MESSENGERS (*OLĂCARI*) AND WAYS OF COMMUNICATING IN MOLDAVIA (15ᵀᴴ–17ᵀᴴ CENTURIES)

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Abstract: The present paper is part of wider research on the history of communications and it is focused on some of the messengers in late Moldavian medieval society (15ᵗʰ–17ᵗʰ centuries). In the Moldavian space, we cannot speak of a system of messengers like in Western Europe; however, the monarchy tried to organize a post service employing specialized personnel to deliver news and letters. The first messengers who were mentioned in the documents of the time were called olăcari, *and they dispatched news and letters from the prince, being people very close to him, whom he trusted.*

Keywords: Moldavian Principality, olăcar, messenger, letters, communications.

Rezumat: Mesageri (olăcari) și modalități de comunicare în Moldova (secolele XV-XVII). Materialul face parte dintr-o cercetare mai amplă dedicată istoriei comunicării. În atenția cititorilor sunt aduși o parte dintre mesagerii prezenți în societatea medievală moldovenească târzie (secolele XV-XVII). În spațiul moldovenesc nu putem vorbi de un sistem de mesageri, așa cum exista în vestul Europei, însă Domnia a încercat să organizeze un serviciu de poștă cu personal specializat, care să ducă știri și scrisori. Primii mesageri atestați se numeau olăcari și mergeau cu vești și scrisori din partea domnului, fiind oameni apropiați ai acestuia.

INTRODUCTION

Mentioned since ancient times, messengers have made an important contribution to the way we communicate in all historical periods, including the late Mid-

dle Ages. Throughout history, messengers have provided mobility for news or letters and have been regarded as the liaison men who travelled across vast territories and braved dangers of all kinds to spread information. The means by which they managed to travel certain routes were diverse, but distance was the main enemy of the messengers, due to the difficulties posed by the state of the roads or various natural factors[1]. However, over the years, there have been various ways for messengers to cover long distances in a short time. In ancient Egypt couriers sailed the Nile canals to communicate information, in the Roman and later the Byzantine and other eastern empires they used horses for transport[2], while in the Inca, Maya and Aztec empires across the ocean, messengers ('chaski') ran to the nearest town or village[3].

      Both in Europe and in the Romanian territories, in the medieval period, we can distinguish two types of correspondence: the official correspondence, related to the ruler of the territory – which could concern matters of internal organization, whether political, economic or military, but could also involve matters of a personal nature –, and the private correspondence of the subjects, whether they were nobles, clergy or other categories of the population.

      In the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, the lordship was the central institution that exercised several functions[4]. From the point of view of communication (correspondence), two "types" of people were used to relay news and send orders within and outside the territory of the ruler. Thus, for the part of external communication, the maintenance of diplomatic relations or other matters of this nature, emissaries (*soli*) were used[5]. They were often people close to the ruler, noblemen or trusted men, even close relatives. For example, in 1688, Şerban

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[1] Ovidiu Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor. Ştiri şi război în sec. XV-XVI* [The Power of Words. News and War in the 15th–16th Centuries]*,* Târgovişte, Cetatea de Scaun Publishing House, 2014, p. 177.

[2] Jason Fossella, *The dromos and Byzantine Communications, Diplomacy, and Bureaucracy*, *518-1204*, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2023, pp. 27, 71-72.

[3] Dennis Ogburn, *Dynamic Display, Propaganda, and the Reinforcement of Provincial Power in the Inca Empire*, in "Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association", June 2008, p. 232.

[4] Nicolae Grigoraş, *Instituţii feudale din Moldova. Organizarea de stat până la mijlocul sec. al XVIII-lea* [Feudal Institutions in Moldova. State Organization up to the Middle of the 18th Century], Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1971, p. 13-14.

[5] Ovid Sachelarie, Nicolae Stoicescu, *Instituţii feudale din Ţările Române. Dicţionar* [Feudal Institutions in the Romanian Principalities. A Dictionary], Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1988, p. 448.

Cantacuzino, the prince of Wallachia, sent his brother Iordache Cantacuzino, Constantin Bălăceanu, his son-in-law, and Şerban Cantacuzino, who was the prince's nephew, to Vienna[6]. Emissaries were the diplomats of the time, empowered to conclude treaties, swear on behalf of the ruler or negotiate matters of a political nature. The emissaries communicated news that was of importance to the state, the ruler or the nobles. At the same time, the emissaries had the task of monitoring the political situation and the relations of the European states or the Ottoman Empire to prevent possible danger or to influence the political direction the country was to take[7].

Unlike emissaries (*soli*), messengers had the mission of delivering news and letters, being mere "transmitters", they had no rank and did not deal with political matters, but only facilitated the exchange of correspondence. Although some of the messengers travelled with news and letters to neighboring countries, they simply carried that information. As for the selection of couriers for this work, while the emissaries came from the princely chancellery or from the council, being people close to the ruler, the messengers were chosen from among the servants, who in turn came from different social backgrounds[8]. Thus, they could also have other duties; for example, we have come across situations where some messengers, when they were not out with news, oversaw the collection of taxes for the prince[9]. Finally, not only did the ruler use these messengers to pass on information, but also various travelers, clerics and others who were travelling and could carry a message.

