



## FROM AN OPEN TO A CLOSED FRONTIER THE WALLACHIAN–MOLDAVIAN FRONTIER FROM C. 1350 TO C. 1450<sup>1</sup>

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The topic of the medieval Wallachian–Moldavian frontier, due to the flimsy extant evidence<sup>2</sup> and to ideological biases,<sup>3</sup> has rarely been addressed or has been dismissed in just a few lines by previous Romanian scholars. Although it is still recognised as a historical frontier, it is also, from a national perspective, a pseudo-frontier, since the Wallachians and the Moldavians were regarded as part of the same nation. Different historians differently undertook the difficult task of fitting the sources into a modern interpretative framework. However, in my opinion, the various interpretations can be grouped around two main solutions. The first, and the most often used, was to ignore the problem. The second was to emphasise that this frontier is special, with particular features. By interpreting the frontier from a different perspective and by analysing other sources, previously ignored for this topic, I propose a reconsideration of the problem. Until now, historians have approached the problem of the territorial extent of the Moldavian and Wallachian medieval states in two ways. The first is the 'regressive' method, by which a historian starts from the first extant exhaustive

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<sup>1</sup> This study is a revised version of the second chapter of my M.A. thesis, "The Building of the Moldavian–Wallachian Frontier c. 1350–1450" (Budapest: Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Only two pieces of information are extant concerning the Wallachian–Moldavian frontier during the period covered here: one mentions an agreement and the other a conflict. Neither the terms of the agreement, nor the precise disputed borderlands are mentioned in the sources. For the agreement between Mircea, voivode of Wallachia (1386–1418) and Alexander, voivode of Moldavia (1400–1432) see Ioan Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan* (The charters of Stephen the Great) (Bucharest: Soccec, 1913), vol 2, 334–336 (hereafter Bogdan *Documentele*). For the conflict see Antonius Prochaska, *Codex epistolaris Witoldi* (Cracow: Academiae Litterarum Cracoviae, 1882), 836 (hereafter Prochaska, *Codex Witoldi*).

<sup>3</sup> See for example P. P. Panaitescu, *Mircea cel Bătrân* (Mircea the Old) (Bucharest: Corint, 2000), 275 (hereafter Panaitescu, *Mircea*) or Cristofor Mironescu, "Hotarul între Moldova și Muntenia" (The boundary between Moldavia and Wallachia), *Anuar de geografie și antropogeografie* 2 (1911): 87.



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description of the frontier and attempts to reconstruct earlier frontiers.<sup>4</sup> The second approach is the analysis of the different parts of the *intitulatio* of the voivode, each of them corresponding to a territory.<sup>5</sup> Both these approaches analyse the frontier as a political issue, from the point of view of the political history of the medieval state.

What is proposed here is a different approach, analysing the frontier not as a matter of political history, but as an issue of human geography.<sup>6</sup> Through the attempt to reconstruct the geographic distribution of the population, I argue that both the Wallachian and the Moldavian societies were politically and demographically expanding towards the north-east and south-west, respectively. The thesis of this study sustains that the *closing* process<sup>7</sup> of the medieval Wallachian-Moldavian frontier began precisely in this period, c.1350–c.1450. Before addressing the main problem, namely the demographic evolution of these two societies, Wallachian and Moldavian, there are two necessary preliminaries. Firstly, a short review of the extant sources on the other medieval frontiers of these two states will provide some guidelines for a comparative view. Secondly, a description of the landscape of the Wallachian–Moldavian borderland offers a possible explanation for the demographic evolution in the region.

### Natural and Artificial Boundaries

Since the medieval Wallachian and Moldavian frontiers are mentioned in the sources as linear borders rather than as frontier regions, they seem, at a first reading of the sources, to have been closed from an early period. However, this is only an illusion, and, from the point of view of demographic evolution, a clear distinction must be made between two types of linear borders: natural boundaries, marked by a natural element like a river, and artificial boundaries, marked by human-made signs.

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<sup>4</sup> See Ștefan Gorovei, "Formation et évolution de la frontière de la Moldavie médiévale," *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 35 (1996): 131–136.

<sup>5</sup> The classic example is the study of Dimitrie Onciul, "Titlul lui Mircea cel Bătrân și posesiunile lui" (The *intitulatio* of Mircea the Old and his possessions) in D. Onciul, *Scrieri istorice* (Historical writings) (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1968), vol. 2, 19–142.

<sup>6</sup> This perspective can, to some extent, be considered a Turnerian approach. For a discussion on the Turnerian thesis applied to medieval history see Nora Berend, *At the Gate of Christendom: Jews, Muslims and 'Pagans' in Medieval Hungary, c. 1000 – c. 1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7.

<sup>7</sup> For this concept see Archibald Lewis, "The closing of the Medieval Frontier (1250–1350)" *Speculum* 33 (1958): 475–483.



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The Dniester River, separating Moldavia and Lithuania, is a case of a natural barrier that became a clearly delineated political frontier. The travel account of a Russian pilgrim, Deacon Zosima, who crossed the river around 1419 on his way to Constantinople, allows the observation of the mechanism of this transformation:

Then we set out for the Tartar steppe and went fifty miles along a Tartar road which is called “To the Great Valley,” and we came to a large river, below Miterevye Kyshina,<sup>8</sup> which is called the Dniester. There was a ferry there, and it was the Wallachian<sup>9</sup> border. On the far side the Wallachians take a ferry [charge], and on this side Grand Prince Vitovt’s men take a tax; thus they both do [the same thing]. It is three days from there through the Wallachian land to Belgorod.<sup>10</sup>

This short account provides some hints as to the process of the development of a feature of landscape into a political frontier. Willing to exploit the source of revenues represented by the medieval tax<sup>11</sup> on crossing rivers, the Lithuanian prince and the Moldavian voivode were both interested in controlling crossing points over the Dniester. Due to its size, the river limited the possibilities for crossing, and by its location on an important commercial route<sup>12</sup> provided significant tax revenues. Although this is a sketchy presentation

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<sup>8</sup> “Miterevye Kyshina” means the stones of the customs. This place is probably in front of today’s Soroca; see George P. Majeska, *Russian Travellers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), 180, footnote 16 (hereafter Majeska, *Russian Travellers*). Giurescu identified the place with Tighina; see C. C. Giurescu, *Târguri sau orașe și cetăți moldovene din secolul al X-lea până la mijlocul secolului al XVI-lea* (Moldavian boroughs or cities and citadels from the tenth to the middle of the sixteenth century) (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1967), 293.

<sup>9</sup> The name Wallachian is used here as an ethnic description. Moldavians were often called Wallachians in the medieval sources, both Western and Eastern.

<sup>10</sup> Zosima’s account is edited, both in Russian and English translation, in Majeska, *Russian Travellers*, 178–180. The fragment regarding Moldavia is edited in Romanian translation in the first volume of *Călători străini în Țările Române* (Foreign travellers about Romanian lands), vol. 1 ed. Maria Holban, Maria M. Alexandrescu and Paul Cernovodeanu (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1968), 43–44 (hereafter Holban et al, *Călători străini*).

<sup>11</sup> Panaitescu considered that in medieval Wallachia there were three types of customs: at a market town, at a mountain and at a ford; see Panaitescu, *Mircea*, 150.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting that Zosima travelled from Kiev with “merchants and great magnates” (И поидох от Кіева с купцы и вельможами с великими). The editor of the text believes that this “Tartar road” was probably the standard route taken by merchants going between Kiev and Belgorod; see Majeska, *Russian Travellers*, 178, footnote 14.



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of the process, it nevertheless contains the principal elements: motivation (economic benefits) and means (controlling the river fords).<sup>13</sup> The case of the Danube is probably a similar situation, albeit less clearly documented. When a traveller crossed the big river he knew he had entered Wallachia: "From Târnovo we arrived in a city named Șiştov. Here we crossed the Danube. Then we had arrived in Wallachia."<sup>14</sup>

Although both the Danube and the Dniester were linear frontiers for Wallachia and Moldavia, respectively, neither of them marked a closed frontier from the demographic point of view. Both narrative and diplomatic sources project an image of largely uninhabited regions in the vicinity of the two rivers.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the frontiers on the two rivers were not established as a consequence of a progressive demographic expansion, but rather preceded it. In comparison, the case of the linear frontiers artificially delineated is completely different.

References to artificial boundary markers are mentioned in the documents for this period mainly in relation to the boundaries of individual estates, as is abundantly attested, especially for Moldavia,<sup>16</sup> but they were also used for designating the borders of the states themselves.<sup>17</sup> In the charters, the most common references for delimiting boundaries were mounds of earth (*meta terrea*,

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<sup>13</sup> Miron Costin mentions, among the duties of the *vornic*, that of organising "the guards of the fords and borders," see Miron Costin, "Poema Polonă" (Polish Poem), in *Opere* (Works), ed. P. P. Panaitescu (Bucharest: Ed. pentru Literatură, 1965), 238. This illustrates the connected development of military control on fords and borders.

<sup>14</sup> This is the account of the German pilgrims Peter Sparnau and Ulrich von Tennstadt; see Holban et al., *Călători străini*, vol.1, 19.

<sup>15</sup> See the section entitled "Borderlands and demographic realities" below, and map 1.

