

The Romanian extra-Carpathian area after the moment of the great Mongol invasion of 1241-1242. The premises of the politico-territorial unification

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Abstract: The great Mongol invasion represented a moment of reference in the history of the European Middle Ages. The Romanian extra-Carpathian areas were directly concerned by these events. The installation of the Mongol authority over the Moldavian territories, by the middle of the 13th century prevented the development of some pre-state formations. On the contrary, to the south of the Carpathian chain, the Mongol invasion dislocated the hegemony exerted by Hungary and allowed the political and territorial evolution of the local formations.

Key words: 13th century, invasion, Golden Hoard, prince (*voievod*), Hungary

The processes of creation of the two medieval Romanian states constituted from the very beginning a focal point for the Romanian historiography and consequently benefited of an ample analysis of the main factors that participated to the appearance of Walachia and of Moldova. Generally, the beginning of the evolution towards state forms was pushed forward towards the middle of the 13th century, immediately after the great event known in history as the Great Mongol Invasion.

The penetration of the Mongol hordes had deep consequences on the situation from central and south-east Europe, both territorially and strategically, and these changes influenced as well the evolution of the Romanian extra-Carpathian territories.

So, if in the western areas of the old continent we witness an epoch of progress both economically and politically, in the above-mentioned area, the defeats triggered by the daring steppe fighters brought forth a period of great internal turmoil, the main victims being the Catholic kingdoms of Hungary and Poland.

Even though the Romanian historiography appreciated differently the effects of the great Mongol roller on the extra-Carpathian areas, we consider that this last migratory wave troubled the normal development of the political, economic and social life in the Romanian area. As we have highlighted, in the specialized literature we can encounter slightly different opinions concerning the trajectory followed by the Mongol troops in the Romanian area. Some historians support the idea that a subunit detached from the great Mongol army penetrated from two flanks, one led by the leader Kadan and the other run by Bujdek, entering the area east of the Carpathians and later on, getting together again in Transylvania, at Cenad, on the road to Hungary (A. A. Bolșacov-Ghimpu, 1979). In contrast, another hypothesis refers to the fact that actually the wing of the Mongol army commanded by Bujdek went only through Walachia, and from there, along the Valley of Olt, it penetrated into Transylvania (C. C. Giurescu, Dinu C. Giurescu, 1974). From our viewpoint, regardless of the veracity of one or the

other of the hypotheses presented, the attack against the Romanian extra-Carpathian region was indispensable to the Mongol hordes due to their strategic position in relation to Hungary and Transylvania, which turned them into excellent bases for attack. At the same time, the Mongols may have pursued as well to annihilate any attempt of coalition between the extra-Carpathian Romanian population and the kingdom (*voievodat*) of Transylvania, in an attempt to block the access to the Hungarian kingdom (V. Spinei, 1982).

The scarcity of the information concerning the passage of the Mongols through the extra-Carpathian area has imposed a reference to a main source namely the *Song of despair (Cântecul de jale)* of Monk Rogerius. It is, however, too little to afford to build a comparison concerning the level of destruction incurred by the south-Carpathian Romanian society compared to that of the east-Carpathian area. At the same time, the lack of documents emitted by the Hungarian Chancellery mentioning the fights of the Romanians from the extra-Carpathian areas against the Mongols seems to indicate rather the fact that the Romanian population in the area did not really provide to the Hungarians the support that the Hungarian kingdom needed in order to block the invasion (A. Sacerdoțeanu, 1930).

With the appearance of the Khanate of the Golden Horde, the new state created on the Lower Volga, the situation underwent significant changes, though during the initial stage, the Mongols continued to control an area that probably touched, in certain areas, the natural border of the Carpathian Mountains.

The political, geostrategic and economic influences consolidated the break-up in the evolution of the southern territories by comparison to those situated east of the Carpathians, creating a new chronological gap in the development of the internal factors, those that will hold the essential role in the conclusion of the process of gradual and progressive accumulation of the state life forms.

The installation of the Mongols in the area of the Danube's mouths decisively contributed to the development of the commercial road to the Baltic Sea, but, at the same time, it also pushed the Moldavian area towards a greater dependence, in its south and central area, in relation to the Golden Horde. One of the most convincing examples is that of prince Nogai, the creator of a frontier district under

military command (in Romanian, *marcă*) at the Lower Danube, which experienced a fast ascension during the second half of the 13th century, being defeated with difficulty by Tokta Khan himself. Prince Nogai, though denying the central power exerted from Karakorum, brought, according to some opinions, north Moldova as well under the Tartar reign, instating here another nomad population, the Alans, professional mercenaries, who will leave the area only after the year 1300, at the moment when their protector disappeared (V. Ciocâltan, 1995).

