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THE BANKS OF THE DANUBE AND THE THREE SEAS IN THE EAST: THE MAKING AND RE-MAKING OF EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

***Abstract:** The article shows the process of shaping Central and Eastern Europe in the context of cultural changes in those areas at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times. The triangle is a visualization of a specific area of Central, Eastern Europe and Southern Europe (the banks of the Danube and the three seas) which represented a similar cultural context. At the same time, it was under the control of the expansionist forces from the outside.*

***Key words:** East-Central Europe, Kyvian Rus', Byzantium, Ottoman Empire.*

Some half a century prior to the Eastern Schism and almost four centuries prior to the Western one, the area which was to become East-Central Europe, not yet crossed by the *Huntington line*, was surrounded by three 'super-powers', pushing themselves towards the center of the area. Virtually all three could be regarded as having reached the maximal historical expansion. The first of the three was revived Byzantium. The empire was eliminating the last remainders of the First Bulgarian Tsarate and reestablishing «East Roman» imperial grip on the Lower Danube and control between the Adriatic and the Black Sea. The second super-power was Kyvian Rus', christianized by Byzantium and created as an «empire» by a mixture of Nordic, Oriental and Slavic elements connecting the Baltic to the Black Sea. The third was the «Western Empire», already more German than Roman. The empire's supremacy was (successfully) contested from within by the Papacy. Rome had just created «in front» of the empire the Kingdoms of Hungary and Poland and thus (re) established its own missionary front stretched between the Adriatic and the Baltic Sea. The three imperial sides formed a triangle marked by political fragmentation that came to an apparent «end» (more precisely to a more lasting *status quo*) due to the brutal alterations of the structure(s) of power and state

territories imposed by the courses of World War II¹.

Entire 'East-Central Europe' should have been a purely Christian affair irrespective of rite. First the collapse of Kyivian Rus followed by the subsequent rise of – in particular – the Cumans, Tartars and Lithuanians, turned the triangle's «eastern side» into an Infidel side (half Pagan, half Muslim) between the late 1200s and the late 1300s. The decline of Byzantium and the fall of the second series of Slavic Balkan states brought the rising Ottoman power to the Lower Danube line towards the end of the 14th century. Less than a century later, the «southern imperial side» was completely Ottoman, hence Muslim. It was to remain so for three-four centuries, collapsing from West to East. Yet, at no point, due mainly to the Christianization of Lithuania in the late 1300s, the triangle had two *In-fidel* sides. Furthermore, due chiefly to the costs and strategies of Ottoman expansion, which – in almost traditional Roman imperial manner – attempted to reduce its areas of direct authority north of Danube to a minimum, the strong – in political and cultural terms – Muslim impact on East-Central Europe was rather reduced in matters of ethnic composition. The reduced «administrative mobility» of the Ottoman southern side gradually turned – also because (to an important degree of the decline of the Porte in the 1700s-1800s) the quest for East-Central European supremacy into an East-West clash). Regional political fragmentations and frontier