<sup>16</sup> Of the 755 villages in Moldavia mentioned in documents prior to 1449, 525 have old boundaries; see Henri H. Stahl, *Contribuții la studiul satelor devălmașe românești* (Contributions to the study of Romanian village communities), vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1958), 105.

<sup>17</sup> Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between these two types of boundaries: state and estate. Two documents from 1366 describe the procedure of delimiting the estates of a Hungarian subject, Peter of Cîsnădie, from the land of Vladislav, voievode of Wallachia (*a terra seu tenutis magnifici viri, domini Ladislai, vaivode Transalpini*). *Documenta Romaniae Historica. D. Relațiile dintre Țările* (Romanian Historical Documents. Series D. The relationships between Romanian principalities). Vol. 1 (1222–1456), ed. Constantin Cihodaru and Ștefan Pascu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1977), 84 (hereafter *DRH-D*). This could have been a local affair between estates in Făgăraș; or, since King Louis did not make any distinction between the "Făgăraș feuds" and Wallachia (*terra nostra Transalpina*), this procedure could be regarded as similar to that used for the Wallachian–Hungarian border.

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îiaëëâ êîiäiä),<sup>18</sup> pillars,<sup>19</sup> scratches on trees (Romanian *cioplej*),<sup>20</sup> and boundary-crosses.<sup>21</sup> The aurochs (Romanian *bouri*), mentioned later, yet probably in use in the period under discussion here, are blocks of stone or sometimes trees on which an aurochs was inscribed.<sup>22</sup> In Wallachia boundary signs are attested only in a later period. Mentions of Wallachian estates' boundaries are not only later but also scarcer than the Moldavian ones. In a sample of 100 documents covering the period from 1352 to 1450 for Wallachia and from 1384 to 1430 for Moldavia, only three Wallachian documents depict the boundaries of a donation (two of them for Făgăraș donations, probably later interpolations) compared to 34 Moldavian documents. It is possible that the different chancellery practices originated from different realities of human geography.<sup>23</sup>

The strict delimitation of an artificially linear border, drawn by the parts placed on the two sides of it, is the most visible sign of a closed frontier. Fortunately for understanding the case of the Wallachian–Hungarian frontier, one surviving document mentions the end of the process.<sup>24</sup> In 1520 the

<sup>18</sup> ȩăăăă ăăăăă. *Documenta Romaniae Historica. A. Moldova* (Romanian Historical Documents. Series A. Moldavia) (hereafter *DRH-A*), vol. 1 (1384–1448), ed. Constantin Cihodaru, Ioan Caproșu and Leon Șimanschi (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1975), doc. 38, from 1414, 53.

<sup>19</sup> *āi ñòieĩĩ; āi õiòàòh Õãóie÷ãmáiú. DRH-A, vol. 1, doc. 79 form 1428, 116.*

<sup>20</sup> āāā ōiūáhæiā iā āōhâ@. *DRH-A*, vol. 1, doc. 264 from 1446, 373

<sup>21</sup> N. Iorga, *Istoria românilor prin călători* (History of Romanians through travellers) (Bucharest: Editura Eminescu, 1981), 167–168.

<sup>22</sup> The aurochs was the medieval symbol of Moldavia. From it derives the Romanian expression "s-au mutat bourii" (literally: moving the aurochs) which in fact means to "move the boundary." For a recent analysis of the aurochs as a boundary sign, see Gheorghe Burlacu, "Bourul Moldovei – semn de hotar" (Moldavian aurochs—boundary sign) *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie si Arheologie A. D. Xenopol* 31 (1994): 517–543.

<sup>23</sup> For example, a document from 1495 of Vlad Călugărul (1481–1495) mentions the use of boundary signs: êăđă êîêêêî âño çăăăêăæêîî. *Documenta Romaniae Historica. B. Țara Românească* (Romanian Historical Documents. Series B. Wallachia) (hereafter *DRH-B*), vol. 1 (1247–1500), ed. Petre P. Panaitescu and Damaschin Mioc (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1966), 415–416.

<sup>24</sup> Document no. 194, *Documenta Romaniae Historica. B. Țara Românească* (Romanian Historical Documents. Series B. Wallachia) (hereafter *DRH-B*), vol. 2 (1500–1525), ed. Ștefan Ștefănescu and Olimpia Diaconescu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1972), 375. The manner in which the document was elaborated, namely the lack of any reference to a previous settlement of the frontier, indicates that this was probably the first in this area. The first to interpret the document as attesting a change in the nature of the frontier, from borderland region to a linear boundary, was the geographer Ion Conea, "Cel dintâi hotar



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Wallachian and Transylvanian voivodes, Neagoe Basarab and John Zápolya, settled the frontier between the Olt River and the city of Râșova.<sup>25</sup> The frontier was drawn along the peaks of the mountains, which became its distinguishing features,<sup>26</sup> although this did not exclude the use of artificial signs.<sup>27</sup> From a comparative perspective, there are three relevant elements in this document: the place where the frontier was drawn, the actors, and their motivation(s). Not by chance was the delimited area in the western part of Wallachia, which had the highest population density from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onwards. (See *Map 1*.) The two voivodes had two reasons for entrusting the task of settling the frontier to the nobles and boyars who owned properties in that area: they knew the place best and their lands were directly involved.<sup>28</sup> The motivation for this action is not clearly specified in the document, but it is to be found in the economic interest of the local lords, the ones who actually made the decision. The local lords were not just emissaries, but decision-makers acting under the authority of the voivode, and in the assembly held at Morișor they made the decisions and settled the frontier. The oath taken by both parties not to steal or plunder supports the idea of an economically determined agreement.

Different types of economic interests in a given geographic area, in the routes (a commercial interest), or in the land itself (an agricultural interest) determine different models of a frontier.<sup>29</sup> In the first case, the stress is on controlling the key points and this is the model that applied to the frontier area between Wallachia and Moldavia for a long period. The city of Chilia was the main disputed borderland between the Wallachian and Moldavian voivodes in

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politic pe creasta munților Olteniei (1520)" (The first political boundary on the peaks of the Oltenian Mountains) *Revista geografică română* 1 (1938): 1–20.

<sup>25</sup> Oææå, ôîååå uòæîèèøå è ôîðàðâî wââî ååå çâîèè wò îèàîèè, èèîæå åå ñå çîååò: wò èîèå Wèòuèîå ååæå âî Ðúøååå, wò éú Åðååèñèþ çâîèå è wò éú Åèàøèþ Çâîèè.

<sup>26</sup> I give an excerpt from the document to illustrate the settlement of the border on peaks: è wò òuåå ååñ îî åðúò âî îèàîèè Êðåèuè îèòîèîå è îèàîèè Êuîîîuè è wò ôîå ååñ, u ååå çîåå ñå îèàîèè Êðåpwåå è îèàîèè çîåå îå Áååå è îèàîèè Wîåøàòåè.

<sup>27</sup> The boundary signs are explicitly mentioned: è ååèh¾è îw îèàîèè.

<sup>28</sup> The Hațeg nobles were from Răchitova, Mujina, Mățești, Sătcili and Râul Bărbat. The Wallachian boyars were from Crasna, Borăști, Românești, Baia, and Polovragi.

<sup>29</sup> The theory of human territoriality based on an economic model that emphasised the relationship between the resources and the costs of use/defence of an area, was contested by a model stressing ecological variables as major factors determining territoriality. Rada Dyson-Hudson and Eric Alden Smith, "Human territoriality: an ecological reassessment," *American Anthropologist* 80 (1978): 21–41.







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the first half of the fifteenth century. Its importance was mainly due to a branch of the Levantine trade that crossed it.<sup>30</sup> The second case requires a clear delimitation of the land due to a decrease in the ratio between available agricultural land and the size of the population, the states' borders being in fact the boundaries of individual estates. This second stage is attested for a much later period in the Moldavian-Wallachian case; the first known accord concerning the frontier that settled the use of the land by the inhabitants on the two sides of the border dates only from 1706.<sup>31</sup>

### An Overview of the Landscape

The region through which the future Moldavian-Wallachian boundary was to be drawn, from west to east, is composed of two main geographic units disposed in a north-south direction. The Sub-Carpathian Hills and the Carpathian Mountains are located in the present-day departments of Buzău in Wallachia and Vrancea in Moldavia. To the east the Wallachian Plain and the Southern Moldavian Plain also form a geographic unit. The Putna, Milcov, Siret, and Bârlad rivers in Moldavia and the Buzău River in Wallachia formed an alluvial plain easily flooded by unstable riverbeds until modern times.<sup>32</sup> A natural barrier in the region is the Siret River, located between the Moldavian Plateau, the

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<sup>30</sup> See Șerban Papacostea, "De Vicina à Kilia. Byzantins et Genoïs aux bouches du Danube au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle" *Revue des Etudes Sud-est Européenne* 1 (1978): 65–79 and Zsigmond Pál Pach, "Le commerce du Levant et la Hongrie au Moyen Age," *Annales ESC* 31 (1976): 1176–1194. For the Wallachian–Moldavian conflict over Chilia see Ștefan Andreescu, "Une ville disputée: Kilia pendant la première moitié du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle" *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire* 23 (1985): 217–230. For a different opinion, see Virgil Ciocâltan, "Chilia în primul sfert al veacului al XV-lea" (Chilia in the first quarter of the fifteenth century), *Revista de istorie* 34 (1981): 2091–2096.