The relation of the Golden Horde with the east-Carpathian population must be understood and considered within certain parameters, being rather a vassal-sovereign one, rather than one of effective subordination. So, at least on a confessional level, the relationships between the Orthodox Romanians and the Mongols did not record visible changes during the period that followed immediately after the great invasion. As a decisive argument can be brought the model implemented in the Russian princedoms (in Romanian, *cnezate*), where the representatives of the Orthodox Church were exempted of any material obligations to the Golden Horde and received full freedom from a confessional viewpoint (F. Solomon, 1993).

The Mongol pressure was felt effectively on the level of the local society, preventing the development of a natural growth process from a political and military viewpoint. It is the reason why the Romanian historians question, concerning the second half of the 13th century, the existence of a certain elite of the local Moldavian society invested with political and military powers, able to oppose the Mongol force. In the same order of ideas, we will remind that in the area east of the Carpathians the researchers have not found any fortified settlements that could have supported an eventual resistance of the Romanian population against the Tartars.

Although it is not possible to make exact estimations concerning the amplex of the destructions caused by the great Mongol invasion in the Moldavian area, we consider that the economic life which was, obviously, under the control of the Khanate's authority, recorded an ascending period, proved especially by the intense circulation of the Tatar coins, during the last decennia of the 13th century. A testimony in this sense are the archeological discoveries found in a unitary way all over the Moldavian territory, of which a remarkable example is the discovery

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from Oțeleni locality, supposed to have contained initially 300-400 coins (O. Iliescu, 1964).

The economic flourishing consolidated a much stricter relationship to the local society, from among whom a series of representatives were able to become remarked, who assured the connection between the rest of the population and the Tartar authority, in the process of the acquittal of the financial obligations resulted from the exploitation of the resources of the territory east of the Carpathians. The ascension of these locally empowered people on the background of an accentuated Mongol dominion, determined as well by the pushing of the Tartar reign eastwards, appears likely. Their preeminence among the primary forms of organization of the feudal society, the village communities (in Romanian, *obștile sătești*), points us to the conclusion that their evolution manifested itself only economically, and not politically or militarily, as they acted mainly to the benefit of the Mongol authority, being interested first of all to officially determine this relationship, not to create a power role that, at some point, could try to eliminate all the economic obligations existing on the level of the local population. For this reason, we think there is not enough data to advance the hypothesis that they came from structures with a strong political basis such as the princedoms (*cnezate* or *voievodate*).

So, the germs of a territorial unification process, which would suppose the existence of a visible ascension in the framework of the political life, should not be looked for, in our opinion, in the east-Carpathian area, earlier than the 13th century.

The lack of the politico-territorial unification process can be analyzed starting from the idea that in the Moldavian territory there has been no proof of the existence of a political formation strong enough to assume such a role. In this sense, we avail ourselves of the defining example of the second Romanian extra-Carpathian area, where the formations of Litovoi and Seneslau, reminded as well in different documents, showed themselves from the beginning as forces able to extend their political, economic and military powers over a territory as vast as possible.

In the region delimited by the Southern Carpathians and the Danube, the evolution of the international relations imposed a different rhythm of development to the Romanian society which finally held a significant role in the

accomplishment of the state unity, half a century earlier than in the Moldavian area.

The withdrawal of the Mongol armies towards the eastern area of the continent provided Hungary with more opportunities to reestablish its dominion over certain areas outside its actual kingdom, which had been controlled effectively or just by instituting some firm vassal-sovereign relationships. Transylvania, inhabited by Romanians as well, gathers the largest number of pieces of evidence in this sense. The example of Țara Bârsei colonized by the Teutonic Knights, between 1211 and 1225, the diploma emitted by King Andrew II, in 1222, reminding of the organization of Țara Făgărașului confirm the existence of certain organizational models that could have been applied successfully as well in the case of the Romanian territories south of the Carpathian Arc.

So, we can appreciate that the first half of the 13th century marked the appearance of a new wave of Hungarian expansion towards the areas inhabited by the Romanians, which combined the tendency of direct subordination to the effort of religious assimilation of the Orthodox population from the Romanian area (Ș. Papacostea, 1993). Yet, the shock produced by the Mongol invasion on Hungary will be unexpectedly strong, producing an important imbalance between the Hungarian kingdom's desires to continue its offensive territorial policy and the realities existing in both the intra and the extra-Carpathian area.

Within the framework of such coordinates should be considered and explained as well the ascension of the formations south of the Carpathians, whose existence can surely be situated earlier on, yet which acquire only at this moment the capacity to rise to a different status in relation to the Hungarian royalty.

The Hungarian policy of colonization, reinstated soon after the Mongol invasion has a more complex character than those applied in Transylvania during the first decennia of the 13th century, and this was so because its aim was to reorganize the area differently, not just using the help of the colonizing elements, but also giving an important role, for the first time, to the local political formations. The first example is that of the area south of the Carpathians, through the awarding of the Johannite Knights' diploma.