As for the circulation of information outside the area controlled by the prince, we are talking about a very diverse private correspondence. In the late Middle Ages, it was not just the prince's servants who went around with news and letters, and information didn't just circulate with the ruler's knowledge. Clerics communicated with each other through their own people, whom they sent with news or letters, just like messengers[10].

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[6] Radu Greceanu, *Istoria domniei lui Constantin Basarab Brîncoveanu Voievod* (1688-1714) [History of the Reign of Constantin Basarab Brîncoveanu Voievod (1688–1714)], Edited by Aurora Ilieş, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1970, p. 55.

[7] Ovid Sachelarie, Nicolae Stoicescu*, Instituţii feudale...*, p. 449.

[8] Nicolae Grigoraş, *Instituţii feudale...*, p. 368-369.

[9] *Documente privind istoria României* [Documents on the History of Romania], Series A, 17th century, Vol. II, no. 20, p. 162 (Further cited as: *DIR*).

[10] *Călători străini despre Ţările Române* [Foreign Travelers on Romanian Countries], Vol. VII, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing House, 1980, p. 90.

Merchants or travelers, due to the specific nature of their activity, often carried news and messages. Moreover, rumors circulating among the population, even at the princely court, were also a form of communication and could take countless forms and variations. The information circulating among the population was a very complex "system"[11].

Throughout time, in the Romanian space, those who transmitted news and letters were mentioned in documents, in the narrations of foreign travelers or in chronicles under a variety of names. In the various documents issued by the ruler we find them most often called *olăcari*[12] (specific term for messengers). Beginning in the 17th century, the term *călăraș de Țarigrad*[13] (former mounted fighters turned messengers) appears in various texts of the time designating this new occupation. Other common names are those of *beșlii* and *ceauși*, which the chronicles of the time mention as people of the Ottoman Empire who performed several functions or had various duties, including that of carrying news and letters[14]. Because this subject is vast, in the present study we propose to analyze only some of the servants who carried news and letters from the prince. Thus, in what follows, we have turned our attention to the *olăcari* and their activity in the 15th–17th centuries.

OLĂCARI IN SOCIETY AND IN THE SERVICE OF THE PRINCE

In the Romanian territories, as the messengers were called *olăcari*[15], their activities were called *olăcărie*[16]. As for the term *olac*, it was used in the Ottoman

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[11] Ovidiu Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor...*, pp. 146-147.

[12] *Catalogul documentelor Moldovenești din arhiva istorică centrală a statului (1387-1620)* [Catalogue of Moldavian Documents in the Central Historical State Archive (1387–1620)], Vol. I, Bucharest, 1957, no. 821, p. 205.

[13] Mihai Regleanu, Iulia Gheorghian, Veronica Vasilescu, Doina Duca, *Catalogul documentelor moldovenești din arhiva istorică centrală a statului (1621-1652)* [Catalogue of Moldavian Documents in the Central Historical State Archive (1621–1652)], Vol. II, no. 1956, Bucharest, 1959, p. 383; *Documenta Romaniae Historica* [Romania's Historical Documents], Series A, Vol. XIX, no. 452, p. 621-622 (Further cited as: *DRH*).

[14] Mihail Guboglu, Mustafa Mehmet, *Cronici turcești privind Țările Române. Extrase* [Turkish Chronicles on the Romanian Countries. Excerpts], Vol. I, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1966, p. 31.

[15] *DRH*, Series A, Vol. VIII, no. 333, p. 361-362; Ion Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* [Chronicle of Moldova], Edited by Iorgu Iordan, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing House, 1968, p. 56; Miron Costin, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei de la Aron Vodă încoace* [Chronicle of Moldavia from Aron Voda onwards], Edited by P. P. Panaitescu, Bucharest, 1944, p. 105.

[16] *DIR*, 17th century, Series A, vol. II, no. 78, p. 70; Lazăr Șăineanu, *Influența orientală asupra*

Empire with reference to messengers (*ulak*)[17] and it appears in documents issued by the sultan in the 15th–16th centuries[18]. Western sources have confirmed that the Ottomans used the term *ulak* for people who delivered news and letters[19]. However, originally the term did not belong to the Turks, but they in turn took it from the peoples who made up the Mongol Empire. According to the 13th-century chronicler Alaeddin Ata Malik-i-Cuvayni, the name *ulak* was already known and used in this vast empire, the term being employed at first to designate the horses used by messengers, and the stable for these horses (the station) being designated by the term *yam*[20]. It should also be noted that in the Mongol Empire, some messengers were called "Tatars", but this name, according to Faris Çerçi, often referred to a fast messenger[21]. In fact, due to the size of the empire and the various ethnic groups that made up this vast territory, several names referring to messengers were encountered, but the term *ulak* was generally known[22]. The use of Tartars as messengers is also found later, according to Ümit Ekin, in the Ottoman Empire, where people were sometimes chosen from among the Tatar military who could carry messages[23]. Considering the statements of the two researchers, we believe that some of the Tatars were engaged in the transportation of messages because they had certain knowledge that helped them in this activity and certain benefits.

limbei şi culturei române [Oriental Influence on Romanian Language and Culture], Vol. II, Bucharest, 1900, p. 277-278.

[17] Zaynel Ozlu, *The menzil staff working in the menzil organisation in Göynük, Bolu*, in "Trakya Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi", Vol. VIII, no. 2, 2006, p. 2-3.