<sup>31</sup> C. Constantinescu-Mircești and Ion Dragomirescu, "Marginea țării. Aspecte caracteristice în zona hotarului dintre Moldova și Țara Românească" (The border of the country. Particular features in the borderland between Moldavia and Wallachia). *Studii și articole de istorie* 9 (1967): 85 (hereafter Constantinescu-Mircești and Dragomirescu, "Marginea țării").

<sup>32</sup> For the changes that took place in the Siret riverbed, see Nicolae Antonovici, "Probleme hidrografice în basinul inferior al Siretului" (Hydrographic issues of the low riverbed of the Siret), *Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*. Series 3: 1–8. For a discussion on the frontier dispute provoked by these changes see C. Constantinescu-Mircești and Ion Dragomirescu, "Contribuții cu privire la cunoașterea hotarului dintre Moldova și Țara Românească de la întemeierea Principatelor până la Unire" (Contributions to research on the boundary between Moldavia and Wallachia from the foundation of the Principalities until the Union), *Studii și articole de istorie* 6 (1965): 65–70.





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Romanian Plain, and the Sub-Carpathians.<sup>33</sup> Paradoxically, the frontier was eventually established through the very middle of these geographic units, dividing them along the Milcov River, traditionally considered the border between Moldavia and Wallachia.

Different types of soil distinguish the two geographic areas, the plains on one hand and the mountains and hills on the other. In the Sub-Carpathian hills the type of soil suggests that these were probably forested areas for a long period.<sup>34</sup> Numerous clearance areas attested here in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries confirm this interpretation.<sup>35</sup> The soil of the plains region, levigate chernozem, is different, specific to unforested areas and excellent for agriculture.<sup>36</sup> Using nineteenth century realities as a comparative base, it is clear that the area between the Siret and Ialomița rivers is the least forested region in all of Wallachia and Moldavia. These unforested plains regions<sup>37</sup> represented a perfect corridor for people coming from the eastern steppes. This gave the region its paradoxical status: a good land for agriculture, but at the same time an open space communicating directly with the eastern steppes through Bugeac, and therefore exposed to recurrent population incursions that had significant demographic impacts.

### Borderlands and Demographic Realities

The number of inhabitants of Moldavia and Wallachia, especially during the first century of their existence, remains a disputed matter in historiography, mainly due to the lack of sources. For Wallachia, a figure between 266,000 and 700,000 inhabitants has been proposed, with variations determined by the sources

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<sup>33</sup> *Geografia României* (Geography of Romania), ed. Lucian Badea (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1984), vol.1 *Geografia fizică* (Physical geography), 632 and 645.

<sup>34</sup> N. Florea, I. Munteanu, and C. Rapaport, *Geografia solurilor României* (The geography of the soils of Romania) (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1968), 61 (hereafter N. Florea, et al., *Geografia*).

<sup>35</sup> For a discussion on the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century modifications of the landscape in the Moldavian-Wallachian frontier region see C. Constantinescu-Mircești and I. Dragomirescu, "Marginea țării," 81–121.

<sup>36</sup> N. Florea, et al., *Geografia*, 466.

<sup>37</sup> In his monograph, Giurescu does not mention any important forest in the frontier area of Moldavia–Wallachia. C. C. Giurescu, *A History of the Romanian Forest* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1980).



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chosen for estimation and by ideological factors.<sup>38</sup> Ioan Bogdan, who used a 'regressive' reckoning, estimated the populations of Wallachia and Moldavia in the fifteenth century to have been 266,000 and 415,625 inhabitants, respectively. He starts with the census from 1885–1886 and projects his estimation into the past for four centuries; therefore his results are questionable.<sup>39</sup> P. P. Panaitescu based his evaluation on the size of the army and, by assuming a ratio of 1:10 between the army and the general population, he estimated that Wallachia was inhabited by 400,000 to 500,000 people.<sup>40</sup> The discovery of two fiscal references allowed Louis Roman to propose the even higher number of approximately 700,000 inhabitants.<sup>41</sup> For Moldavia, historians have estimated around 400,000 inhabitants at the time of Stephen the Great (1457–1504); while this is generally accepted, that does not mean it is more certain. Louis Roman estimated the evolution in number of the Moldavian villages as follows: 1000 around the year 1241, 850 at the middle of the fourteenth century and 1500 to 1600 one century later.<sup>42</sup> Based on these data, the average population density in Wallachia and Moldavia is estimated at four and three inhabitants, respectively, per square kilometre for the middle of the fourteenth century, taking into account their entire future territory.<sup>43</sup> This short review has been intended to establish some

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<sup>38</sup> These estimates were ideologically influenced by a nationalist attitude that requires an emphasis on present Romania as a land inhabited during history by Romanians, in large number and in all regions.

<sup>39</sup> See Louis Roman, "Populația Țării Românești în secolele XIV–XV" (The Wallachian population in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), *Revista de Istorie* 39 (1986): 669 (hereafter Roman, "Populația").

<sup>40</sup> According to some Venetian sources, the army in the time of Vlad Țepeș (1456–1462, 1476) had 30,000–40,000 soldiers. Panaitescu, *Mircea*, 74–75. Ștefan Ștefănescu, by a different estimation, arrived at the same number. Ștefan Ștefănescu, "La situation démographique de la Valachie aux XIV<sup>e</sup>, XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles d'après les conjonctures socio-politiques," *Nouvelles Études d'Histoire* 4 (1970): 47–61.

<sup>41</sup> Louis Roman uses the two accounts discovered and edited by Șerban Papacostea, both using Hungarian sources, which give a number of 60,000 families (in the sense of fiscal units) for Wallachia. See Șerban Papacostea, "Populație și fiscalitate în Țara Românească în secolul al XV-lea: un nou izvor" (Population and fiscality in the fifteenth-century Wallachia: a new source), *Revista de Istorie* 33 (1980): 1179–1786. However, Roman's estimation is unconvincing, and shows a clear tendency of arriving at higher numbers. Roman, "Populația," 669–684.

<sup>42</sup> Louis Roman, "Toponimia și demografia istorică" (Toponymy and historical demography), *Revista Istorică* 8 (1997): 432.

<sup>43</sup> See a comparative table of population density in Bogdan Murgescu, *Istorie românească, istorie universală* (Romanian history, universal history) (Bucharest: Editura Teora, 2000)



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necessary limits for the approach taken in this study and has also shown the difficulties and the uncertainty of demographic studies for medieval Wallachia and Moldavia.

Population distribution is an even more difficult matter, especially due to the lack of studies on this topic.<sup>44</sup> However, an approach based on three different categories of sources, namely, narrative, diplomatic, and archaeological, can offer a reasonably accurate picture, with special regard to the frontier zone of Moldavia and Wallachia.<sup>45</sup>

The few narrative sources from this period that contain references to the population agree that medieval Moldavia and Wallachia were, by contemporary standards, sparsely populated. King Louis of Hungary's chronicler, John of Küküllő, describes Moldavia as a "land subject to the Hungarian Crown but for a long time empty of inhabitants owing to the proximity of the Tartars."<sup>46</sup> Ghillebert of Lanoy, a messenger of the Duke of Burgundy, travelling in 1421 in the hinterland of Cetatea Albă and Chilia in southern Moldavia, speaks of great deserted regions.<sup>47</sup> In the Lublau treaty (1412) the expression *campis desertis* is used to refer to the same territories.<sup>48</sup> Another Burgundian, the crusader Walerand of Wavrin, gives a similar account, this time for Wallachia, around 1445: "la Vallaquie...un grand et spacieux pays, mal peuple en aulcunes marches."<sup>49</sup> The most interesting demographic aspect recounted by Wavrin

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22. For Transylvania the estimate is 7 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, for Poland 10 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, and for Italy 33 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> A notable exception is the study of Robin Baker, "Magyars, Mongols, Romanians and Saxons: Population Mix and Density in Moldavia, from 1230 to 1365," *Balkan Studies* 37 (1996): 63–76 (hereafter Baker, "Magyars, Mongols").

<sup>45</sup> Some historians have noted that this region had a low density of population: "In the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the density of the population appears to have been relatively uniform in the centre and north of Moldavia, on the other hand in the steppes on the north of the mouth of the Danube, the population was sparse because of the incursions of tribes of Turkish and Mongol horsemen," Victor Spinei, *Moldavia in the 11<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1986), 137–138 (hereafter Spinei, *Moldavia*).

<sup>46</sup> See Johannes de Thurocz, *Chronica Hungarorum*, vol. 1, ed. E. Galántai and J. Kristó (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1985), 185 (hereafter Thurocz, *Chronica*).

<sup>47</sup> "En m'en allay par grans desers, de plus de quatre lieues, en laditte Wallachie." Holban et al., *Călători străini*, vol. 1, 50.

<sup>48</sup> Prochaska, *Codex Witoldi*, 230.

