

MESSENGERS (*OLĂCARI*) AND WAYS OF COMMUNICATION IN MOLDAVIA (15TH-17TH CENTURIES)

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Abstract: *The present paper is part of research dedicated to the history of communications, and through this text we tried to address some of the messengers present in late medieval society (XV-XVII centuries). In Moldavian space we cannot speak of a system of messengers like in Western Europe, however, the central authority tried to organize certain people to carry the news and letters. The first messengers that appeared in the documents of the time were called olăcari, and they went with news and letters from the prince, being people very close to him, whom he trusted. Starting with the 16th-17th centuries, the messengers know a diversification, but in the present study we focus only on the olăcari category.*

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

Rezumat: *Mesageri (olăcari) și modalități de comunicare în Moldova (secolele XV-XVII). Lucrarea de față face parte dintr-o cercetare mai amplă dedicată istoriei comunicării, iar prin acest text am încercat să descriem o parte dintre mesagerii prezenți în societatea medievală 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 anumite persoane care să ducă știri și scrisori. Primii mesageri care apar în documentele vremii se numeau olăcari și mergeau cu vești și scrisori din partea domnului, fiind oameni apropiați ai acestuia, în care avea încredere. Începând cu secolele XVI-XVII, mesagerii cunosc o diversificare, însă în studiul de față ne concentrăm doar pe categoria olăcari.*

INTRODUCTION

Mentioned since ancient times, messengers have made an important contribution to the way we communicate in all historical periods, including the late Middle 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 in order 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 factors¹. 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 transport², while in the Inca, Maya and Aztec empires across the ocean, messengers ('chaski') ran to the nearest town or village³.

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, 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 countries of Wallachia and Moldavia, the lordship was the central institution that exercised several functions⁴. From the point of view of communication (correspondence), two "types" of people were used to make news and

¹ Ovidiu Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor. Știri și război în sec. XV-XVI* [The power of words. News and war in the 15th-16th centuries], Târgoviște, 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 Grigoraș, *Instituții 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.

send commands 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 (*solii*) were used⁵. They were often people close to the ruler, noblemen or trusted men. 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 in order to prevent possible danger or to influence the political direction the country was to take⁶.

Messengers, unlike emissaries (*solii*), 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 neighbouring countries, they simply carried that information. As for the selection of couriers for this work, if 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 backgrounds⁷. Thus, they could also have other duties; for example, I have come across situations where some messengers, when they were not out with news, oversaw collecting taxes for the prince⁸. Finally, the ruler not only used these messengers to pass on information, but also various travellers, 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 wasn't 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 messengers⁹.

⁵ Ovid Sachelarie, Nicolae Stoicescu, *Instituții feudale din Țările Române. Dicționar* [Feudal Institutions in the Romanian Countries. Dictionary], Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1988, p. 448.

⁶ Ovid Sachelarie, Nicolae Stoicescu, *Instituții feudale...*, p. 449.

⁷ Nicolae Grigoraș, *Instituții feudale...*, p. 368-369.

⁸ *Documente privind istoria României* [Documents on the history of Romania], Series A, 17th century, Vol. II, no. 20, p. 162 (Further cited as: *DIR*).

⁹ *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign travelers about Romanian Countries], Vol.

Merchants or travellers, due to the specific nature of their activity, often carried news and messages. Moreover, rumours 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"¹⁰.

Throughout time, in the Romanian space, those who transmitted news and letters appear mentioned in documents, in the narrations of foreign travellers or in chronicles under different names. In the various documents issued by the ruler we find them most often called *olăcari*¹¹ (specific term for the messengers). Beginning in the 17th century, the term *călăraș de Țarigrad*¹² (former mounted fighters turned messengers) appears in various texts of the time having 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 letters¹³.

Because this subject is a vast one, in the present study we propose to analyze only some of the servants who have 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, and we will discuss the other servants of the ruler who carried various messages in more detail in the doctoral work, which deals with communications in the Principality of Moldavia in the 14th-17th centuries.

OLĂCAR IN SOCIETY AND IN THE SERVICE OF THE PRINCE

VII, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing House, 1980, p. 90.

¹⁰ Ovidiu Cristea, *Puterea cuvintelor...*, p. 146-147.