The document issued on June 2, 1247 should not be appreciated simply as a happy case, only because it has been kept until now, while the eastern territory did not benefit of this chance.

The justification of the reasons of the absence of such a significant source should be given, from our perspective, a scientific motivation.

In this context, it would be important to highlight the idea that the act emitted towards the middle of the 13th century does not necessarily appear as an initiative belonging to the Hungarian kingdom, as the directions of this true political program had idea of the fortification of the marginal territories of the central-European states, via which new Mongol invasions were likely to occur, establishing that the fast conquest of Hungary was caused by the very lack of a well-organized system of fortifications (I. M. Țiplic, 2006).

This can explain why the Johannites knights were brought here, their role in the construction of certain *castra* (fortified castles) in the area of Cumania and the exemption of some financial obligation for the local formations, in exchange for ensuring their military support, which were basic conditions of the colonization contract.

From our viewpoint, the act emitted on June 2, 1247 represents, consequently, the indirect recognition, by the Hungarian state, of the evolution of the local formations, of the feudal right of dominion over the land instituted here, of the concentration of the political, economic and military functions in the hands of a single family or group of people.

In other words, the Johannite Knights' diploma indicates the very presence of basis from which the Romanian state was possible to begin, a basis that cannot be found, for the same period, east of the Carpathians, too.

The princedoms (*voievodate*) of Litovoi and Seneslau, those (*cnezate*) of Ioan and Farcaș managed to reach, by mid 13th century a certain evolutionary stage, even though they oscillated between the Cuman-Mongol dependence (confirmed only partially, for certain areas, in the act emitted on June 2, 1247) and the rather nominal dominion of the Hungarian kingdom. Conclusive, in this sense, appear to us as well the diggings that took place a few decennia ago, at the princely center from Cetățeni. The results obtained proved the existence here of a strong political residence which has never been affected either by the Mongol invasion or by the Hungarian attempts to penetrate south of the Carpathians (D. V. Rosetti, 1962)

The colonization act awarded to the Johannite Knights highlights the importance of two political formations from the area south of

the Carpathians, namely the princedoms (*voievodate*) of Litovoi and Seneslau, which enjoy a special regime, being exempted of the payment of half of their benefits and revenues resulted from the exploitation of the territories belonging to them.*

However, the theory accepted, without reserves, in most of the specialized studies, might need a series of nuances, starting as well from a series of mentions encountered in the above-mentioned source. In the diploma we find, for instance, a precious detail, when the enumeration of the formations east of the Olt River occurs, namely that the tax exemption is applied to the princedom of Litovoi.* So, they lead their princedoms, while maintaining certain economic and juridical powers. For this reason, we consider that we should admit at least as a working hypothesis, the idea that the exemption of obligations was possible to apply only to the princedom (*cnezat*) led by Litovoi, and not to the *voievodat*, which certainly comprised more political formations.

This sign of goodwill should rely especially on military reasons, put into practice, in the present case, on the level of the *voivodat*, in the sense that the two *voivodes*, Litovoi and Seneslau, were obliged to give military support both to the Hungarian state and to the Johannite Knights, in case of a danger coming from the outside.

However, we do not know if it was only the lack of the military potential (caused by the Mongol invasion) that pushed the Hungarian kingdom towards the acceptance of such concessions, in the case of the area south of the Carpathians. Certain is that many of the provisions concerning the local formations could have disintegrated the Johannite order, this being one of the reasons why they did not actually get to possess the extra-Carpathian territories. The very fact that they had to share half of the benefits and the revenues obtained from the exploitation of the area with the Hungarian royalty, in a context in which they had to be able of a considerable military effort as well, in the new colonized territories, may have pushed them away from the agreement with the Hungarian royalty (S. Turcuș, 2001).

The only clear aspect that can be deduced from the study of the diploma remains, after long decennia of historiographic analysis, the detailed knowledge concerning the political realities of the area and the desire of the Hungarian state to maintain, as much as possible, a certain control,

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without the engagement of its own resources or people.

So, the extra-Carpathian area recorded, after the moment marked by the Mongol invasion, a completely different evolution. If the territory of the future Moldova will largely get under the authority of the Golden Horde, the area south of the Carpathians will undergo a constant process of ascension of the local factors, on the background of a favorable external context, determined as well by the weakening of the central authority in Hungary.

The second half of the 13th century meant, for both of the Romanian areas, going through a period characterized by the disappearance of the information of any kind meant to help us understand the evolutions and the organizations recorded in the domain of the political, economic and social life, natural, we could say, at least south of the Carpathians, after the 1247 moment. The consequences of this state of fact were extremely important, the lack of documentary information hindering, of course, the historical research in the precise determination of the stages covered by each of the two areas towards the completion of their state unity.

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