[18] V.L. Ménage (edited with additions by Colın Imber), *Ottoman Historical Documents: The Institutions of an Empire*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2021, pp. 36, 42.

[19] Colin Heywood, *The evolution of the courier order (ulaḳ ḥukmi) in Ottoman chancery practice (Fifteenth to eighteenth centuries)*, in Johannes Zimmermann, Christoph Herzog, Raoul Motika (eds.), *Osmanische Welten: Quellen und Fallstudien* [Ottoman Worlds: Source and Case Studies], Vol. 8, Bamberg, University of Bamberg Press, 2016, p. 270-272.

[20] *The Ta'rikh-i-Jahán-gusha of Ald'u'd-Din Atá Malik-i-Juwayni. Containing the history of Chingiz Khan and his successors*, part I, Edited by Mirza Muhammad ibn Abdul-Wahháb-i-Qazwini, Leyden, London, 1912, pp. 25-26; Gábor Ágoston, Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, New York, 2009, p. 374.

[21] Faris Çerçi, *Messengers (Dispatch-riders) during the Progress Era of Ottoman Empire and the Perspectives of Mustafa Âli of Gallipoli*, in "Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi", 2003, p. 196.

[22] Ishak Emin Aktepe, *Ebû Mûsâ (Ebû Abdillâh) Uleyy b. Rebâh b. Kasîr el-Lahmî el-Mısrî (ö. 114/732)*, in "TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi'nin", 42, 2012, p. 77.

[23] Ümit Ekin, *Organization of Transportation and Shipping in the Ottoman Empire*, in "Kadim", no. 3, 2022, p. 37.

Similarly, the "călăraşi de Ţarigrad" present in Moldavia, who came from the military corps, often went with letters to Constantinople because they were proficient in Turkish, and for this work they received certain benefits from the ruler[24].

Returning to the term "*ulak*", an interesting mention of it dates back to 1427, when Sultan Murad II tried to reopen political ties with the Khan Uluğ Mehmed[25]. The Khan's response comes on 14 March 1428, when the Golden Horde Chancellery issues a letter to the Ottoman Sultan. The document in question survived the passing of time and was published by the historian Akdes Nimet Kurat, representing an important document for the analysis of the relations between the Khan and the Ottomans[26]. Moreover, the Khan's message also touches a part of the history of the Romanian territories, Moldavia and Wallachia, the introduction and publication of the document in the Romanian historiography being due to Marcel D. Popa[27]. In his translation we find an interesting phrase for the analysis of the word *ulak* and its possible meanings: "Although we sent men, we could not put them on the road, because the Romanians (Ulak) said they could not pass"[28]. The term *ulak* is here associated with the population of the Romanian territories, the word *ulak* being equated with "Romanians", leading to the conclusion that this statement by the Khan was probably made against the background of Moldavian–Tatar economic relations[29]. Another Romanian translation of the document was made by Mehmet Ali Ekrem, who translated: "We are thinking of sending a man, but we

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[24] Andrei Veress, *Documente privitoare la istoria Ardealului, Moldovei şi Ţării Româneşti. Acte şi scrisori (1661-1690)* [Documents Concerning the History of Transylvania, Moldavia and Wallachia. Acts and Letters (1661–1690)], Vol. XI, Bucharest, 1939, no. 4, p. 6.

[25] Nagy Pienaru, *Otomanii şi hoarda de aur. Relaţiile lui Murad al II-lea cu Uluğ Mehmed* [The Ottomans and the Golden Horde. Murad II's relations with Uluğ Mehmed], in "Studii şi Materiale de Istorie Medie", Vol. XX, 2002, p. 162.

[26] Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Topkapi Sarayi Müzesi Arşivindeki Altin Ordu, Krim ve Türkistan Hanlaria ait Yarlik ve Bitikler* [Yarliks and Bitiks of the Golden Army, Krim and Turkestan Khans in the Archives of the Topkapi Palace Museum], Istanbul, Bürhaneddin Matbaasi Publishing House, 1940, p. 6-9.

[27] Marcel D. Popa, *Aspecte ale politicii internaţionale a Ţării Româneşti şi Moldovei în timpul lui Mircea cel Bătrân şi Alexandru cel Bun* [Aspects of the international policy of Wallachia and Moldavia at the time of Mircea cel Bătrân and Alexandru cel Bun], in "Revista de Istorie", tome 31, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1978, pp. 253-271.

[28] Marcel D. Popa, *Aspecte ale politicii...*, p. 262-263. In Turkish: "aramizda bu b(i)r kisek Ulak kâfirni kiterürge niçük maslahat itip istegin (?) kurudin sudin bazirgân ortak" (Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Topkapi Sarayi...*, p. 9).

[29] Marcel D. Popa, *Aspecte ale politicii...*, p. 266-267.

have not sent him so far, fearing that Ulak (Wallachia) will prevent him from cross-ing"[30]. Like Marcel D. Popa, this author also assumed that the term "*Ulak*" referred to the population of the Romanian territories, specifically Wallachia. Ştefan An-dreescu stated that this document resumed economic relations between the Khan and the Ottomans on the road through Moldavia[31]. Şerban Papacostea was inclined to believe that the policy pursued by Alexandru cel Bun was hostile to the eco-nomic relations between the Khan and the Ottomans[32], and Victor Spinei believes that this prince adopted a series of restrictive measures against the people of the Khan, who "was considering the removal of the prince from Moldavia"[33].