<sup>49</sup> Jehan de Wauvrin, *Croniques et anciennes istories de la Grant Bretagne, a present nomme Engleterre*, vol. 5, ed. William Hardy and Edward L. C. P. Hardy. (London, 1891. Reprint, Nendeln: Kraus, 1967), 104. (hereafter Wauvrin, *Croniques*)



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regards the uneven distribution of population in Wallachia and the attempts of the voivode, at that time Vlad Dracul, to colonise the marginal regions—towards Moldavia—with people from south of the Danube.<sup>50</sup> Although geographically imprecise, these accounts paint an image of a sparsely inhabited territory. However, this information has been questioned by historians, who have made solid criticisms, such as the purposes of these authors,<sup>51</sup> their comparative views, and the images reflected by other sources. For instance, the Burgundians came from a densely inhabited region of Europe, and therefore the subjective nature of their view, with its implicit comparison to their country, must be taken into account.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, the most often quoted source for a positive demographic image is the patriarchal document by which the second metropolitan see of Wallachia was founded at Severin. The Patriarch of Constantinople justifies this act by the large population.<sup>53</sup> Therefore the narrative sources cannot constitute, at least not by themselves, a reliable basis for historical reconstruction.

A second category of sources that can be used for analysing the distribution of population in Wallachia and Moldavia is represented by internal documents, mainly donation charters. The 100 preserved Wallachian documents from 1352 to 1450 contain references to 163 settlements, compared with more than 750 in the 298 Moldavian documents.<sup>54</sup> Most of them can be located, thanks to the geographical references contained in the documents. These settlements represent, of course, the lower limit; in reality their number must

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<sup>50</sup> “Puis requist ledit seigneur Vallaque au cardinal et au seigneur de Wavrin quilz lui voulsissent aidier a passer ces christiens Volguaires outre la riviere de Dunoue tant quilz feussent en son pays, adfin dyceulz mettre hors de chetivete; si mist on bien trois jours et trois nultz a les passer, car ilz estoient bien douze mille personne, hommes, femmes, et enfans sans les bagues et bestail, si disoient ceulz quy les veyrent que cestoiient telz gens comme sont Egiptiens.” Wauvrin, *Croniques*, 105

<sup>51</sup> Probably John of Küküllő's intention is to play down the significance of the loss of Moldavia to Hungary; see the criticism by Spinei, *Moldavia*, 206.

<sup>52</sup> See P. P. Panaitescu's remarks on Wavrin in *Mircea*, 74, and the analyses on the significance of the word “desert” by Lanoy in Holban et al., *Călători străini*, vol. 1, 61.

<sup>53</sup> *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor* (Documents concerning the history of Romanians), series 1, vol. 1 (1199–1345), ed. Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki and Nicolae Densușianu (Bucharest: Socec & Teclu, 1889), 8–9. Another positive account is that of the archbishop John of Sultanieh, who appreciates that the two Wallachias *non habent civitates magnas sed villas multas*. A. Kern, “Der ‘Libellus de notitia orbis’ Johannes III O. P. Erzbischofs von Sultanieh,” *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 7 (1938): 103.

<sup>54</sup> The documents are published in *Documenta Romaniae Historica*, series A for Moldavia and series B for Wallachia.



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have been much higher. In his analysis for the period between 1352 and 1625, Ion Donat estimates the number of Wallachian settlements at 3,220.<sup>55</sup> For this study, a more important aspect is whether the maps reflect a correct image of the population distribution; that is why possible distorting factors must be taken into account.

The first possible objection concerns the way in which the documents were preserved. In Moldavia secular donations are more numerous than monastic ones, but in Wallachia most of the documents represent donations to the monasteries and were preserved by them.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, one could argue that the Wallachian map of settlements is rather a map of monasteries' possessions, with the settlements concentrated around the monastic sites of Vodița, Tismana, Cotmeana, Glavacioc, and Snagov. It was not mandatory for these settlements to be localized to an area around the monastery and sometimes they could be located at great distances. This is the case for the village situated at the mouth of the Ialomița River given by Mircea to the Cozia monastery.<sup>57</sup> However, there was usually a geographic connection between a monastery and its possessions. One could argue that even the distribution of the monasteries could be connected with the settlements' density, since a monastery needed the support of several settlements for its survival. If this argument is accepted, then different demographic realities correspond to the difference between eastern Wallachia and western Wallachia, where monastic foundations are numerous in an early period.<sup>58</sup>

The second possible distorting factor concerns the nature of the documents. Only the villages in which a change in the property system took place are mentioned in these charters, as the settlement was usually transferred from the ruler's domain into monastic or boyar property. Therefore, the villages inhabited by free peasants are not attested in documents. This could explain the blank spots on the maps, especially those from the region of direct interest here. Indeed, in

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<sup>55</sup> Ion Donat, "Așezările omenești în Țara Românească în secolele XIV–XVII" (Human settlements in Wallachia from the fourteenth to seventeenth century), *Studii Revistă de Istorie* 9 (1956): 75–95 (hereafter Donat, "Așezările"). Lia Lehr contested the result with strong arguments—Donat includes in his list toponyms that probably do not represent settlements—and proposed the number of 2,100. L. Lehr, "Factori determinanți în evoluția demografică a Țării Românești în secolul al XVII-lea" (Determinant factors in the demographic evolution of Wallachia in the seventeenth century), *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie* 7 (1974): 161–205.

<sup>56</sup> Charters for monasteries represent almost two-thirds of Wallachian documents and less than one third of Moldavian documents.

<sup>57</sup> *DRH-B*, vol.1, 65–66.

<sup>58</sup> For a map of the Wallachian monasteries from the period 1352–1625, see Donat, "Așezările," 86.



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the region of the Wallachian-Moldavian frontier, where the so-called “Republic of Vrancea” is attested,<sup>59</sup> the percentage of free villages was substantial.<sup>60</sup> However, the existence of these villages of free peasants could be due to a later peopling of the area after the emergence of medieval states.

The third factor refers to the issuers of these documents. Since the charters were written by the chancelleries of Wallachia and Moldavia, they only refer to the territories within these states; thus, it is possible that these “blank spots” represent areas outside the control of the two voivodes. This would also explain why the settlements next to the frontier area are only mentioned in a later period.

Two opposing theories address the hypothesis that during his reign Basarab, the first Wallachian voivode, extended his territories eastwards, to include the future Bessarabia region. The first theory suggests that Basarab extended the territory of Wallachia during the Hungarian expeditions against the Golden Horde, in which he participated as an ally of the Hungarian king. Only three pieces of evidence support this scenario, first the Romanian historical tradition that recalls participation in the wars against the Tartars under the rule of King Laslău, hypothetically identified with King Louis of Anjou; second, a letter of Pope John XXII in which he praised the fight of Basarab against the infidels; and third a highly singular interpretation concerning the reason that led Charles Robert to attack Basarab.<sup>61</sup> To my mind, this hypothesis is completely wrong, because such an early end to the Mongol control over the region (the 1320s) is contradicted both by the written sources and the archaeological evidence.

The second theory suggests exactly the opposite, namely that Basarab extended his domination under Tartar hegemony, in an evolution similar to the Russian model of the Muscovy knezat. The hypothesis is only indirectly supported by the sources. Firstly, there is sufficient information from contemporary sources for assuming Wallachian-Tartar cooperation or rather Mongol hegemony over Wallachia. Secondly, the hypothesis is strengthened by

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<sup>59</sup> The name of “Republic” was given by Dimitrie Cantemir to three Moldavian regions: Câmpulung, Tigheciu and Vrancea. Dimitrie Cantemir, *Descriptio antiqui et hodierni status Moldaviae*, ed. and tr. Gheorghe Guțu (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei, 1973), 303. This term was taken over by H. H. Stahl who assumed that this represented an archaic (pre-state) form of social organisation. Henri H. Stahl, *Les anciennes communautés villageoises roumaines* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1969), 37.

<sup>60</sup> See Stahl’s maps and estimations in Stahl, *Les anciennes communautés*, 25–32.

<sup>61</sup> See P. P. Panaitescu, *Introducere la istoria culturii românești* (Bucharest: Editura Științifică, 1969), 304–314. The same opinion at Ștefan Ștefanescu, *Istoria medie a României*, vol. 1 (Bucharest: Editura Universității București, 1991), 114.



