the Voivode. And in the beginning, he appeared to be good and a God loving man, and he was comforting everyone and made gifts to churches and acted in a very Christian manner...

But it was not long before he unexpectedly changed, and the evil started to flow out... And he started to think and to do everything like his brother, and to even go ahead of him sometimes. For he also brought Turkish sloths and mullahs... this filthy, blood drinker murderer was full of rage against women and men equally and dirtied himself with all impious acts, he was debauched and lustful and he was robbing and killing... he was killed by the boyars' council, and

⁷⁹ *The Chronicle of Azarie*, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, pp. 100, 102, 104-105.

⁸⁰ Bishop of Roman around 1550, and bishop of Rădăuți since 1551.

⁸¹ *The Chronicle of Eftimie*, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, p. 119-120.

he got the rightful punishment for his meanness, as he ended his unclean and debauched life with a bad death"⁸².

Between the chronicler's lines, full of hatred and contempt for Elena and her sons, the question appears: how could a lady, who was so attached to her husband, to faith, and to her country, raised such "debauched sons... lustful and dirty murderers" (?- L.Z.). In exchange, the daughter of Elena and Petru Rareș, Ruxandra, proved herself to be an independent, strong and creditable woman. She was a faithful partner and a good support for her husband, Alexandru Lăpușeanu, and that is why, after his death, it is to her that the boyars consigned the country's throne, until her sons had reached the coming of age.

The original texts of the time expressively illustrate the life and the political activity of Ruxandra. In *The Chronicle of Azarie*, we find the most beautiful words about the political abilities of Ruxanda: "When Bogdan received the sceptre of power, because he was still young, Ruxanda, his mother, came to rule the country. Her counselors were Gavriil the Great Steward (Great Steward of Moldavia between 1568 and 1571) and Dumitru the Hetman (back then he was ex-hetman and magistrate (pârcălab) of Suceava, function held by him between 1557-1561) and the Lady (the tsarevna!) was reigning over everyone. For she had a man's mind, a great soul and she was gilded with wisdom and a living heaven who fed her garden with blessings. And this most generous "Lady" (*tsarevna!* - empress, t/n) honoured the princes beneath her with thousands of charities and was comforting them with very rich gifts and great honour and saw everything around her, without sparing the gold and without keeping an account, she was a nourishing rain who comforted the those who laboured under diseases, gave blessings to the helpless and poor and filled the hands of those tormented by their old age, full of pain, and urged the priests to pray by giving them comforting charities and cooled down the heart of the God-loving monks of the monasteries, who led a clean life, and of those who spent a life full of passions in seclusion and often checked up on them. And, everywhere, the holy Churches were nurtured for she was like a golden river with silver waves, and the poor took water and drank from it, till they were satiated. But she had a very weak body and always rested it on soft bedding. Together, the mother and the son, ruled for two years and nine months. And, day by day, as her sickness grew, it asked for the clay of the human being. And she has paid her duty, that is, she passed away in the year of 1571, in November, and was buried in honour in the praying house that they had founded, Slatina"⁸³. The *Chronicle* of Grigore Ureche mentions, in the same manner, the special features of Ruxandra's character:

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 121-122.

⁸³ *The Chronicle of Azarie*, in *Cronicile slavo-române din sec. XV-XVI...*, pp. 135, 148.

“After the death of Alexandru the Voivode, as the good son of Bogdan the Voivode was 15, they all put him on the throne, but the country's affairs were ruled by his mother, Ruxanda, for she was a smart, worthy woman, led by God, full of mercy and a lover of all good things”⁸⁴. This description of Lady Ruxanda deeply reflects the time's view on women, the opinion that the woman as a queen, as an empress, was the regent of her children. European history knows many situations of this kind. In Ruxanda's case, the fact that she was “smart, worthy and full of mercy” was acknowledged by the boyars, by men, who would have loved to lead the country on their own (under any guise – as regents or as lovers). Grigore Ureche speaks about Ruxanda's wisdom and describes it resulting from the others' sayings, and this only makes her merits greater.

One of the most persuasive examples is Elisabeta Movilă. After the death of Ieremia Movilă, she fought in order to get the throne for her sons. Miron Costin writes about her that “she was a wicked... and rapacious woman”⁸⁵, who “poisoned her brother-in-law, Simion the Voivode”⁸⁶. After the death of Simion, Elisabeta started an atrocious struggle with her sister-in-law, the wife of Simion Movilă, who had presented her son, Mihăilaș, as a candidate for the throne. Finally, the struggle was won by Constantin, the son of Ieremia, helped by his brothers-in-law from Poland. Constantin was a child, and, as a ruler, he was fostered by her mother, Elisabeta, an energetic and daring woman (1608-1611)⁸⁷.