However, according to some new interpretations, the term *ulak* in the letter has been mistakenly equated with Moldavia or Wallachia. According to Nagy Pienaru, who has re-examined the document in question, the reference is not to Romanian territory, but in fact to a messenger on horseback. After the expansion of the Khanate, the term *ulak* appears in the northern Black Sea, and in this area of the Golden Horde's influence the name probably became known to the popula-tion of the Romanian territories. In the Turko-Mongolian area *ulak* was a familiar term, as evidenced by documents preserved throughout the ages in which the term *ulak* is associated with a messenger or the horses used by messengers. For example, in 1398, in a privilege granted by Temür Kutlug to Haci Mehmed, it is mentioned that the latter was exempted from the duties incumbent on him for the good conduct of the messengers[34].

The mistake of associating the term (*ulak*) with the population of Romanian territories is due to the first editor of the document, Akdes Nimet Kurat, who wrote the term "*ulak*" in capital letters, turning it into a proper name and, at the same

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[30] Mehmet Ali Ekrem, *Menţiuni despre români în izvoare turceşti preotomane şi otomane (secolele IX-XV)* [Mentions of Romanians in pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Turkish sources (9th–15th centuries)], in "Anale de Istorie", XXVII, 1982, no. 4, p. 80-82.

[31] Ştefan Andreescu, *Trois actes des archives de Gênes concernant l`histoire de la Mer Noire au XVᵉ siècle* [Three acts from the archives of Gênes concerning the history of the Black Sea in the 15th century], in "Revue des Etudes Sud-Est Europeennes", tome XXI, 1983, no. 1, pp. 38-44.

[32] Şerban Papacostea, *Începuturile politicii comerciale a Ţării Româneşti şi Moldovei (secolele XIV-XVI). Drum şi stat* [The beginnings of the commercial policy of Wallachia and Moldavia (14th–16th centuries). Road and state.], in "Studii şi Materiale de Istorie Medie", Vol. X, 1983, p. 45-46.

[33] Victor Spinei, *Moldova în secolele XI-XIV* [Moldavia in the 11th–14th Centuries], Chişinău, Universitas Publishing House, 1994, p. 380.

[34] Abdullah Hasan, *Temir Kutluğ yarliği,* in "Türkiyat Mecmuası", III, 1926-1933, Istanbul, 1935, pp. 216, 218.

time, into a nickname for the population of the Romanian territories[35], the editors of the later document referring only to the Turkish version of the document. This error is not the only case recorded over time. In the late medieval period, the translation of the word *ulak* into Italian as *ulacchi* caused some confusion in Western Europe, with the Ottoman *olăcari* being confused with the people of Wallachia[36]. Thus, a new, false image was created in which the Wallachians were considered messengers of the Sultan. Luigi Bassano stated in the 16th century that: "alcun corriere (che Valacco si chiama tra loro)"[37]. The new meaning of the word spread because of a translation error in the writings of the Byzantine chronicler Laonic Chalcocondil, the correction of the confusion and the establishment of the correct meaning of the term was due to Radu G. Păun[38].

Returning to the term *ulak*, in Arabic writing it appears as *ulağ*, and in transliteration we find it as *ulah*, having originally, in the Turko-Mongolian world, the meaning of horse for chieftains. Over time, the term was no longer used only for the horse, but also for the rider, *ulak* becoming a synonym for people who rode to bring news[39]. At the end of the 15th century, the term is recorded in anonymous Ottoman chronicles in reference to a messenger, leading to the conclusion that the term had a clear use in this period[40].

Nagy Pienaru mentions that in the Tatar world the term *ulak* has also found its way into onomastics[41]. In the Romanian territories, we have identified this in a single document, from Wallachia: "I (the prince) give this commandment for the jupanița Neacșa, daughter of Olac of Iași, on Argeș, to strengthen her inheritance left by her father Olac"[42]. Since we have not identified any other documents to sup-

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[35] In the glossary of terms at the end of the historian Akdes Nimet Kurat's work, the term *ulak* is listed as a proper name and written in capital letters (Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Topkapi Sarayi...*, pp. 9, 136).

[36] Luigi Bassano da Zara, *I costumi et i modi particolari della vita de'turchi* [The Customs and Particular Ways of the Life of the Turks], Roma, 1545, p. 55-56.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

[38] Radu G. Păun, *Les «Valachs» de Montaigne. Les métamorphoses d'un mot* [Montaigne's "Valachs". The metamorphosis of a word], in "Revue Roumaine d'Histoire", tome 34, 1995, no. 1-2, p. 207-211.

[39] Nagy Pienaru, *Otomanii și hoarda...*, p. 166.

[40] Friedrich Giese, *Die Altmosmanischen anonymen Chroniken in text und Übersetzung Herausgegeben* [The Old Ottoman Anonymous Chronicles Published in Text and Translation], part I, Breslau, 1922, p. 137-138.

[41] Nagy Pienaru, *Otomanii și hoarda...*, p. 170.