¹¹ *Catalogul documentelor Moldovenești din arhiva istorică centrală a statului (1387-1620)* [*Catalogue of Moldovan documents from the central historical state archive (1387-1620)*], Vol. I, Bucharest, 1957, no. 821, p. 205.

¹² Mihai Regleanu, Iulia Gheorghian, Veronica Vasilescu, Doina Duca, *Catalogul documentelor moldovenești din arhiva istorică centrală a statului (1621-1652)* [*Catalogue of Moldovan documents from 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*).

¹³ 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.

In the Romanian territories, as the messengers were called *olăcari*¹⁴, their activities were called *olăcărie*¹⁵. As for the term *olac*, it was used in the Ottoman Empire with reference to messengers (*ulak*)¹⁶ and appears in documents issued by the sultan in the 15th-16th centuries¹⁷. Western sources have confirmed that the Ottomans used the term *ulak* for people who went with news and letters¹⁸. 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 used at first to designate the horses used by messengers, and the stable for these horses (the station) as a whole being designated by the term *yam*¹⁹.

An interesting mention of the term dates back to 1427, when Sultan Murad II tries to reopen political ties with the Khan Uluğ Mehmed²⁰. 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 passage of time and

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ DIR, 17th century, Series A, vol. II, no. 78, p. 70; Lazăr Șăineanu, *Influența orientală asupra limbei și culturii române* [Oriental influence on Romanian language and culture], Vol. II, Bucharest, 1900, p. 277-278.

¹⁶ 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

¹⁷ V.L. Ménage (edited with additions by Colin Imber), *Ottoman Historical Documents: The Institutions of an Empire*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2021, pp. 36, 42.

¹⁸ Colin Heywood, *The evolution of the courier order (ulağ hukmi) 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.

¹⁹ *The Ta'rih-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, p. 25-26; Gábor Ágoston, Bruce Masters, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, New York, 2009, p. 374.

²⁰ Nagy Pienaru, *Otomanii și hoarda de aur. Relațiile lui Murad al II-lea cu Uluğ Mehmed* [The Ottomans and the Golden Horde. Murad II's relations with Uluğ Mehmed], in „Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie”, Vol. XX, 2002, p. 162.

was published by the historian Akdes Nimet Kurat, representing an important document for the analysis of the relations between the Khan and the Ottomans²¹. 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. Popa²². 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"²³. 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 relations²⁴. Another Romanian translation of the document was made by Mehmet Ali Ekrem, who translated: "We are thinking of sending a man, but we have not sent him so far, fearing that Ulak (Wallachia) will prevent him from crossing"²⁵. Like Marcel D. Popa, this author also assumed that the term "Ulak" referred to the population of the Romanian territories, specifically Wallachia. Ștefan Andreescu stated that this document resumed economic relations between the Khan and the Ottomans on the road through Moldavia²⁶. Șerban Papacostea was inclined to believe that the policy pursued by Alexander the Good was hostile to the economic

²¹ Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Topkapi Sarayi Müzesi Arşivindeki Altın Ordu, Krim ve Türkistan Hanlaria ait Yarlık ve Bitikler* [Yarlıks and Bitiks of the Golden Army, Krim and Turkestan Khans in the Archives of the Topkapi Palace Museum], Istanbul, Bürhaneddin Matbaası Publishing House, 1940, p. 6-9.

²² Marcel D. Popa, *Aspecte ale politicii internaționale a Țării Românești și Moldovei în timpul lui Mircea cel Bătrân și Alexandru cel Bun* [Aspects of the international policy of Wallachia and Moldavia in the time of Mircea the Elder and Alexander the Good], in „Revista de Istorie”, tome 31, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1978, p. 253-271.

²³ Marcel D. Popa, *Aspecte ale politicii...*, pp. 262-263. In Turkish: „aramızda bu b(i)r kisek Ulak kâfirni kiterürge niçük maslahat itip istegin (?) kurudin sudin bazirgân ortak” (Akdes Nimet Kurat, *Topkapi Sarayi...*, p. 9).

²⁴ Marcel D. Popa, *Aspecte ale politicii...*, p. 266-267.