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the existence of a precedent: the Bulgarians ruled over a large area under Mongol hegemony during the first two decades of the fourteenth century. This region could have subsequently been given to Basarab.<sup>62</sup> However, even if one of these two theses, highly speculative, is accepted, this extension of Wallachia was only for a short period of time. There are two main sources that support the idea of Wallachia's eastern border being on the Ialomița River before 1368: King Louis' privilege from 1358, given to the Brașov merchants,<sup>63</sup> and John of Küküllő's description of the Wallachian–Hungarian confrontation of 1368.<sup>64</sup>

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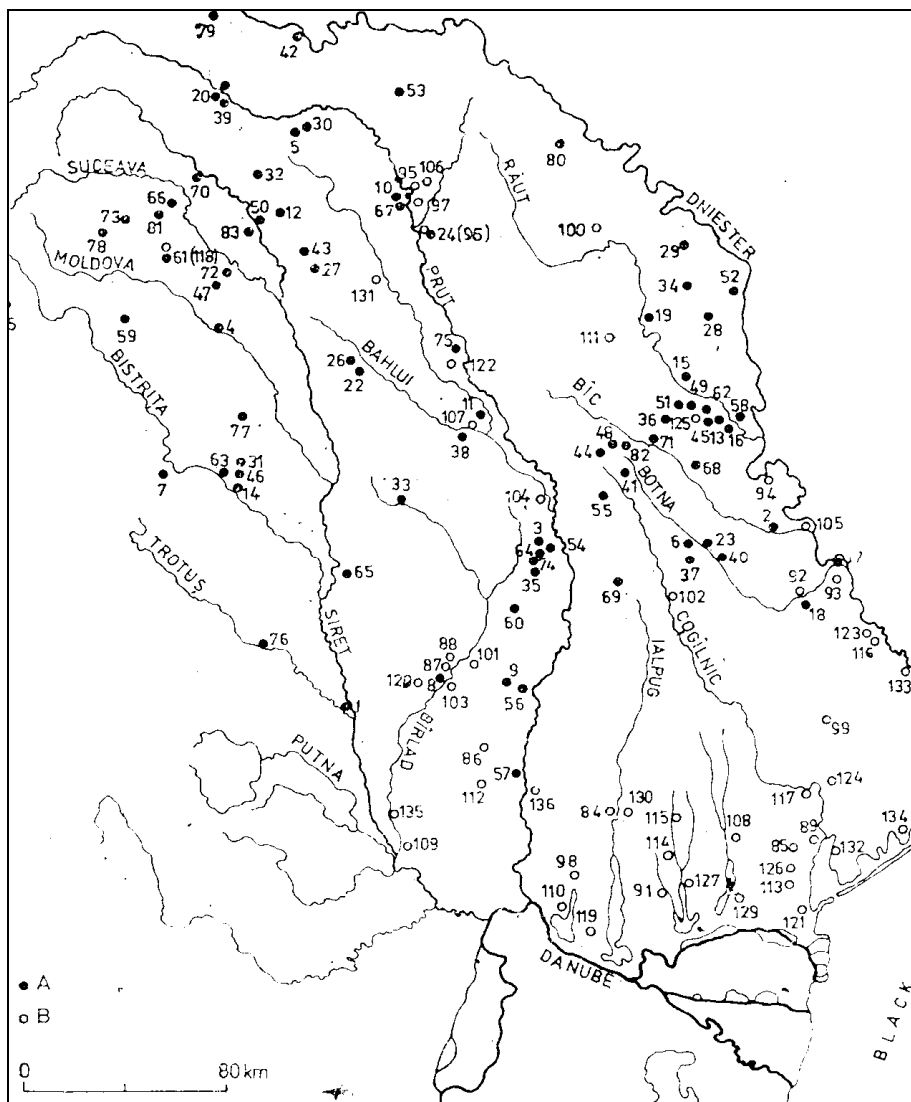
<sup>62</sup> For this thesis see N. Iorga, "Imperiul cumanilor și domnia lui Basarabă" (The Cuman Empire and the rule of Basarab), in N. Iorga, *Studii asupra Evului Mediu românesc* (Studies on the Romanian Middle Ages), ed. Șerban Papacostea (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984), 70; Panaitescu, *Mircea*, 346–350; Șerban Papacostea, *Geneza statului în Evul Mediu românesc* (The genesis of the state in the Romanian Middle Ages) (Bucharest: Corint, 1999), 29; and Virgil Ciocâltan, *Mongolii și Marea Neagră în secolele XIII–XIV* (The Mongols and the Black Sea in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries) (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998), 252.

<sup>63</sup> "ut vos cum vestris mercimoniis et quibuslibet rebus inter Bozam et Prahow, a loco videlicet ubi fluvius Iloncha vocatus in Danobium usque locum ubi fluvius Zereth nominatus similiter in ipsum Danobium cadunt, transire possitis libere et secure, nec vos aliquis in ipso vestro transitu indebite valeat impedire." *DRH-D*, vol. 1, 72. The privilege from 1358 has been used by some historians to argue for the existence of Hungarian control over the region between Buzău and Ialomița, the so-called "Hungarian corridor." The idea of the "Hungarian corridor" was first suggested by N. Iorga in *Istoria românilor*, (History of Romanians), vol. 3 (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1988). The theory was developed by E. C. Lăzărescu, in his unpublished doctoral thesis "Români, Unguri și tătari în vremea întemeierii domniilor românești" (Romanians, Hungarians and Tartars at the time of foundation of the Romanian reign) (Bucharest, 1946), considered that this "corridor" continued to exist until 1382, when Wallachia was included in its boundaries in the context of the internal disputes in the Hungarian kingdom, as quoted by Gh. Brătianu, "Les rois de Hongrie et les Principautés roumaines au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Bulletin de la section historique de l'Académie Roumaine* 28 (1947), 86. The theory was contested especially by P. P. Panaitescu and M. Holban. See Panaitescu, *Mircea*, 115, and Maria Holban, "Contribuții la studiul raporturilor dintre Țara Românească și Ungaria Angevină – Problema stăpânirii efective a Severinului și a suzeranității în legătură cu drumul Brăilei" (Contributions to the study of Wallachia and the Angevin-Hungary relationship—the problem of the effective rule over Severin and of suzerainty in connection with the Brăila road), *Studii. Revistă de istorie* 15 (1962): 325. To my mind, the privilege given in 1358 should be interpreted as indicating the eastern limits of the Wallachian state, without automatically implying effective Hungarian control over those regions.

<sup>64</sup> "Qui quidem Nicolaus wayuoda cum exercitu predicto fluvium Jlimcza, ubi fortalitia et propugnacula erant per Olachos firmate," Thurocz, 181. The first interpretation in this sense of John's information is that of Brătianu, "Les rois de Hongrie," 87–88.

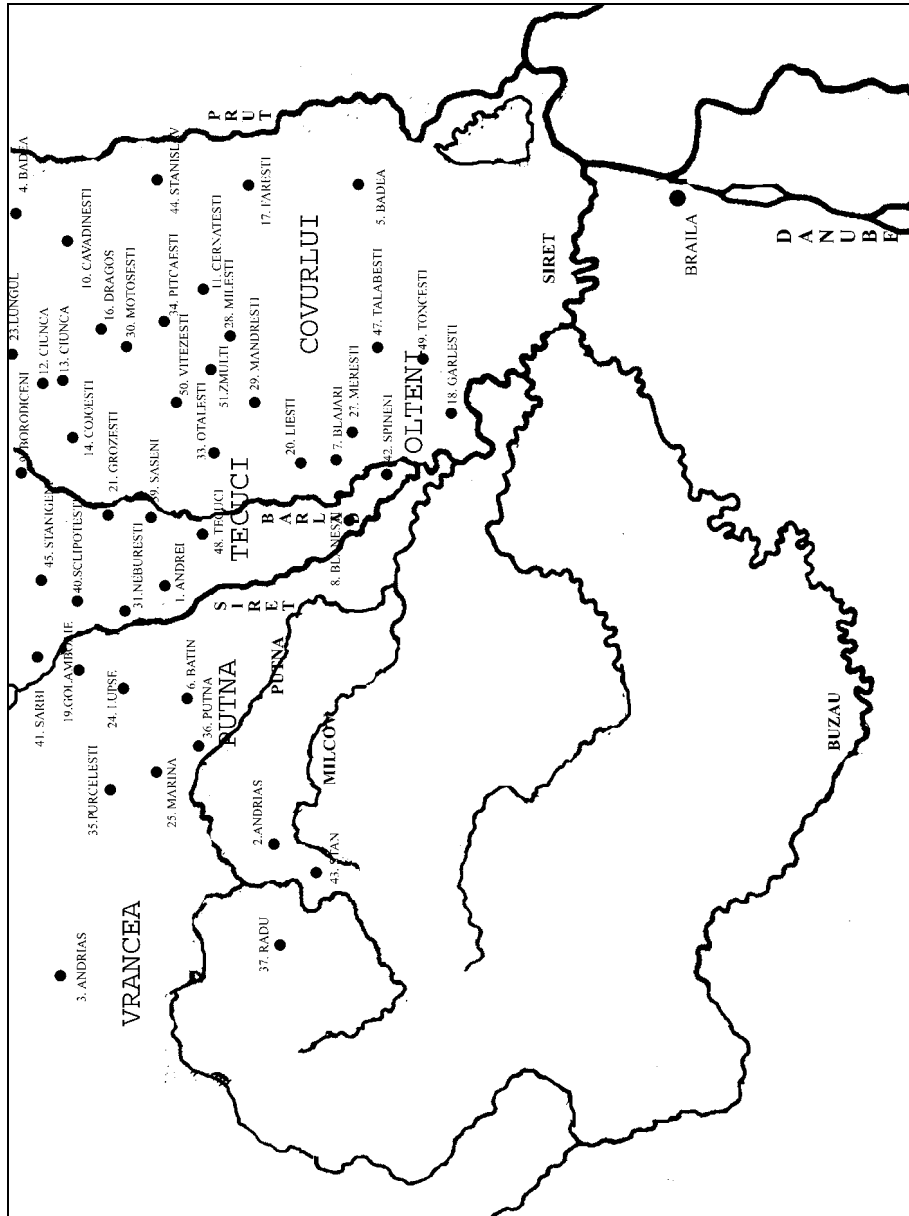


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Map 2. The main archaeological findings in Moldavia (c. 1250 – c. 1350)  
based on: Victor Spinei, *Moldavia in the 11<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries*  
(Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1986), 226.