[42] *DRH*, Series B, Vol. V, no. 322, p. 359.

port the fact that the term *olac* has entered the onomastics of the Romanian terri-
tories, we believe that there are two possible interpretations of this document:
either the person in question was an *olăcar*, and the document referred to him as
he was known in society (according to the name of his profession), or this term
has entered the onomastics of the Romanian territories. And this shows the con-
nection between the Romanian and the Turkish-Tatar population, but also the
origin and adoption of terms such as *olac*. So the term *ulak*, referring to a messen-
ger, circulated in the eastern empires, the Balkan peninsula and the Romanian ter-
ritories, the latter probably representing the frontier up to which this term was
used. In the Latin world, the word "*cursorum*" was used to indicate the messenger,
and is often found in documents or writings in Latin[43]. An example of this can also
be found in the *Description of Moldavia*, a work written by Dimitrie Cantemir in
which the messengers from Soroca are mentioned: "vel cursores soroccenses"[44].
In Polish sources messengers are often referred to as "*poslaniec*"[45], similar to
Slavic documents, where messengers can be referred to by the general term "*pos-
laneț*" (посланец)[46].

  Returning to the Romanian territories, we find the first concrete mention of
an *olac* in an internal document from October 7, 1428, issued by Dan II, prince of
Wallachia, in which he confirmed several villages to the Snagov monastery[47]. The
prince exempted the monastery villages from paying certain taxes or duties, in-
cluding that of providing the messengers with horses for the continuation of the
road. However, this document is not only important because it provides the first

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[43] Michaelem Veyss, *Liber annalium ratim scriptum per Michaelem Veyss* [A book of chron-
icles written by Michael Veyss], in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Brassó*, Vol. V, Brașov,
1909, p. 218; *Mihai Viteazul în conștiința europeană, 1, Documente Externe* [Mihai Vi-
teazul in European Consciousness, 1, External Documents], Bucharest, Academy Pub-
lishing House, 1982, p. 200, no. 63; p. 257, no. 96.

[44] Dimitrie Cantemir, *Descrierea Moldovei* [Description of Moldavia], Translation from the
Latin original by Gh. Guțu, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1973, p. 220.

[45] Dariusz Kolodziejczyk, *Ottoman-Polish Diplomatic Relations (15th-18th Century)*, Lei-
den-Boston-Koln, Brill, 2000, p. 357, nr. 33; P. P. Panaitescu, *Documente privitoare la
istoria lui Mihai Viteazul* [Documents on the History of Mihai Viteazul], Bucharest,
1936, p. 81, nr. 33; p. 137, nr. 60.

[46] *Relațiile istorice dintre popoarele U. R. S. S. și România în veacurile XV-începutul celui de
al XVIII-lea. Documente și Materiale (1633-1673)* [Historical Relations between the Peo-
ples of the USSR and Romania in the 15th–Early 18th Centuries. Documents and Materials
(1633–1673)], edited by A. C. Oțetea, A. Novoselski și L. V. Cerepnin, Vol. II, Moscow,
Science Publishing House, 1968, no. 82, p. 251.

[47] *DRH*, Series B, Vol. I, no. 61, p. 117-118.

mention of an *olac*, but mainly because, indirectly, we deduce how news and letters were sent at that time. Thus, messengers (*olăcari*) went from village to village and procured what they needed for the journey.

A more detailed description of how the news was delivered is found in the writings of the Byzantine chronicler Laonic Chalcocondil, who lived in the 15th century and who left several texts on Byzantine society[48]:

"The emperor's announcers bring news to the country and the heralds, when something new happens, arrive very quickly in the Ottoman Empire; and in very few days they make very long journeys in the following way: when he sees a horse in the way, he immediately takes the rider off the horse and, mounting it, he presses it hard and the horse runs as fast as it can. Then, when he finds another, the herald dismounts and passes the horse [on which he rode] before to the man. And so, with short halts, they travel a very long way. And their body they keep warm, so that they do not tire and strain their body too much, when they ride. And we know of announcers who come in five days from Peloponnesus to Adrianople, a journey [otherwise] of fifteen days for a man who rides very well. These announcers are called *olăcari*"[49].

From the Byzantine chronicler's description, it appears that the *olăcari* were used to carry news and letters because they were among the fastest servants. Their way of travelling and their physical stamina were essential for carrying messages. It should be noted that in the Byzantine Empire there was an organization of messengers, as it was inherited from the Roman Empire. *Cursus publicus*, the Roman "system" of messengers was preserved and developed even after the division of the empire; moreover, in Byzantium, even private persons with a good financial status could afford to send a message by paying a messenger. Between 762 and 1204, Byzantium also developed its own system, like the Roman one, called *dromos*, by which news and letters could be sent to all parts of the empire[50].

At the same time, the chronicler's description of the way messages were sent was not only applied in the territory ruled by the Byzantines, and later by the Ottomans, but this way of sending news was also found in other states of the time, including the Romanian principalities[51]. Over time, we find several documents in

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[48] Haralambie Mihăiescu, Radu Lăzărescu, Nicolae-Șerban Tanașoca, Tudor Teoteoi, *Izvoarele istoriei României. Scriitori și acte bizantine. Secolele IV-XV* [Sources of Romanian History. Byzantine Writers and Documents. 4th–15th Centuries], Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1982, p. 451.

[49] *Ibid.*, p. 505.

[50] Joson Fossella, *The dromos and Byzantine*..., pp. 14-16, 53.