¹ * Quotations were limited to a historiographical minimum. Precedence was given to secondary literature and to synthesis. The works quoted are largely also those that make the most use of primary sources in regard to the specific topics in the text. Readers can easily find the way back to the edited and unedited material on which the analysis was based. In relation to the archive and library material, some of the most important "reservoirs", mainly for the Late Middle Ages (which can still be of great use), should be mentioned. They are to be found in Venice (the Archivio di Stato, in the highly researched series of Senato Secreti, Deliberazioni too, in the Marciana, where aside from the numerous chronicles still preserved there, several collections of diplomatic reports are contained in the Italian and Latin sectors of the Codices), Milan ("beyond" the famed Ambrosiana, the collections in the Archivio di Stato, Archivio Ducale Sforzesco, mainly the Potenze Estere section, are, for the later crusades, the equivalent of the Swiss archives for World War II) or in Vienna (the Haus-, Hof und Staatsarchiv as well as the Nationalbibliothek offer unique insights into the political and cultural dealings and trends of the last six centuries) and even Budapest (still largely underrated and undervalued in relation to the greater more "attractive" archival centres on the map of the continent). This distribution largely speaks for the fact that up to the late 1700s-early 1800s the history of the "Eastern" (East Central and South-Eastern) part of Europe is a history that has to be written based on namely Western and "Central" European data (for a first draft of this in fact 2000-2001 paper, see our *Transylvanian Review* (Cluj-Napoca), XIX (2009), 1, pp. 146-155). For instance: *A History of East-Central Europe*, ed. P. F. Sugar, D. W. Treadgold, vol 1, no 3-9, Seattle-London 1974-2001, passim (regardless of the – various – discrepancies in terms of the quality of analysis between and within the volumes); S. Franklin, J. Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus', 750-1200*, New York-London 1995; J. Fried, *Otto III. und Boleslaw Chrobry. Das Widmungsbild des Aachener Evangeliars, der Akt von Gnesen und das frühe polnische und ungarische Königtum. Eine Bildanalyse und ihre historischen Folgen*, Stuttgart 2001; *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500-1492*, ed. J. Shepard, Cambridge 2008, passim (in particular the studies authored by Michael Angold, Paul Magdalino, Anthony Bryer, as well as Michel Balard); N. Necipoğlu, *Byzantium between the Ottomans and the Latins: Politics and Society in the Late Empire*, Cambridge 2009, passim.

changes therefore increased not diminished (1850s to 1940s)².

Mission, Authority and Division

Virtually by definition, isolation means purity, whether we take into discussion «mountain values» or «monastic values». On the other hand, *East-Central Europe*, like *Christendom's bulwark* or *gate*, taken simultaneously into account as defining concepts for the area (although the first one was coined in the 1950s, following Soviet victory in the East, and the second was born following the Mongol shock in the early 1240s), are anything but representatives for – or products – of isolation and political or ideological reclusion. In return, exposure becomes – has swiftly become – synonymous with corruption, with deformation. On a larger scale, one consequently discovers two attitudes/claims, both extreme (because of the values tailored to suit them) and arbitrary (by their determinations). Nevertheless (perhaps foremost), the two are facile solutions for an environment shaped by great informational challenges (lacks of data or more-accurately archival losses) that – only through the means imposed and the limits drawn by such aspects – does not allow «final solutions»; mainly for the 1200s and 1300s. It should nonetheless also be stressed out that this area was never «united» under one authority (the Soviet Union, not the European Union, due to the status of the Ukraine in particular (prior and after the events of the past years), was the only authority that – by officially.

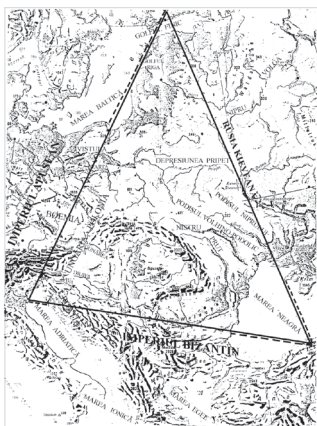


Illustration 1. 'The Triangle of the Year Thousand'

Al. Simon, *În jurul Carpaților. Formele și realitățile genezei statale românești* [Around the Carpathians: The Forms and Realities of the Romanian Statal Genesis] [Babeș-Bolyai University, BA thesis] (Cluj-Napoca, 2002), p. 104.

Imperiul Bizantin=Byzantine Empire; *Imperiul Apusean*= 'Western Empire'; *Rusia Kieveană*=Kyvian Rus'.

² E.g. E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge 1990; J. P. Niederkorn, *Dieeuropäischen Mächte und der Lange Türkenkrieg Kaiser Rudolphs II. (1593–1606)*, Vienna 1993; G. C. Soulis, *The Serbs and Byzantium during the Reign of Emperor Stephen Dusan (1331–1355) and his Successors*, Athens 1995; *Pope Innocent III and his World*, ed. J. C. Moore, Ashgate 1999; S. Faroqhi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, London 2004. For the manifold perspectives "in use", see the series *Die Habsburgermonarchie*, ed. A. Wandruszka, P. Urbanitsch, Vienna 1973–2008; with re-editions.

Indirect means and under circumstances radically different from those under which the triangle had developed – achieved, for five decades, almost complete East-Central European hegemony, because Croatia, as a part of former Yugoslavia, eluded Soviet – not Communist – control)³.