²⁵ Mehmet Ali Ekrem, *Mențiuni despre români în izvoare turcești preotomane și otomane (secolele IX-XV)* [Mentions about Romanians in pre-Ottoman and Ottoman Turkish sources (9th-15th centuries)], in „Anale de Istorie”, Year XXVII, no. 4, 1982, p. 80-82.

²⁶ Ștefan Andreescu, *Trois actes des archives de Gênes concernant l'histoire de la Mer Noire au XV^e 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, no. 1, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1983, p. 38-44.

relations between the Khan and the Ottomans²⁷, 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"²⁸.

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* appeared north of the Black Sea, and along this Tatar-Mongolian path, the term came to be known to the people of the Romanian territories²⁹. The mistake that occurred 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 time, into a nickname for the population of the Romanian territories³⁰, 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 Wallachia³¹. 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)"³². The new meaning of the word spread as a result 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. Păun³³.

²⁷ Șerban Papacostea, *Începuturile politicii comerciale a Țării Românești și Moldovei (secolele XIV-XVI). Drum și stat* [The beginnings of the commercial policy of the Romanian and Moldavian Lands (14th-16th centuries). Road and state.], in „Studii Materiale de Istorie Medie”, Vol. X, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1983, p. 45-46.

²⁸ Victor Spinei, *Moldova în secolele XI-XIV* [Moldova in the 11th-14th centuries], Chisinau, Universitas Publishing House, 1994, p. 380.

²⁹ Nagy Pienaru, *Otomanii și hoarda...*, pp. 166, 169-170.

³⁰ 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).

³¹ 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.

³² Luigi Bassano da Zara, *I costumi...*, p. 56.

³³ 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, no.

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 horse, but also for rider, *ulak* becoming a synonym for people who rode to bring news³⁴. 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 period³⁵.

Nagy Pienaru mentions that in the Tatar world the term *ulak* has also found its way into onomastics³⁶. In the Romanian territories, we have identified the same thing 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"³⁷. Since we have not identified any other documents to support the fact that the term *olac* has entered the onomastics of the Romanian territories, we believe that there are two possible interpretations of this document: either the person in question was a *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 connection between the Romanian and the Tatar population, but also the origin and adoption of terms such as *olac*.

Returning to the Romanian territories, we find the first concrete mention of a *olac* in an internal document from October 7, 1428, issued by Dan II, prince of Wallachia, in which he confirmed to the Snagov monastery several villages³⁸. The prince exempted the monastery villages from paying certain taxes or duties, including 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 mention of a *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.

1-2, 1995, pp. 207-211.

³⁴ Nagy Pienaru, *Otomanii și hoarda...*, p. 166.

³⁵ Friedrich Giese, *Die Altosmanischen anonymen chroniken in text und Übersetzung Herausgegeben* [The Old Ottoman anonymous chronicles in text and translation Published], part I, Breslau, 1922, p. 137-138.

³⁶ Nagy Pienaru, *Otomanii și hoarda...*, p. 170.

³⁷ *DRH*, Series B, Vol. V, no. 322, p. 359.

³⁸ *DRH*, Series B, Vol. I, no. 61, p. 117-118.

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 society³⁹:

"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 a 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 him, he puts his hand to it and the horse runs as hard as he can. Then, when he finds another, the herald dismounts and passes to the man the horse [on which he rode] before. And so with short halts they travel a very long way. And the body they still 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*"⁴⁰.

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.

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 principalities⁴¹. Over time we find several documents in which the messengers in the Romanian territories and the way they carried out their activity are mentioned. For example, a document from 1475 mentions a *olac* ("cursor" in the original document written in latin) who went with a letter to Bistrița to give it to the emissaries of Matthias Corvinus⁴². The document shows that

³⁹ 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.

⁴⁰ Haralambie Mihăiescu, Radu Lăzărescu, Nicolae-Șerban Tanașoca, Tudor Teoteoi, *Izvoarele istoriei...*, p. 505.

⁴¹ Constantin Minescu, *Istoria poștelor române. Originea, dezvoltarea și legislațiunea lor* [History of Romanian Post. Their origin, development and legislation], Bucharest, 1916, p. 105-107.