[51] Constantin Minescu, *Istoria poștelor române. Originea, dezvoltarea și legislațiunea lor*

which the messengers in the Romanian territories and the way they carried out their activity are mentioned. For example, a document from 1475 mentions an *olac* ("cursor" in the original document written in Latin) who went with a letter to Bistriţa to give it to the emissaries of Matthias Corvinus[52]. The document shows that the letter was carried by a single man, who proceeded in the manner described by Laonic Chalcocondil. During the time of Suleiman the Magnificent, we find *olăcari* sent to the Romanian territories, who are said to have carried the news with great speed: "the *olăcari*, swift as a bird in flight, carried the good tidings to all parts: to Moldavia, to Wallachia"[53]. In the 16th–17th centuries we find several documents that present glimpses of their activity. For example, a document from 1589 mentions that the *olac* obtained the necessary supplies for their journey from villages, fairs or from the people they met[54]. Another document, from 1602, mentions *olăcari* and the fact that they used horses for travelling ("*olac* horses")[55]. Also, *olac* horses often appear in the documents of Moldavia and Wallachia, referring to the fact that the messenger (the *olac*) changed several on his way to his destination[56].

Thus, from all these documents and writings in which the *olăcari* were mentioned, it appears that the description of the Byzantine chronicler Laonic Chalcocondil, mentioned above, was "generally valid" for all peoples of that time. In the Romanian territories, news and letters were sent through messengers (*olac*) who went from village to village to procure what they needed for their journey or stopped people on their way and exchanged horses[57]. In this way, by repeated exchanges, the messengers managed to cover the distance to their destination. This way of carrying messages was preserved in the Romanian territories until the 17th

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[History of Romanian Post. Its Origin, Development and Legislation], Bucharest, 1916, p. 105-107.

[52] Ioan Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ştefan cel Mare* [Documents of Ştefan cel Mare], Vol. II, no. CXLIV, Bucharest, 1913, p. 328.

[53] Mihail Guboglu, Mustafa Mehmet, *Cronici turceşti...*, p. 217.

[54] *DIR*, Series A, 16th century, Vol. III, no. 513, p. 424.

[55] Ioan Caproşu, Petronel Zahariuc, *Documente privitoare la istoria oraşului Iaşi. Acte interne (1408-1660)* [Documents Concerning the History of Iaşi. Internal Documents (1408–1660)], Vol. I, Iaşi, Dosoftei Publishing House, 1999, no. 55, p. 80.

[56] *DRH*, Series B, Vol. XXIII, no. 10, p. 20; no.18, p. 35; no. 73, p. 134; no. 177, p. 296; DRH, Series A, Vol. XIX, no. 58, p. 77; no. 60, p. 79; no. 155, p. 186; Teodor Bălan, *Documente Bucovinene* [Bukovinian Documents], Vol. III, no. 20, Cernăuţi, 1937, p. 28; P. P. Panaitescu, *Documentele Ţării Româneşti* [Documents of Wallachia], Bucharest, 1938, no. 113, p. 271.

[57] Nicolae Iorga, *Studii şi documente cu privire la istoria românilor* [Studies and Documents on Romanian History], Vol. V, part I, Bucharest, 1903, p. 35.

century, when the Turkish *menzillas* were introduced and the messengers became more organized. Regarding the organization of the messengers, we learn that in the Ottoman Empire they travelled similarly to those in the Romanian territories until the time of the vizier Lütfi Pasha, when he proposed a more efficient organization of the way in which the messengers carried the letters and the existence of places where they could take horses for the continuation of their journeys[58]. At the same time, messengers were given a document "İn'am Hükmü" specifying the number of horses they needed, so that they could not abuse the "system" by taking more horses than they needed[59]. This "system" implemented by Lütfi Pasha was used in the Ottoman Empire until the establishment of modern postal services in 1839–1840[60].

In the Romanian principalities, the messengers were servants of the princely residence with duties in carrying news and letters[61]. They came from various social backgrounds, which led to their being mentioned in several types of documents[62]. Throughout the centuries, in the Romanian territories, messengers were mainly found in the acts of exemption granted by the rulers to churches, monasteries, villages or to some nobles. One of these documents is the one issued on 25 May 1589, in which Petru Şchiopul exempted the monastery of Saint Sava "from *olăcari* and other donations"[63]. As a rule, in the documents in which the ruler granted an exemption, he also mentioned what the village, monastery or nobleman was exempted from. Peter Şchiopul mentioned in the document of 1589 that the monastery of St. Sava was exempt from giving anything else to the messengers. And Moses Movila, also in a document of exemption, made a point of explicitly specifying this fact: "do not enter that village, for I have shown mercy and forgiven them all"[64].

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[58] Izzet Sak, Cemal Çetin, *In 17th and 18th centuries Menzils in Ottoman Empire and Thier Functions: A Model of Akşehir Menzils*, in "Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi", no. 16, 2004, p. 193-194.

[59] Mehmet Süme, *Osmali ulaşim ve haberleşme ağinda bolu menzilinin yeri ve önemi* [Place and importance of the *bolu* chain in the Ottoman transportation and communication network], in Mehmet Okur, Üyesi Ülkü KöksaL, Üyesi Volkan Aksoy (eds.), *Geçmişten Günümüze Karadeniz'de Ulaşim* [Black Sea Transportation from Past to Present], Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Yayinlari, 2020, p. 144.