Prior to the rise of modern ideologies and national states, as well as of trans-national structures, Louis I of Anjou, King of Hungary, of Croatia (1342–1382) and of Poland (1370–1382), suzerain of Wallachia and of Moldavia (in particular in the late 1340s–1350s, and late 1370s), came closest to «uniting» East-Central Europe. The House of Jagiello too almost accomplished this goal (1490–1526), after Wladislaw II, already king of divided Bohemia (since 1471), was crowned king of Hungary, following Matthias Corvinus' death (his 'co-king' of Bohemia as well). At that time, the Jagiellonians had been ruling the Polish-Lithuanian Union for over a century. Personal unions, family ties, as well as feudal relations brought at times powers close to authority over all these borderlands. Some even claimed that, like King Louis I of Anjou who allegedly stated that his realm touched the three seas (i.e. the Adriatic, the Baltic and the Black Sea; this «almost» happened in fact). Moreover, the Angevines and the Jagiellonians paid very dearly – both in relation to «East-Central Europe» and to the 'foreign powers' – for their hegemonic attempts and successes. The disintegration of Louis' heritage after his death and the events surrounding the clash at Mohács (1526), which also marked the beginning of the decline of the Jagiellonians, are some of the best proofs for it⁴.

Another defining feature of the region was (is) its missionary character. It is (was) an area «made up» by and for *holy war*, for the crusade in Christian terms. This fact applies also to the smallest – in terms of medieval political structuring – members of the area, namely – in particular – to the Croatians and Wallachians, *Deeds* against Livonian or Lithuanian pagans, Bohemian *heretics*, Russian *schismatics* and Tartars, converted to Islam, were gratified with the title and support

³ E.g. W. H. Mc Neill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier 1500–1800*, London 1964; F. Dvornik, *The Making of East-Central Europe*, New York 1974; N. Shields Kollmann, *Kinship and Politics. The Making of the Muscovite Political System, 1345–1547*, Stanford 1987; O. Halecki, *Jadwiga of Anjou and the Rise of East-Central Europe*, New-York 1991; J. R. S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe*, Oxford 1998; *The Federal Vision Legitimacy and Levels of Governance in the United States and the European Union*, ed. K. Nicolaidis, R. Howse, Oxford 2002; *Sigismund of Luxemburg and the Orthodox World* (=Denkschriften der Österreichisch-chischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol 409), ed. E. Mitsiou, M. Popović, J. Preiser-Kapeller, A. Simon, Vienna 2010; *Matthias Corvinus und seine Zeit: Europa am Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit zwischen Wien und Konstantinopel* (=Denkschriften der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, vol 410), ed. Ch. Gastgeber, E. Mitsiou, I.-A. Pop, M. Popović, J. Preiser Kapeller, A. Simon, Vienna 2011; N. Housley, *Crusading and the Ottoman Threat. 1453–1505*, Oxford 2012.

⁴ Turning also to our "more local" endeavors, see also *Between Worlds* (=Mélanges d'Histoire Générale, NS, vol 1, no 1–2) ed. A. Simon, no 1. *Stephen the Great, Matthias Corvinus and their Time*, ed. by L. Koszta, O. Mureşan, A. Simon, Cluj-Napoca 2007), passim (in particular the studies by Zoltán Kordé, András Kubinyi, Sándor Papp and Ioan Drăgan); no. 2 *Extincta est lucerna orbis: John Hunyadi and his Time*, ed. A. Dumitran, L. Mádly, A. Simon, Cluj-Napoca 2009, passim (especially the works of Iulian Mihai Damian, Andrea Fara, István Petrovićs and Péter Szabó); *Worlds in Change* (=Mélanges d'Histoire Générale, NS, vol 4, no 1–2; "Translyanian Review", XVIII-XIX, suppl. 2), ed. I.-A. Pop, A. Simon, vol I. *Church Union and Crusading in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed Ch. Gastgeber, I.-A. Pop, O. J. Schmitt, A. Simon, Cluj-Napoca 2009, passim (chiefly the papers of János Bak, Ovidiu Cristea, Borislav Grgin, N. Housley, Tudor Sălăgean, as well as O. J. Schmitt).