⁴² Ioan Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan cel Mare* [Documents of Stephen the Great], Vol. II, no. CXLIV, Bucharest, 1913, p. 328.

the letter was carried by a single man, who walked in the manner described by Laonic Chalcocondil. In 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 glad tidings of good tidings to all parts: to Moldavia, to Wallachia"⁴³. 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 met⁴⁴. Another document, from 1602, mentions *olăcari* and the fact that they used horses for travelling ("*olac* horses")⁴⁵. 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 destination⁴⁶.

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 horses⁴⁷. In this way, by repeated exchanges, the messengers managed to cover the distance to their destination.

In the Romanian principalities, the messengers were servants of the princely residence with duties in carrying news and letters⁴⁸. They came from dif-

⁴³ Mihail Guboglu, Mustafa Mehmet, *Cronici turcești...*, p. 217.

⁴⁴ *DIR*, Series A, 16th century, Vol. III, no. 513, p. 424.

⁴⁵ Ioan Caproșu, Petronel Zahariuc, *Documente privitoare la istoria orașului Iași. Acte interne (1408-1660)* [Documents concerning the history of Iasi. Internal documents (1408-1660)], Vol. I, Iași, Dosoftei Publishing House, 1999, no. 55, p. 80.

⁴⁶ *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, Cernăuți, 1937, p. 28; P. P. Panaitescu, *Documentele Țării Românești* [Documents of the Romanian Country], Bucharest, 1938, no. 113, p. 271.

⁴⁷ Nicolae Iorga, *Studii și documente cu privire la istoria românilor* [Studies and documents on Romanian history], Vol. V, part I, Bucharest, 1903, p. 35.

⁴⁸ Nicolae Stoicescu, *Curteni și slujitori* [Courtiers and servants], Bucharest, Military Publishing House, 1968, p. 358.

ferent social backgrounds, which led to their mention in several types of documents⁴⁹. 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 Șchiopul exempted the monastery of Saint Sava "from *olăcari* and other donations"⁵⁰. 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 Șchiopul 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"⁵¹.

The ruler granted these exemptions, usually with the intention of attracting the sympathy and support of the clergy or some of the nobles, in order 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 realised this because we find exemption documents stating that in the event of urgent news, even exempt villages were obliged to provide the necessary travel supplies⁵². 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 with 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"⁵³.

Other documents that mention *olac* throughout the ages are those of "sale-purchase". In these documents, messengers (*olac*) were found as witnesses to the various sales. One such example is Gheorghe Olacarul from Iași county, whom we find in 1669 mentioned as a witness to a sale between a certain Ștefan, son of

⁴⁹ Nicolae Grigoraș, *Instituții feudale...*, p. 367.

⁵⁰ *Catalogul documentelor Moldovenești...*, Vol. I, no. 821, p. 205.

⁵¹ *DRH*, Series A, XXI, no. 348, p. 443.

⁵² *DIR*, Series A, 17th century, vol. V, no. 273, p. 191.

⁵³ *Călători străini...*, vol. VI, p. 704.

Copăceanul, and Ursache *vistiernicul*⁵⁴. 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, Irina⁵⁵.

The presence of messengers (*olac*) in such documents indicates that they had a good material situation, 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 Olăcarul wrote"⁵⁶, which indicates that this person knew writing and reading and had a certain status.

Thus, Gheorghe Olăcarul, in addition to being a messenger, was probably also a scribe. In Moldavia and Wallachia, messengers could have other jobs or occupations when they were not carrying letters or news⁵⁷. In fact, some documents mention them as having the task of collecting part of the taxes for the prince⁵⁸. Regarding the collection of duties by the messengers (*olac*), because few of them were wealthier, the others wanted to accumulate wealth, thus recording a series of abuses against the population. The messengers responsible for collecting taxes went to the villages to collect the tax for the reign from the peasants. Peasants who could not pay were sold things from the yard, and those who were poor enough to have nothing to sell from the yard went to neighbouring villages and forced others to pay on their behalf⁵⁹.

Regarding the internal chronicles, the chronicler Grigore Ureche often places the messengers (*olac*) in a context related to sending simple news or letters,

⁵⁴ Toma Bulat, *Documentele Mănăstirii Văratec (1497-1836)* [Documents of Văratec Monastery (1497-1836)], Chisinau, 1939, no. XXIV, p. 101.