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Map 3. South-western Moldavian settlements mentioned in internal documents (1384–1448).  
Map by the author.



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However, the use of archaeological evidence, the third, independent source, reinforces the image of population distribution with a low density in the Wallachian-Moldavian frontier zone, reflected in the maps of settlements. However, the archaeological investigation does not follow the written evidence. The similarity of the archaeological features belonging to the same material culture discovered throughout Moldavia and Wallachia—some sites being also documentarily identified—shows that the same type of settlement is attested by both written and archaeological sources. I added to this study the map of Spinei (see *Map 2*), because it is the only one that covers the entire medieval Moldavia, not only the present day Moldova region from Romania. In Wallachia's case, a map of fourteenth-century settlements attested by archaeological sites reveals almost deserted regions in eastern Wallachia. Panait remarks that 40 sites dating from this century are grouped in the northern region (Olt-Cotmeana-Târgoviște-Târgșor-Poienari), the southern region (along the Danube) and in the central area (near today Bucharest, Verbicioara, Craiova).<sup>65</sup> For Moldavia, an archaeological survey revealed 135 locations with evidence from the second half of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth century.<sup>66</sup> Out of these, 117 are in the northern part of Moldavia and the rest on the Central Plateau and the Huși-Elan-Horinceu depression; not even one lies in the plain of Siret or in the southern part of the Sub-Carpathian region.<sup>67</sup> Although recent studies have added new elements to this image by including recent archaeological discoveries in the region,<sup>68</sup> these have not changed the previous patterns. Taking into account the archaeological findings, the south-western Moldavian region was far less inhabited in the fourteenth century than the northern regions (see *Map 3*). Another map of archaeologically attested settlements from the tenth to the

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<sup>65</sup> P. I. Panait, "Cercetarea arheologică a culturii materiale din Țara Românească în secolul al XIV-lea" (Archaeological research on the material culture from fourteenth-century Wallachia), *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie* 22 (1971): 247–263.

<sup>66</sup> The authors mention in the Introduction that their repertory and map is based on a survey of the entire surface of Moldavia. However, they did not include the part of Moldavia then situated in the U.S.S.R., today in Ukraine and Republic of Moldova. N. Zaharia, M. Petrescu-Dâmbovița and Em. Zaharia, *Așezările din Moldova. De la paleolitic până în secolul al XVIII-lea* (Moldavian settlements. From Palaeolithic until the eighteenth century) (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei, 1970), 12–17 (hereafter Zaharia, et al., *Așezările*).

<sup>67</sup> Zaharia et al., *Așezările*, 148.

<sup>68</sup> The most recent monograph on the region is that of Anton Paragină, *Habitatul medieval la curbura exterioară a Carpaților în secolele X–XV* (The medieval habitat outside the Carpathian curve from the tenth to the fifteenth century) (Brăila: Istros, 2002). For a repertory of the archeological findings see pages 115–129.



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fourteenth century, created this time on a different basis,<sup>69</sup> again revealed blank spots in north-eastern Wallachia and southern Moldavia. On this map there are no settlements between Buzău and Siret for the period between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, yet a concentration of settlements can be noted in the Brăila zone, between Buzău, Călmășui and the Danube.<sup>70</sup> This set of maps based on archaeological evidence must also be analysed taking into account two possible distorting factors: the lack of uniformity of archaeological investigation and the conservation of material evidence of settlements. Namely, the dwellings in the Sub-Carpathians, built of wood and the topsoil, are less well preserved than the structures from the plains and plateaux.<sup>71</sup>

The correlation of written sources with the archaeological evidence—each of them projecting problematic images, but whose overlap shows an image close to medieval reality—strongly suggests that the future Moldavian–Wallachian frontier area was sparsely inhabited in the fourteenth century, even compared with other Wallachian and Moldavian regions.

### Political and Demographic Expansion

Most scholars consider, even if to different degrees,<sup>72</sup> that the Mongol invasion in 1241–1242 was the main reason for the depopulation of Wallachia and Moldavia, and especially of the future frontier areas. The Mongols' demographic impact is difficult to estimate, due to the lack of sources dating from both before and after the invasion, but there seem to be two factors that have to be

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<sup>69</sup> Olteanu, contrary to Zaharia and Petrescu-Dambovița, takes into account only the sites which reveal settlements (cemeteries, dwellings) and refuses to identify as settlements any stray discoveries of ceramics and coins; Ștefan Olteanu, "Evoluția procesului de organizare statală la est și la sud de Carpați în secolele IX–XIV" (The evolution of the process of state organisation east and south of the Carpathians from the ninth to the fourteenth century), *Studii. Revistă de Istorie* 23 (1971): 759 (hereafter Olteanu, "Evoluția").

<sup>70</sup> The few archaeological discoveries in Buzău-Siret area revealing human settlements from this region are for the period between the tenth and the twelfth century: Dragoslaveni, Pietroasa, Balotesti, Milcovia (sic), Malu, Oituz, Adjutul Vechi, Ibrianu. Olteanu believes that the Brăila zone, which in his opinion was a pre-state formation, was incorporated by Wallachia in a later period. Olteanu, "Evoluția," 766.

<sup>71</sup> Olteanu, "Evoluția," 761.

<sup>72</sup> One of the most radical scholars is Robin Baker who considers that Moldavia after the Mongol invasion had become a wasteland with sparse settlement of marauding groups of Tartars. Robin Baker, "Magyars, Mongols," 69. However, the archaeological evidence contradicts his thesis.



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considered. First, probably only a small number of people inhabited the Moldavian and Wallachian regions before the invasions. Second, the Mongol rulership did not have only negative demographic consequences, but also had a positive impact. Among other factors, the temporary presence of the Alans in the future Moldavia is attested both by written and cartographic sources.<sup>73</sup>

To my mind, the Mongol invasion had two main demographic consequences over Moldavia and Wallachia. First, a shift took place in the population distribution. A comparative view of the archaeological maps, especially those of Moldavia,<sup>74</sup> shows a major change between the tenth and eleventh centuries and the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. During these three centuries numerous settlements disappeared from the unforested plains zones, and the density of settlements increased in the hilly, forested areas. This shift was caused, at least partially, by the Mongols.<sup>75</sup> It is not clear whether there is truly a connection between the demographic shift of the two regions and the distinction between the regions directly ruled by the Mongols and those that kept their own political structures, although submitting to Mongol dominance. For the eastern Carpathian regions, Victor Spinei tried to separate the two zones on the basis of the differences in the material culture reflected by archaeological remains. Ceramics made of reddish-yellow clay, specific to the centres of production under the Horde's control, were discovered in southern Moldavia bordered by the Dniester to the east, Siret to the west, and the lower basin of the Răut and Bahlui to the north.<sup>76</sup> Second, the impact of the Mongol invasion

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<sup>73</sup> See Victor Spinei, "Coexistența populației locale din Moldova cu grupurile etnice alogene în secolele XII–XIV" (The coexistence of the local population from Moldavia with the foreign ethnic groups in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), *Acta Moldaviae Meridionalis* 2 (1986): 157–176, here 164 (hereafter Spinei, "Coexistența").

<sup>74</sup> For such maps see Zaharia, et al. *Așezările*, or, more recently Dan Gh. Teodor, *Descoperiri arheologice și numismatice la Est de Carpați în secolele V–XI* (Archaeological and numismatic findings east of the Carpathians from the fifth to the eleventh century) (Bucharest: Muzeul Național de Istorie, 1997).

<sup>75</sup> Spinei suggested that this shift began as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and was also caused by the Turanic migrations; see Victor Spinei, "Restructurări etnice la nordul gurilor Dunării în secolele XIII–XIV" (Ethnic reshaping at the north of the mouth of the Danube in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), *Carpica* 24 (1993): 37–65, here 39.

<sup>76</sup> Spinei, *Moldavia*, 137.



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in 1241 was not a massive depopulation, but rather a delay in the demographic growth of a sparsely inhabited area.<sup>77</sup>

The end of Mongol domination over the future Moldavian–Wallachian frontier areas marked the beginning of the political expansion of the two medieval states into these regions. Three dates have been proposed as marking the end of the Golden Horde's domination over the region between the Carpathians and the Danube: 1345, 1362/1363, and 1368/1369. The first date is related to the Hungarian expedition in 1345. Another date proposed for the elimination of the Mongols' control over south-eastern Moldavia was that of the Lithuanian victory at Sinie Vody in 1362/1363.<sup>78</sup> Based mainly on archaeological evidence, Victor Spinei argued that the Mongols' retreat from south-eastern Moldavia took place in 1368/1369. These are the years when the prosperous urban centres of Orheiul Vechi and Costești were abandoned and the last Mongol coins in the region were minted.<sup>79</sup> Southern Moldavia and the north-eastern Wallachian regions,<sup>80</sup> subjected to prolonged Mongol control, remained outside the two Romanian medieval states at the time of their emergence. It is difficult to draw a demarcation line between the Tartar controlled area and that outside their control. This probably followed different features of the landscape dividing forested areas from steppe zones.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> In this sense the attempts at installing the Teutonic Order and the missionary bishopric of the Cumans illustrate early thirteenth-century attempts of the Hungarian kingdom to extend, and to some degree, to colonise the regions beyond the Carpathians.