of a crusade. Anti-Ottoman warfare was basically twinned with crusading. The Wallachians, usually the only *Greek* rite Christians on Rome's crusader list after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 (and in particular between the mid-1470s and the late 1520s), adapted and exported the *Latin* concept to Moscow. Beginning with the mid-1500s) and – especially – since the 1700s, the latter configured the (Christian) concept of Holy War in an (its) Orthodox format and pushed south in its name. Holy War transformed Ottoman expansion and engulfed major Ottoman actions north of the Danube line, more than in the case of the earlier Tartar campaigns. As time went by, the Reformation, the crisis and changes it triggered, bestowed new meanings upon the concept. In the end, World War II was also a clash of holy wars, whether brown or red (or green or blue), western or eastern⁵.

As crusade and trade combined, another political party played an important, almost imperial, part in regional affairs, long after the «infamous fourth crusade», diverted – and eventually led to – by that power to the conquest of Constantinople (1204). Adriatic based Venice overshadowed in this respect too her *Italic* archrival Genoa (whose colonies took over – for up to three centuries in some cases – large portions of the Black Sea's western and north-western shores). The Venetian bureaucracy has legated probably the most accurate late medieval «definition» of East-Central Europe: *Hungaria* [including Bohemia, for they shared the same king, who resided mostly in Buda], *Polania*, *Dacia* [i.e. Moldavia and Wallachia] *et Croatia* [initially omitted from the formula, as since 1102 Hungary and Croatia had the same king; Venice's Adriatic eyes eventually safeguarded her inclusion). *Hungaria, Polania, Dacia et Croatia*, employed in Venetian registers as title for all information coming from the area (1498–1530), as formula, is telling for the impact of that age on the modern political fate and perception of the area. Christian crusading proved ineffective, while Muslim Holy War was successfully used by the Ottomans, equally careful of becoming a «European» partner of divided Christendom, another aim achieved by the pragmatic and often tolerant Ottoman state apparatus. The southern side of triangle was thus largely blocked (the most notable exceptions, the conquest of Buda in 1540 or the siege of Vienna in 1683, proved – in the long or in the immediate aftermath – to have disastrous consequences for the *Turk*). In more than just one way, the Ottomans drew East and West closer together over *East-Central*

⁵ E.g. S[tephen]. C. Rowell, *Lithuania Ascending. A Pagan Empire within East-Central Europe, 1295–1345*, Cambridge 1994; J.K. Hoensch, *Sigismund von Luxemburg, Herrscher and der Schwelle zur Neuzeit (1387–1437)*, Munich 1996; I. Moroz, “The Idea of Holy War in the Orthodox World (On Russian Chronicles from the Twelfth–Sixteenth Century)”, *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae*, vol 4, 1999, pp. 45–67; T. A. Fudge, *The Crusade against Heretics in Bohemia: Sources and Documents for the Hussite Crusades. 1418–1437*, Aldershot 2002; N. Housley, *Religious Warfare in Europe, 1400–1536*, Oxford 2002; E. Siberry, *The New Crusaders: Images of the Crusades in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, Aldershot 2002, N. Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks*, Philadelphia 2004; not to mention the World War II “memoirs” of Jukov or of Eisenhower.

*Europe*⁶.

Cause, Effect and Change

An intriguing distinctive feature of *East-Central Europe* is the search for key moments, for an *annus mirabilis* that changed the region. For the last centuries, this has worked rather well. The treaties of Paris (1856), Berlin (1878), Versailles (1919), Potsdam (1945) or Paris (1947) (in order to stop some two generations before – our – present day concerns, scopes and aims) are quite eloquent in this respect, though they also reveal a certain frequency and periodicity, which leaves room for – much more discussions. For the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern age, this is less the case, probably also because the distance in time is greater. The Eastern Schism (1054) only became a «turning point» through the «crusader fall» of Byzantium (1204), which became a «turning-point» after the Byzantines returned to the city (1258) and later, after the same victorious Emperor Michael V Palaeologus was compelled to search union with Rome (1274). Even the Vienna Treaty (1515), that eventually ensured the crowns of Hungary and Bohemia for the House of Habsburg, or the *Turkish* conquest of *The City* (1453), fully «operational» only once Innocent VIII publicly accepted to be enlisted on Bayezid II's payroll (1490) and Maximilian I likewise publicly concluded a treaty with the same sultan (1497), are «key moments» rendered possible by other «key moments». Peculiar time spans appear to dictate the functioning of a chain of events and connect «moment» to «impact». We therefore turn to the years after *Hungaria, Polonia, Dacia et Croatia*'s disappearance from the Venetian registers⁷.