⁵⁵ Gheorghe Ghibănescu, *Surete și Izvoade. Documente slavo-române (1412-1722)* [*Surete and Izvoade. Slav-Romance documents (1412-1722)*], Vol. XXII, no. 28, Iași, 1929, p. 25- 26.

⁵⁶ Gheorghe Ghibănescu, *Surete și Izvoade...*, p. 26.

⁵⁷ Nicolae Grigoraș, *Instituții feudale...*, p. 367.

⁵⁸ *DIR*, Series A, 17th century, Vol. II, no. 161, p. 131.

⁵⁹ Vasile C. Nicolau, *Priviri asupra vechii organizări administrative a Moldovei* [A look at the old administrative organization of Moldova], Bârlad, 1913, p. 125-126.

simple messengers, but does not give details about this occupation, but only mentions that they were among the fastest servants⁶⁰. Miron Costin, another chronicler, does the same, mentioning the messengers (*olac*) in various contexts in which urgent or quick news is sent⁶¹. In Wallachia, the Cantacuzine Chronicle⁶² or Radu Popescu⁶³ mention 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*"⁶⁴. The *ciohodar* in the Romanian territories had a wider application, but in most sources he is found as a servant of the ruler who took care of his shoes⁶⁵. 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 trusted men of the ruler.

Thus, from the documents shown above and the accounts in the chronicles, we note another thing about 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 dues were either *zapcii* or *zlotășii*, and the *olăcarul ciohodar* was a personal servant of the ruler, which indicates that the *olăcarii* 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.

With regard to external documents and narratives, they often mention the *olăcarii* of the Romanian territories going with simple commands or letters⁶⁶. However, in the Ottoman Empire it is possible that over time the term *olac* took on

⁶⁰ Grigore Ureche, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei* [Letopyses of Moldova], Edited by P. P. Panaitescu, Bucharest, State Publishing House for Literature and Art, 1958, pp. 148, 167, 173, 177.

⁶¹ Miron Costin, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei...*, pp. 105, 203.

⁶² 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.

⁶³ 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.

⁶⁴ Ion Neculce, *Letopisețul Țării Moldovei și O Samă de Cuvinte* [Letopyses of the Land of Moldova and A Sum of Words], Edited by Gabriel Ștrempel, Bucharest, Minerva Publishing House, 1982, p. 521.

⁶⁵ Ovid Sachelarie, Nicolae Stoicescu, *Instituții feudale...*, p. 101.

⁶⁶ J. S. Grosul, A. C. Oțetea, A. A. Novoselski, L. V. Cerepnin, *Relațiile istorice dintre popoarele*

another meaning in addition to that of messenger, namely a servant sent to carry out a simple command. 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 with the cutting off of their heads: "he sent out *olaci* to catch and bring their wives and their children who remained, in order to punish them"⁶⁷. We find a similar mention during the reign of Petru Rareș, 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"⁶⁸. In the Romanian territories, this task of the *olac* has 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 were for the purpose of fulfilling various commands. Scholarly works that have dealt with the later courier system in the Ottoman Empire mention that messengers were known under the general name of *tătari* (tatars), and *olac* (*ulaks*) were more often used as private messengers⁶⁹.

CONCLUSIONS

Finally, the main activity of the servants called *olăcari* was to go with 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

U.R.S.S. și 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.

⁶⁷ Mustafa A. Mehmed, *Documente turcești privind istoria României* [Turkish documents on Romanian history], Vol. I, no. 17, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, 1976, p. 24.

⁶⁸ Mihail Guboglu, Mustafa Mehmet, *Cronici turcești...*, p. 412.

⁶⁹ Ayşegül Okan, *The Ottoman Postal and Telegraph Services in The Last Quarter of The Nineteenth Century*, Bogazici University. Atatürk Institute of Modern Turkish History, 2003, pp. 16-17.

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. *Olăcarii* 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 went with news and letters, for their activity were probably rewarded by the ruler with a reduction of taxes or even with land, the historian Gheorghe Ghibănescu states that "such activities were more often well rewarded by the ruler"⁷⁰.

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 were on a higher level 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, through whom the latter made his news and commands 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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⁷⁰ Gheorghe Ghibănescu, *Surete și Izvoade...*, p. XXVII.

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