[60] Cemal Çetin, *Organization of Transportation and Communication in The Ottoman State*, in "The Pursuit of History", no. 5, 2011, p. 18.

[61] Nicolae Stoicescu, *Curteni şi slujitori* [Courtiers and Servants], Bucharest, Military Publishing House, 1968, p. 358.

[62] Nicolae Grigoraş, *Instituţii feudale...*, p. 367.

[63] *Catalogul documentelor moldoveneşti...*, Vol. I, no. 821, p. 205.

[64] *DRH*, Series A, XXI, no. 348, p. 443.

The ruler granted these exemptions, usually with the intention of attracting the sympathy and support of the clergy or some of the nobles, to be able to keep or gain power. Servants or villages who received these exemption documents from the ruler no longer contributed to the smooth running of the messengers, their work was obviously made more difficult, and letters and news could be delayed. Some rulers must have realized this because we find exemption documents stating that in the event of urgent news, even exempt villages were under obligation to provide the necessary travel supplies[65]. However, over time there have been cases where some villages have shown opposition to the nobles and, therefore, to this measure of giving horses to messengers. One such case can be found in Wallachia, described by Evlia Celebi during an expedition: "when our companions asked for horses for *olac*, all the villagers of the village jumped on us with scythes, shovels and swords, so that we fought them… Afterwards, going with us, he (the nobleman of the territory) advised us thus: do not take horses by force for *olac*, because these villagers are rebellious"[66].

Other documents that mention *olac* throughout the ages are those of "sale–purchase". In these documents, messengers (*olac*) were found as witnesses to various sales. One such example is Gheorghe Olacarul from Iaşi county, whom we find in 1669 mentioned as a witness to a sale between a certain Ştefan, son of Copăceanul, and Ursache *vistiernicul*[67]. And a year later, in 1670, the same Gheorghe Olăcarul was also mentioned as a witness to a gift in Suceava between Irimia and his sister-in-law, Irina[68].

The presence of messengers (*olac*) in such documents indicates that they were prosperous, because the witnesses to the sales also had a small fortune. However, the appearance of messengers in sale–purchase documents is rare, the earlier documents being among the few cases identified. However, there are two details that catch our attention. The first is that the messenger (*olac*) is mentioned by name. Over time, the names of these servants were not specified in documents or narratives; being mere "intermediaries", they were of no particular importance. The second detail is related to the mention at the end of the document "I Gheorghe

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[65] *DIR*, Series A, 17th century, vol. V, no. 273, p. 191.

[66] *Călători străini*…, vol. VI, p. 704.

[67] Toma Bulat, *Documentele Mănăstirii Văratec (1497-1836)* [Documents of Văratec Monastery (1497–1836)], Chişinău, 1939, no. XXIV, p. 101.

[68] Gheorghe Ghibănescu, *Surete şi Izvoade. Documente slavo-române (1412-1722)* [Transcriptions and Ledgers. Slavic-Romanian documents (1412–1722)], Vol. XXII, no. 28, Iaşi, 1929, p. 25- 26.

Olăcarul wrote"[69], which indicates that this person could read and write and had a certain status.

Thus, in addition to being a messenger, Gheorghe Olăcarul was probably also a scribe. In Moldavia and Wallachia, messengers could have other jobs or occupations when they were not carrying letters or news[70]. In fact, some documents mention them as having the task of collecting part of the taxes for the prince[71]. Regarding the collection of duties by the messengers (*olac*), because few of them were wealthier, the others wanted to accumulate wealth, thus committing a series of abuses against the population. The messengers responsible for collecting taxes went to the villages to collect the tax for the ruler from the peasants. If peasants could not pay, goods from their courtyard were sold and, if they were poor enough to have nothing to sell in the yard, they went to neighboring villages and forced others to pay on their behalf[72].

Regarding domestic chronicles, the chronicler Grigore Ureche often places the messengers (*olac*) in a context related to sending simple news or letters, simple messengers, but does not give any details about this occupation, only mentioning that they were among the fastest servants[73]. Miron Costin, another chronicler, does the same, mentioning the messengers (*olac*) in various contexts in which urgent or quick news is sent[74]. In Wallachia, the Cantacuzine Chronicle[75] or Radu Popescu[76] mentions the messengers in similar circumstances, without further details. However, in Ion Neculce's chronicle (Moldavia), we find an interesting mention, namely a "*ciohodar* of *olac* at Dumitrașco-vodă"[77]. The *ciohodar* in the Roma-

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[69] *Ibid.,* p. 26.

[70] Nicolae Grigoraș, *Instituții feudale...*, p. 367.

[71] *DIR*, Series A, 17th century, Vol. II, no. 161, p. 131.

[72] Vasile C. Nicolau, *Priviri asupra vechii organizări administrative a Moldovei* [A Look at the Old Administrative Organization of Moldavia], Bârlad, 1913, p. 125-126.

[73] Grigore Ureche, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* [The Chronicle of Moldavia], Edited by P. P. Panaitescu, Bucharest, State Publishing House for Literature and Art, 1958, pp. 148, 167, 173, 177.

[74] Miron Costin, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei...,* pp. 105, 203.