<sup>78</sup> Constantin Cihodaru, "Observații cu privire la procesul de formare și de consolidare a statului feudal Moldova în secolele XI–XIV," (Remarks on the foundation and consolidation process of the medieval state of Moldavia, between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries), *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie "A.D. Xenopol"* 17 (1980): 131.

<sup>79</sup> Spinei, "Coexistența," 163.

<sup>80</sup> The image of Wallachia projected by the Hungarian chronicles is that of a state, the core of which, if not its entire extent, was located in northern and western areas, at the foot of the Carpathians, in the hilly regions, and eastwards as far as the Dâmbovița River.

<sup>81</sup> To support this hypothesis I would like to quote a passage from an early Moldavian chronicle, the so-called Moldo-Russian chronicle. In the chronicle it is mentioned that Dragoș and his followers stopped at the boundaries of the region where "the Tartars were wandering," between the Prut and Moldova rivers. *Âi êðàè òàòàðüñêüiö êî÷ââîeüü*; see Ioan Bogdan, *Vechile cronice moldovenesci pana la Urechia* (The old Moldavian chronicles until Ureche) (Bucharest: Tipografia Carol Göbl, 1891), 237. Virgil Ciocâltan proposed identifying this steppe area with south-western Moldavia, the Bugeac



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The principality of Moldavia incorporated the south-eastern regions, including Cetatea Albă, probably in the 1390s, although the circumstances in which this expansion took place are unclear, either directly succeeding Tartar control or taking over from the Grand Duchy of Lithuania<sup>82</sup> or from a temporary local political structure.<sup>83</sup> As for the expansion of the Moldavian principality towards the southwest, up to Oituz in the Trotuș region, the year 1395 constitutes a *terminus ante quem*. This is the year of Sigismund's campaign against Moldavia, which is known from the account by Thuróczy and from several charters issued by the king to reward the participants of the expedition. From Sigismund's itinerary, reconstructed on the basis of the charters he issued, it seems almost certain that he entered Moldavia through the Oituz pass in south-western Moldavia.<sup>84</sup> The strong resistance Hungarians met while crossing the pass, vividly described by Thuróczy, suggests that the principality of Moldavia already had the rule over that region, especially because the voivode himself took part in the battle.<sup>85</sup>

In a similar evolution, the medieval state of Wallachia extended towards the north-east, controlling the region between the Ialomița and Buzău rivers as early as 1368, according to the privilege given by Voivode Vladislav to the

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region. See Virgil Ciocâltan, "Alanii și începuturile statelor românești" (The Alans and the beginnings of the Romanian Principalities), *Revista de istorie* 6 (1995): 935–955.

<sup>82</sup> The thesis of a Lithuanian domination over the region around Cetatea Albă was supported by C. Racoviță, (see C. Racoviță, "Începuturile suzeranității polone asupra Moldovei" (The beginnings of Polish suzerainty over Moldavia), *Revista istorică română* 10 (1940): 237–332, here 317) and Ștefan S. Gorovei, *Întemeierea Moldovei. Probleme controversate* (The foundation of the Moldavia: disputed problems) (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza," 1997), 207–209.

<sup>83</sup> Șerban Papacostea, "La începuturile statului moldovenesc. Considerații pe marginea unui izvor necunoscut" (The beginnings of the Moldavian state. Remarks on an unknown source), 104–121, in Șerban Papacostea, *Geneza statului în Evul Mediu românesc* (The genesis of the state in the Romanian Middle Ages) (Bucharest: Corint, 1999), 111.

<sup>84</sup> The places from which Sigismund issued charters from December 1394 to January 1395 are Turda (Torda)—25 December; Cristuru Secuiesc (Kerestwr/Keresztúr)—3 and 4 January; Odorheiul-Secuiesc (Zekeloduarhel/Székelyudvarhely)—9 January; Piatra Neamț (Piatra lui Crăciun, Karachonkw/Karácsonkő)—30 January; Neamț (Nempch)—3 February; Brașov (Brassó)—12 Feb. See *Zsigmondkori oklevéltár* (Chartulary of the Sigismund-period), vol. 1 (1387–1399), ed. Elemér Mályusz (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1951), 409–416. This itinerary was also suggested by Radu Manolescu in "Campania lui Sigismund de Luxemburg în Moldova" (Sigismund of Luxemburg's campaign in Moldavia), *Analele Universității București, Seria Științe Sociale-Istorie* 15 (1966): 59–75.

<sup>85</sup> Thuróczy, *Chronica*, vol. 1, 209.





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Braşov merchants.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, it is probable that in this period Wallachia extended even further eastwards, although the exact territorial limits are heavily disputed because a new element, *confinia Tartariae*,<sup>87</sup> was introduced in the *intitulatio* of Mircea the Old. Four main interpretations of *confinia Tartariae* have been proposed by scholars: the region between the mouths of the Dniester and Prut rivers (so-called Bessarabia), southern Moldavia including the town of Chilia, the area around the mouth of the Siret River, and northern Dobrudja.<sup>88</sup>

To conclude, it can be inferred that in the last decades of the fourteenth century the two new-founded medieval states, Wallachia and Moldavia, expanded their territories towards the north-east and south-west, respectively.

The question is whether a demographic expansion corresponds to this political one. Although the population movements in this region in the fourteenth and early fifteenth century cannot be followed in detail, due to the scarcity of both archaeological<sup>89</sup> and written sources, I will to analyse the few

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<sup>86</sup> For an edition of this document see DRH-D, vol. 1, 86–87.

<sup>87</sup> In a document of contested authenticity issued by Mircea in 1391, the Voievod has the title: “Nos Joannes Mircsa, Dei gratia princeps et vajvoda totius regni Vallachie incipendo ab Alpibus usque ad confinia Tartariae.” The charter is a donation in the Făgăraş domain, and was preserved only in a nineteenth-century Latin translation. The last editors of the document considered it authentic (DRH-B, vol. 1, 36–39), but in the previous edition (D.I.R.-B, vol.1, 276–277) the document was considered a fake. I am using the most recent edition (DRH edition) of the document. The new element introduced now in the *intitulatio*, “confinia Tartariae,” was regularly used in the Slavonic acts issued by Mircea only from 1404 onwards. Oàòàðñèùì ñòðàíàì. DRH-B, vol. 1: 63,66,70,73,75,80,90.

<sup>88</sup> For the hypothesis of Bessarabia see Panaitescu, *Mircea*, 367. For the hypothesis of northern Dobrudja see Constantin Cihodaru, *Alexandru cel Bun* (Alexander the Kind). (Iaşi: Editura Junimea, 1984), 230–231. For the identification of the Tartarian areas with the region around the mouth of the Siret River see Ciocâltan, “Către *părțile tătarăști* din titlul voievodal al lui Mircea cel Bătrân” (Towards the ‘Tartarian parts’ in the voivodal title of Mircea the Old), *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie “A.D. Xenopol”* 24 (1987): 349–355.

<sup>89</sup> Few scholars have attempted to use archaeological evidence in order to identify the population movements from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A notable exception is the study of Maria Comşa on Wallachian types of dwellings, in which, by analysing the evolution of rural habitations, she identifies two major stages of population movements: from plains areas towards the hilly and mountainous regions in the middle of the thirteenth century, and a reverse movement from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Maria Comşa, “Types d’habitations de caractère rural de la région comprise entre les Carpates Méridionales et le Danube aux XIIIe–XVIIe siècles,” *Dacia* 21 (1977): 299–317.

existing elements in order to propose a possible answer to this question. The direct written evidence is rather unclear, and refers only to isolated population movements. There are two terms which appear in Wallachian and Moldavian charters that suggest such population movements: *siliște* (abandoned village) and *slobozie* (freedom). Such *siliști* are mentioned in Wallachian documents in the years: 1374, 1385, 1387. The word *slobozie* designates the special statute of a village, which reveals the conditions of its colonisation. Ion Donat, in a study covering a much longer period (until the nineteenth century) emphasised the fact that the villages named from the word *slobozie* are numerous towards the frontier with Moldavia, but they probably date from the seventeenth century.<sup>90</sup>

It is generally accepted that an impetus to migration in the Middle Ages was from the inner to the outer Carpathian arc, affecting Romanian, Hungarian, and German ethnic groups. Geographically, there was a significant difference between the population movements from the kingdom of Hungary into the eastern Carpathian region in the thirteenth century, before the Mongol invasion, and those in the fourteenth century. The first were mainly oriented toward the southwestern region, the area of the bishopric of Milcovia; the second were toward the northwestern region.<sup>91</sup> South-western Moldavia and north-eastern Wallachia seem to have been peripheral regions for population movements in the fourteenth century, although some toponyms suggest that they were also affected by them. Some names of villages from the region, attested before 1450, suggest colonisation:<sup>92</sup> Borodicieni, Săseni, Spineni, Stăneni.<sup>93</sup> The toponyms with 'eni' suffix show the provenance of the people who settled in the new villages.<sup>94</sup> One of them, Săs, shows that these settlers were Germans, who probably came from Transylvania. However, these mentions are too rare to allow us to reconstruct a general image of the main directions of these movements.