⁶ For an overview, see also O. Halecki, “La Pologne et la question d'Orient de Casi-mir le Grand à Jan Sobieski”, *La Pologne au Congrès International des Sciences Historiques*, vol 7, no 1, 1933, pp. 431–443; K. M. Setton, “Lutheranism and the Turkish Peril”, *Balkan Studies*, vol 3, no 1, 1962, pp. 133–168; E. Fügedi, “Two Kinds of Enemies-Two Kinds of Ideology: The Hungarian-Turkish Wars of the Fifteenth Century”, [in:] *War and Peace in the Middle Age*, ed. B. P. Mc Guire, Copenhagen 1987, pp. 146–160; G. Hödl, *Habsburg und Österreich, 1273–1493*, Vienna 1993; G. Poumarède, *Pour en finir avec la croisade. Mythes et réalités de la lutte contre les Turcs au XVI^e et XVII^e siècles*, Paris 2004. ; A. Simon, “Antonio Bonfini's Valachorum regulus: Matthias Corvinus, Transylvania and Stephen the Great”, [in:] *Between Worlds, I. Stephen the Great, Matthias Corvinus and their Time...*, pp. 207–226.

⁷ E.g. Z. Pál Pach, “The Shifting of International Trade Routes in the 15th-17th Centuries”, *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol 14, no 2, 1968, pp. 287–319; H. Inalcik, “A Case Study in Renaissance Diplomacy: The Agreement between Innocent VIII and Bayezid II regarding Djem Sultan”, *Journal of Turkish Studies*, vol 3, 1979, pp. 209–230; *Fight against the Turk in Central-Europe in the First Half of the 16th Century*, ed. I. Zombori, Budapest 2004, passim (mainly the studies of Pál Fodor, A. Kubinyi, S. Papp and Vladimir Seges), or modern classics such as Norman Davies' *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, vol 1–2, (Oxford 1981) or Samuel P. Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York, 2008²) put into late medieval and early modern perspective. In the end, one cannot avoid the question, but only push it into the footnotes, of what if we re-use the “triangle” and change (not without ground) the names of its sides to maybe the EU (West), US (South) and Russia (East). It should be noted that (if we take into account recent developments) South and East might end up with the same *master*.



*Illustration 2. The Modern Pressure System within the «Triangle»
Sketchy overview of the border changes occurred in the area in the 20th century.*

Al. Simon, Pefecțiunea etnică. Transferurile de populație în Europa-Central Răsăriteană în prima jumătate a secolului XX [Population Transfers in East-Central Europe in the First Half of the 20th Century] [Babeș-Bolyai University, MA thesis] (Cluj-Napoca, 2003), p. 34.

Following the battle of Mohács (1526) and the conquest of Buda, that meant the transformation of central Hungary into an Ottoman province (1541), the northern part of the Hungarian kingdom (largely modern Slovakia) and Croatia came under Viennese authority, not only because the Habsburgs had rights to the Hungarian throne following the heirless death of Louis II. By its Hungarian campaigns, initiated after prolonged hesitations (the conquest of Belgrade in 1521 had already ensured her interests in the Danube area and the status of Ottoman vassal and protégé had already been offered to the Hungarian king), the High Porte actually managed to draw the Habsburgs to the East and against the sultan (at the time of the perhaps maximal continental power of both the Ottoman Empire, under Süleyman I, and of the Habsburgs, under Emperor Charles V). Previously, the Habsburgs had predominantly searched for and obtained arrangements with the «other empire». Süleyman I's Moldavian campaign of 1538 and the ensuing local conflicts and deals (Moldavian rulers too began buying their thrones and receiving their symbols of power in Istanbul) marked the real debut for Moldavia and Wallachia's days as autonomous princely at times whether in dreams or even in fact provinces of the Porte. Way was made for Moscow's real rise as the Third Rome, patron and hope of the oppressed, and as the only Orthodox power capable of returning Istanbul to Byzantium (previously, Moldavia had often been attempted to be – Moscow's western «interface», chiefly between the 1480s and the early 1500s). Istanbul «succeeded» where Rome and Venice too had bitterly failed after spring

1453: the Porte «set» Muscovite Russia on southern crusader course⁸.