[75] N. Simache, Tr. Cristescu, *Cronicile românești. Variante ale Letopisețului Cantacuzinesc* [Romanian Chronicles. Variants of the Chronicle of the Cantacuzins], Vol. III, Buzău, 1942, p. 65.

[76] N. Simache, Tr. Cristescu, *Cronicile românești. Viața și opera lui Radu Popescu* [Romanian Chronicles. The Life and Work of Radu Popescu], part I, 1943, pp. 138, 159, 184.

[77] Ion Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei și O Samă de Cuvinte* [The Chronicle of Moldavia and A Series of Words], Edited by Gabriel Ștrempel, Bucharest, Minerva Publishing

nian territories had a wider application but, in most sources, he is found as a servant who took care of the ruler's shoes[78]. He was not a messenger, but probably in certain situations he could be sent with a letter or a message because he was one of the ruler's trusted men.

Thus, from the documents shown above and the accounts in the chronicles, we note another aspect of the messengers (*olac*), namely that they were chosen from among the court servants, but with a certain status. Gheorghe Olăcarul shown above was a scribe, the messengers (*olăcarii*) who collected the taxes were either *zapcii* or *zlotaşi*, and the *olăcarul ciohodar* was a personal servant of the ruler, which indicates that the *olăcari* were selected from among persons close to the ruler, whom he trusted. We can also note that we do not find peasants as messengers (*olac*) in the documents, nor from among the nobility, but rather from among the servants close to the ruler.

Regarding foreign documents and narratives, they often mention the *olăcari* of the Romanian territories dispatching simple orders or letters[79]. However, in the Ottoman Empire it is possible that over time the term *olac* took on another meaning in addition to that of messenger, namely a servant sent to carry out a simple order. We say this because we find several Turkish documents referring to the Romanian principalities that call the servants of the ruler sent with various tasks *olăcari*. For example, in a document from 1534 we find the servants of the ruler, whom the document calls *olăcari*, as being sent by Vlad Vintilla, prince of Wallachia, to bring to him the wives and children of noblemen who had been punished by beheading: "he sent out *olaci* to catch and bring their wives and their children who remained, in order to punish them"[80]. We find a similar mention during the reign of Petru Rareş, the ruler of Moldavia, when he had to flee to Transylvania because of the Ottomans. Some Ottoman servants were sent after him, and the document calls them *olăcari*: "Petre the prince fled to the Hungarian parts and some *olacari* were sent to the Hungarian king, Janus, to get him"[81]. In the Romanian territories, this task of the *olac* has

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House, 1982, p. 521.

[78] Ovid Sachelarie, Nicolae Stoicescu, *Instituţii feudale...,* p. 101.

[79] J. S. Grosul, A. C. Oţetea, A. A. Novoselski, L. V. Cerepnin, *Relaţiile istorice dintre popoarele U.R.S.S. şi România în veacurile XV – începutul celui de-al XVIII-lea* [Historical Relations between the Peoples of the USSR and Romania in the 15th–Early 18th Centuries], Moscow, Science Publishing House, no. 19, 1968, p. 66.

[80] Mustafa A. Mehmed, *Documente turceşti privind istoria României* [Turkish Documents on Romanian History], Vol. I, no. 17, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1976, p. 24.

[81] Mihail Guboglu, Mustafa Mehmet, *Cronici turceşti...*, p. 412.

not been identified, we believe that it existed in the Ottoman Empire, and these servants were called *olac* because they also did this work in the empire. The way these servants were used had nothing to do with sending news and letters but was aimed at fulfilling various orders. The academic literature dealing with the later courier system in the Ottoman Empire mentions that messengers were known as *olăcari* (*ulaks*) and were more often used as private envoys, which may mean that they were also sent to perform special tasks[82].

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, the main activity of the servants called *olacari* was to carry the news and letters sent by the ruler or the nobles in charge of the country. In the Middle Ages, the rulers used various servants from the princely court to send news. The documents of the clergy or other nobles do not mention sending of *olăcari* for personal purposes, so as to suggest that they were also responding to the demands of society, but only serving the interests of the ruler or the nobles in the ruling council.

The way the news was delivered was adapted to the times. Under the influence of Western states, which used horses as a means of transport, but especially under the influence of the great empires that expanded from Asia, the Romanian territories adopted the same mode of communication and even the same terms to indicate the messenger. The *olăcari* used horses, which they exchanged repeatedly, from village to village or with the people they met along the way, to carry a message as quickly as possible. There is no documentary mention of their payment. The messengers who delivered news and letters were probably rewarded by the ruler with a reduction of taxes or even with land for their work; the historian Gheorghe Ghibănescu states that "such activities were more often well rewarded by the ruler"[83]. The *olăcari* were therefore servants of the princely courts who practiced various trades but were also used to transport news and letters. Their social status was not very high, they were not part of the nobility, but they ranked higher than the common people. Documents often place them in the vicinity of the ruler or the nobles of the council, which shows that they were trusted by the ruler, who employed them to make his news and orders known. Their role was apparently minor but important in terms of the flow of information in the turbulent times between the Late Middle Ages and the modern era.

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[82] Ayşegül Okan, *The Ottoman Postal and Telegraph Services in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century*, Bogazici University, 2003, p. 16-17.

[83] Gheorghe Ghibănescu, *Surete și Izvoade...,* p. XXVII.

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