At the battle at Cornul lui Sas, on the Prut River, Constantin was beaten by Ștefan Tomșa and the Turks. Constantin Movilă died in retreat, but Elisabeta did not lose hope and started to prepare a new campaign; Ștefan Tomșa had no support from the boyars and “when the lady of Ieremia Movilă heard about these misunderstandings of Ștefan the Voivode, and having a son who was still little – Bogdan, the Voivode – urged her sons-in-law, Vișnioviețchi, and prince Corețki of Poland, and also called upon the support of Nistor Ureche. The Lady came on her own, together with her sons-in-law and with the army, against Ștefan the Voivode and having an army ahead, at the Tătăreni village... That war happened in 1615... After the army of Ștefan the Voivode was defeated, he left for Wallahia... And the lady of Ieremia the Voivode was in Iași, with her son, Bogdan the Voivode, but all the councils were led by Nistor Ureche”⁸⁸.

⁸⁴ Grigore Ureche, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei...*, p. 86.

⁸⁵ Nicolae Iorga, *Viața femeilor în trecutul românesc* [The Life of Women in the Romanian History], Vălenii de Munte, 1910, p. 24.

⁸⁶ Miron Costin, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* [Chronicle of Moldavia], Chișinău, Editura Hyperion, 1990, p. 151.

⁸⁷ Petre P. Panaitescu, *Istoria Românilor...*, p. 191.

⁸⁸ Miron Costin, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei...*, p. 151-152.

The document says that Alexandru Movilă, the brother of Constantin, was acclaimed ruler of Moldavia, but in reality, the country was ruled by Lady Elisabeta and the High Steward Nistor Ureche, a faithful friend of the Movilă family. This reign was short, because after a year the Turks removed Alexandru Movilă from the throne and enslaved Lady Elisabeta and her children. Before leaving, “the lady came to great dishonour, and she wrote about it to the boyars... boyars, the pagan humiliated me”⁸⁹. Lady Elisabeta unthreaded her hair and cut it, as a sign of mourning, and put it in a round, silvered box, which is kept to the present time at the Sucevița Monastery.

The end of the “beautiful, ambitious and proud” Lady Elisabeta was tragic. She did not get the throne for her sons, was forced to become a Turk, but she remained in history as being “the only Lady of the Moldavian Country, twice”⁹⁰, and the mother of the four daughters who, “through their marriages with Polish dignitaries, have kept the genetic heritage of the Movilă family, and their descendants became relatives to notorious royal families of Europe”⁹¹.

CONCLUSIONS

As final considerations, we would like to emphasize that the case of women in the view of the political history is of great interest for our past as well as gives us suggestions for a new view of history. In addition, we need to mention that this paper tries to present the political history through the filter of the “feminine history”. Regretfully, the feminine side of Romanian history has been ignored for many years and it is only in the last decade that it is deeply researched by the colleagues from Romania⁹². Without pretending to fully solve the problem, we

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁹⁰ Constantin Gane, *Trecute vieți de doamne și domnițe...*, p. 148.

⁹¹ Lilia Zabolotnaia, *Movilencile și descendenții...*, p. 37.

⁹² M.M. Székely, *Pentru o istorie a vieții zilnice* [For a History of Daily Life], in “Magazin istoric”, 1997, Vol. XXXI, no. 5 (362), p. 57-59; Idem, *Structuri de familie în societatea medievală moldovenească* [Family Structures in the Moldavian Medieval Society], in “Arhiva Genealogică”, 1997, Vol. IV (IX), no. 1-2, p. 74-76; Idem, *Viața de familie în Moldova Medievală* [Family Life in Medieval Moldova], in “Magazin istoric”, 1999, Vol. XXXI, no. 10 (367), p. 75-77; M. Cazacu, *La famille et le statut de la femme en Moldavie (XIV-XIX siècles)*, in “Revista de Istorie Socială”, Iași, 1999, Vol. II-III, p. 1-16; C. Ghițulescu, *Zestre între normă și practică. Țara Românească în secolul al XVII-lea* (I-II) [Dowry between Norm and Practice. Wallachia in the 17th century], in “Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie”, 2000, Vol. XVII, p. 213-222; 2001, Vol. XVIII, p. 255-263; Idem, *În șalvari și cu ișlic* [In the Baggy Trousers and with a Tall Hat], București, 2004; S. Iftimi, *Un model cultural oriental: soțiile ale domnilor români (secolele XVI-XVII)* [An

consider that it is an indisputable fact that studying history without a holistic view gives a unilateral result. Thus, the presented study is only an essay to approach a very delicate matter – the role of women in determining the ruling dynasties in the Medieval Moldavia and the Ladies' regency. The documentary material of the time clearly reflects the situation and the statute of women. To a great extent, an important role was played by ladies in the continuity of the ruling dynasties, that is, the throne was inherited on the female line, “blood out of blood” of the reigning bloodline. Besides, the historical facts show that some of the Medieval Moldavia's ladies were true historical characters.

Oriental Cultural Model: the wives of the Romanian Rulers (16th-17th Centuries)], in *De Potestate. Semne și expresii...*; Idem *Doamnele și puterea...*; A. Ciupală, *Femeia în societatea românească a secolului al XIX-lea* [The Woman in the Romanian Society of the 19th Century], București, 2003; D.H. Mazilu, *Văduvele sau despre istorie la feminin* [Widows or History from a Feminine Perspective], București, 2008.