In 1541, the Porte transformed Transylvania from a Hungarian province into a vassal principality. The foundations were laid for a Reformed cradle governed by an almost republican elite, in times that were to witness the rise of the Catholic (Counter-) Reformation and then of the Orthodox (Counter-) Reformation. For the Catholic Habsburgs, Transylvania was a direct challenge, both on confessional and on political soil, as the prince of Transylvania could claim – often even did so – the Hungarian (Holy) crown, but also the Polish one. Vienna got more involved in eastern affairs. For the redefined Polish-Lithuanian state, after the Union of Lublin (1572), Transylvania was a major source for Reformed and «republican» ideology and politics. Yet the unstable northern union, which almost miraculously lasted for four centuries, was unprepared for supplementary weaknesses in the Age of Reformation(s). Alike in the 1400s, the Papacy tried to respond to «western problems» by winning support from (the) *Greek* rite Christians. In the case of Poland-Lithuania, these souls totalled more than a third of the population. This led to the Catholic Counter-Reformation style Union of Brest (1596) and was to represent a great source of justification for Moscow (the last time Transylvanian and Polish influences and interests had convened, through the election of prince Stephen Báthory as King of Poland, in 1576, one of the results had been a major attack on Moscow). Moscow had already taken large parts of Lithuania deploying Orthodox arms of purity. For her, union with Rome was – in effect – a mortal sin, since the Union of Florence (1439). Hence Moscow pushed westwards (as well)⁹.

By the 1660s the latest, following chiefly the negative outcome of the *Thirteen Year War* (1593–1606), their involvement in the *Thirty Year War* (1618–1648) and the hazardous Polish campaign of Transylvanian prince George Rákóczy (1657–1658), the Ottomans realized that – at the height of their power – they had made a grievous mistake by becoming so involved and expanding so further north of the Danube. The costs of their Hungarian frontier significantly eased the birth of the *Turkish* venality of offices. Besides, Istanbul depended largely on the supplies sent from Moldavia and Wallachia. Retreat, in the Roman style of the 3rd century, was not an option for the Porte. Caught between continents and seas, Istanbul decided to settle the matter and take Vienna, where Süleyman I had failed (1529).

⁸ E.g. S. Fisher-Galați, *Ottoman Imperialism and German Protestantism*, Cambridge 1959; G. Péryes, *The Fall of the Medieval Kingdom of Hungary: Mohács 1526-Buda 1541*, Boulder 1989 (influential and controversial); P. Fodor, “Ottoman Policy Towards Hungary, 1520–1541”, *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol 45, no 2–3, 1991, pp. 271–345; *Süleyman the Magnificent and His Age: The Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern World*, ed. M. Kunt, Ch. Woodhead, London-New York 1995, passim (mainly M. Kunt’s study); C. Imber, *The Ottoman Empire, 1300–1650: The Structure of Power*, New York-London 2001, pp. 56–63, 71–80; as well as I.-A. Pop, “The Expedition of the Sultan in 1538 in Moldavia (in the View of an Italian Author)”, *Colloquia*, vol 13, no 1–2, 2006, pp. 257–271.

⁹ For an overview of these questions, see also Z. Moricz, *Der grosse Fürst-Sie-benbürgen um 1620*, Munich 1977; L. Makkai, “The Crown and the Diets of Hungary and Transylvania in the Sixteenth Century”, [in:] *Crown, Church and Estates: Central European Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. R. Evans, T. Thomas. London 1991, pp. 80–91; R. Frost, *The Northern Wars: War, State and Society in northeastern Europe, 1558–1721*, Harlow-New York 2000, pp. 69–85; B. Lewis, *What Went Wrong? Western Impact and Middle Eastern Response*, London 2001; D. Neri-Ultisch, “Die päpstliche Politik im zweiten Interregnum in Polen 1574/1575”, *Revue d’Historire Écclésiastique*, vol 99, no 1, 2004, pp. 35–64.