<sup>90</sup> For the meaning of the word 'siliște' see Iorgu Iordan, *Toponimie românească* (Romanian toponymy) (Bucharest: Ed. Academiei, 1963), 257–258 (hereafter Iordan, *Toponimie*). About 'slobozie,' see Ion Donat, "Câteva aspecte geografice ale toponimiei din Tara Românească" (Some geographical aspects of Wallachian toponymy), *Fonetică și dialectologie* 4 (1962): 101–131.

<sup>91</sup> As shown by Spinei, "Coexistența," 168.

<sup>92</sup> By using the word 'colonisation' I do not automatically imply the existence of a coherent policy of population settlement by a political authority.

<sup>93</sup> DRH-A, 233 (1437), 402 (1448), 143 (1430) and 176 (1437), respectively.

<sup>94</sup> For the relationship of subordination expressed by the suffix *-eni* or *-ani* see Iordan, *Toponimie*, 404 and Gh. Bolocan, "Structura numelor de sate românești" (The structure of Romanian names of villages), *Limba Română* 25 (1976): 593–609.



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There are two population movements, long discussed in the historiography, that could suggest a chronology for the colonisation of the Wallachian–Moldavian borderland and, therefore, a possible connection with the political expansion of the two principalities: the *csángós* (ethnic Hungarian migrants) and the *olteni* (migrants from the Olt region) cases. According to a recent study on the Moldavian *csángós*,<sup>95</sup> their settlement took place in the fourteenth century, in the first part of the reign of Louis the Great, as a response to the retreat of the Mongols from the territory.<sup>96</sup> If this hypothesis is accepted, it would explain why the *csángós* did not settle in the southern Moldavian regions, since these regions were outside the young Moldavian state, and probably still controlled by the Tartars.

The case of the *olteni* is completely different; they settled in the borderland region. The only source that attests to their settlement is a toponym, this time referring to a region, 'Olteni'. The name implies a colonisation with people from around the river Olt, either from western Wallachia<sup>97</sup> or south-eastern Transylvania.<sup>98</sup> First mentioned in a charter from 1435, issued by Iliaș, the voivode of Moldavia,<sup>99</sup> the dimensions of the region Olteni are unclear. Nevertheless, the appearance of the region on the oldest maps of Moldavia,

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<sup>95</sup> Robin Baker, "On the Origin of the Moldavian Csángós," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 75 (1997): 658–680.

<sup>96</sup> Baker supported his hypothesis with two arguments. The political aspect emphasises the decline of the Tartar rulership over Moldova during the reign of Louis I. The linguistic argument notes that the Moldavian villages with Hungarian names contain the suffix element *-falva* or *-vására* (village or market) and therefore were probably founded not earlier than in the fourteenth century, see also Baker, "Magyars, Mongols," 72–73.

<sup>97</sup> C. C. Giurescu assumed that the name of the region came from the Wallachian colonists from Oltenia settled here by the Wallachian voivode; C. C. Giurescu, "Oltenii și Basarabia. Colonizări muntene în sudul Moldovei în veacurile XIV–XV" (Olteni and Basarabia. Wallachian colonisation in southern Moldavia in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) *Revista istorică română* 10 (1940): 130–140, here 138 (hereafter Giurescu, "Oltenii"). Some other names of villages, such as Muntenii-Pușeni and Muntenii, could also be interpreted as proof of Wallachian colonisation in southern Moldavia. Giurescu, "Oltenii," 136.

<sup>98</sup> The first to suggest that the name of the regions could come from Transylvanian settlers is Gh. Brătianu; see "În jurul întemeierii statelor românești" (Concerning the foundation of the Romanian states), *Revista Istorică* 4 (1993): 372.

<sup>99</sup> Wëöhíű, see Mihai Costăchescu, ed., *Documente moldovenești înainte de Ștefan cel Mare* (Moldavian charters before Stephen the Great) (Iași: Viața Românească, 1931), vol. 2, 682.



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those of Reichersdorf,<sup>100</sup> Jacob Castaldo,<sup>101</sup> and Mercator,<sup>102</sup> shows that it was an important region of southern Moldavia. Practically, it is impossible to date the precise moment of the settlement of the *olteni* into the southern Moldavian region, albeit their movement probably took place in the last decades of the fourteenth century or in first years of the fifteenth. For this approximate dating I use two elements. One, also stressed by Giurescu, is that there must have been a difference of several generations, therefore a few decades, between the time of settlement and the first attestation of the 'Olteni' region. The end of Mongol rulership was chosen as the *terminus post quem*, since this had been the main reason hindering previous settlers from moving into the region.

It is tempting to correlate the settlement of the *olteni* in the southern Moldavian region with the political evolution of this territory, although there is no direct evidence supporting a connection between the two.<sup>103</sup> At the beginning of the fifteenth century, the Wallachian principality seems to have included the borderland regions of southern Moldavia. A short note referring to the Moldavian-Wallachian frontier from the reconciliation act concluded in 1475 between Stephen the Great,<sup>104</sup> voivode of Moldavia, and Matthias, king of Hungary, supports the hypothesis of an earlier agreement between Mircea, voivode of Wallachia (1386–1418), and Alexander, voivode of Moldavia (1400–1432). This settlement was probably in favour of Wallachia. This royal charter of 15 August 1475 contains the conditions that the Hungarian king imposed on Stephen and follows an earlier charter issued by the Moldavian voivode on 12 July 1475. All the other conditions accepted by Stephen—to remain faithful to the Hungarian crown, to take part in the fight against the Ottomans, to give military support to the king against any enemy except Poland, to expel all the

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<sup>100</sup> M. Popescu-Spineni, *România în istoria cartografiei până la 1600* (Romania in the history of cartography until 1600), vol. 2 (Bucharest: Imprimeria Națională, 1938), map no. 43.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, map no. 46.

<sup>102</sup> The map is reproduced in *Atlas Hungaricus: Magyarország nyomtatott térképei, 1528–1850* (Printed maps of Hungary 1528–1850), ed. Szántai Lajos, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1996), 384–385.

<sup>103</sup> Giurescu assumed that the colonisation of the 'olteni' was a political act of the voivodes who wanted to populate the southern Moldavian region in order to create a corridor between Wallachia and the supposed rulership of the voivodes over Bessarabia. Giurescu, "Oltenii," 30–40.

<sup>104</sup> "Super metis etiam provinciae Moldaviae cum provincia Transalpina secundum antiquos terminos et consuetudines per praedecessores vayvodas possessos et tentos utrumque vayvodam, tam scilicet Stephanum Moldaviensem quam Vlad Transalpinum, secundum privilegia Alexandri et Mirczae utriusque partis vayvodarum concordamus." Bogdan, *Documentele*, vol. 2, 334–336.



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enemies of the king from Moldavia—are contained both in the voivodal charter and in the royal one. Since the Moldavian charter contains no reference to the frontier problem, although the content of the two documents is almost identical, it can be inferred that the agreement was unfavourable to the Moldavian voivodeship. This hypothesis is strongly supported by the nature of the relationship between the two voivodes at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Alexander was the protégé of Mircea, and he obtained the Moldavian voivodeship through an armed intervention by Mircea, which removed Alexander's rival, Iuga, from the throne, as an internal chronicle narrates simply: "in that year Mircea Voivode came and took Iuga with him."<sup>105</sup>

Summarising, the Mongol direct rule over the future Moldavian–Wallachian borderland promoted a delay in the demographic growth of the area; population movements from the middle of the fourteenth century, especially settlers coming from Transylvania, did not affect this region. Once the two principalities extended their territory towards this region, the demographic evolution also seems to have changed. Evidence points to a simultaneous demographic and political Wallachian expansion into the southern Moldavian regions in the last decades of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century. However, due to the scarcity of the sources it is impossible to determine the nature of the relationship between the two expansions.

### Conclusions

In this study I have argued for a new perspective on the medieval Wallachian and Moldavian frontiers, regarding them as moving frontiers rather than as immobile borders. Although some of the borders were settled from an early period at natural barriers, such as the Dniester and the Danube rivers, still they were moving frontiers from a demographic perspective. By comparing the conclusions drawn from three different, independent, types of sources, I suggest that, contrary to the generally accepted image, for the period analysed, c. 1350 to c. 1450, the population distribution was markedly unbalanced between different regions of the two principalities. North-eastern Wallachia and south-western Moldavia were sparsely inhabited in comparison to western Wallachia and northern Moldavia, where the cores of the two emerging medieval states actually were. However, in the second part of the period, concomitantly with the end of the Mongol domination, both the Wallachian and Moldavian societies were demographically and politically expanding into this region. As a result of the meeting of these two expansions, the frontier between the two principalities was

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<sup>105</sup> Bogdan, *Documentele*, vol. 2, 330–333.



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settled for the first time, in favour of the Wallachian voivodes. This first settlement was soon contested by the Moldavian voivodes and this prolonged dispute over the borderland region represented one of the main causes of Moldavian-Wallachian animosity during the fifteenth century.