The result was catastrophic (1683). Within a decade all Ottoman positions north of Danube, save Wallachia and Moldavia, were lost. In the North, the Swedish expansion (that the Porte had also attempted to exploit), though eventually far less successful than the medieval Lithuanian expansion, finally brought the Muscovite power to the Moldavian border of Ottoman authority, after Peter I's victory over Charles XII of Sweden (1709). A century of Ottoman-Habsburg-Russian warfare ensued. Poland vanished from the stately scene as Prussia's rise empowered the «western side». By then it had become clear that the great battle was no longer fought in the potential favour of the South, and that the true victor would emerge either in the East or the West. In this respect, Sülyeman I's actions north of the Danube (1520s–1540s) had a greater impact on the evolution of East-Central Europe, on its reshaping, than most treaties signed and battles fought for and in an area, too dependent – by nature and by structure – on others in order to be self-sufficient¹⁰.

Time, Space and Belonging

In the 15th century, prior even to the fall of Byzantium and Serbia (1453–1459), and up to the first decades of the 16th century, the special and at the same time ideological *Christian* structuring of East-Central Europe remained a Cumanic-Tartar product (1200s–1300s), with German (from the West), Lithuanian, in particular, and Teutonic (from the North and the North-East), Kyvian Russian (from the East and the North-East) involvements (all older than the Ottoman one), supported as well in part from the South by Byzantine, Bulgarian and Serbian imperial remainders. From the second half of the 16th century and at least until the beginning of the 19th century, the same defining features of «crusader» East-Central Europe were the results of Ottoman, once again with Habsburg-German participation (from the West), still older, from a chronological perspective than the «Oriental hegemonical dominant», with Polish-Lithuanian involvement (from the North) and Muscovite Russian pressure (from the North and North-East). To this one should add – from the South – the pro-Ottoman or «Orthodox irredentist» resurrection of the Serbians and Greeks, in particular, as well as Albanian or Bulgarian endeavours. The results were three sides of political pressure (one had constantly been *Infidel* for eight centuries) notwithstanding the fact that only two circles of Christian civilization existed – not only in theory – for the disputed area¹¹.

Prior already to 1204, Constantinople and Rome circumscribed two circles

¹⁰ E.g. G. Parker, *The Thirty Years' War*, London 1984; J.-P. Findeisen, *Karl XII. von Schweden – ein König, der zum Mythos wurde*, Berlin 1992; K. Friedrich, *The Other Prussia: Royal Prussia, Poland and Liberty, 1569–1772*, Cambridge 2000; L. Hughes, *Peter the Great: A Biography*, New Haven 2002); T. Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, New Haven 2003 (as well as – in this case – his, *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin*, New York 2010); D. Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922*, Cambridge 2005.

¹¹ E.g. D. Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth. Eastern Europe, 500–1453*, London 1971; A. Vacalopoulos, *The Greek Nation, 1453–1669*, New Brunswick, NJ 1976; B. Jelavich, *History of the Balkans, 18th and 19th Centuries*, Cambridge 1983; *Myths and Nationhood*, ed. G. Hosking, G. Schöpflin, London-New York 1997, passim (chiefly G. Schöpflin's and Anthony Smith's studies); A. Kohler, *Karl V. 1500–1558. Eine Biographie*, Munich 2001; W. Urban, *The Teutonic Knights: A Military History*, London 2003; V. Spinei, *The Great Migrations in the East and South East of Europe from the the Ninth to the Thirteenth Century*, vol 1–2, Amsterdam 2006; G. Mickunaite, *Making a Great Ruler: Grand Duke Vytautas of Lithuania*, Budapest 2006; as well as O. J. Schmitt's *Skanderbeg*, Regensburg, 2009.

of civilization, built on state and faith that interfered. Their «perfection» decreased towards their margins, towards Hungary and Poland (from Rome's perspective), towards Kyvian Russia and, later, the Balkan crowns (from Byzantium's point of view), to mention only those structures directly connected to East-Central Europe. These «political creatures of the frontier» spanned border areas both in relation to the «central perfection» and to the «unknown», to the territories outside. The latter, the frontiers of the frontier, interposed areas, grew into spaces of contact, which the neighbouring powers, the circles of civilization to which the powers belonged, could claim for themselves. In political practices, prior to the rise of the Ottomans, such «territorial claims» were justified by the fact that the desired areas bordered and opened up the vast space of traditional eastern unrest, with which the wanted areas tended to identify. The areas could only turn into lands of 'mixture' and acculturation, also due to the «central» Roman and Byzantine evolutions. In this respect, the changes, the crisis and the developments triggered by the various forms of Church Union, as well as of Reformation were a proper match for the «genetic battlefield features» of East-Central Europe¹².

The triangular shape of (this) East-Central Europe is both artificial (for it dates from the 21st century) and natural (for it reflects, namely, the medieval and early modern evolutions influenced from its three «imperial» sides, arbitrary liniary and structurally influential). The triangle, with its maritime corners, has a correspondent in the peninsular form of the Balkans, based on the Lower Danube and pointing at the Mediterranean Sea, a (another) triangle that contains similar and often more pronounced political, ethnical and religious phenomenon of fragmentation and change induced from the sides (e.g., prior to the rise of the Ottomans, by Hungarians, Cumans and Tartars from the North, by Genoese and the Byzantines from the East, by Venetians and the Italian Angevines from the West). It is interesting to note that together these two triangles, in which the rivers tend to play a greater role than the mountains (a minority in terms of territorial predominance) cover the geographical centre of Europe as a continent, forming a more than troubled in the (very) long run – European «middle earth», where individual endeavours and local specificities combined with outside influences and «imperial» (see universal) pressures in shaping a peculiar ensemble, constant through its instability (as defined

¹² For instance: D. Obolensky, „Russia's Byzantine Heritage”, *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, vol 1, 1950, pp. 37–63; A. Soloviev, „Reges et regnum Russie au Moyen Age”, *Byzantion* vol 36, 1966, pp. 143–173; T. Wyrwa, *La pensée politique polonaise à l'époque de l'Humanisme et de la Renaissance (un apport à la connaissance de l'Europe modern*, Paris 1978; J. Godfrey, *1204: The Unholy Crusade*, Oxford 1980; H. Wiesflecker, *Maximilian I. Die Fundamente des habsburgischen Weltreiches*, Vienna-Munich 1991; T. T. Allsen, *Conquest and Culture in Mongol Eurasia*, Cambridge 2001; K.-P. Matschke, *Das Kreuz und der Halbmond. Die Geschichte der Türkenkriege*, Düsseldorf-Zürich 2004; N. Housley, *Contesting the Crusades*, Oxford 2006, passim (foremost the final two chapters of this – in effect – long term analysis).

by the outside «imperial» spaces of great calm)¹³.

Still, East-Central Europe (the Balkans too) should have been Slavic in terms of common ethnic background (making «subsequent» regional fragmentation the more eloquent for the *nature* of this Europe). The medieval German *Drang nach Osten*, the Hungarian «intrusion», the Lithuanian expansion, combined with the Cuman and Tartar hegemonies, and to a lesser extent (in East-Central European cultural, chronological terms) the Ottoman growth changed its course that had begun to alter around the Year Thousand (Hungary became a Christian state, the first signs of major German eastern solutions for local western necessities arose and a new vague of eastern power riders formed further to the East). The survivors of the old Roman settlers or the ancient Greeks turned Byzantine (unless they were under the direct imperial administrative protection) usually were no match for the already imposed/rising powers. The *Latin* local element only made it to relative power through the creation of Second Bulgarian Tsarate (merely for a few decades: 1180s–1230s) and the foundation of Wallachia and Moldavia (equally for a couple of decades: 1340s–1380s), which soon – if not from the beginning in Wallachia’s case – vested a Slavic institutional coat. Nonetheless, prior to the rise of modern nationalism and its effects (on «Latins» too), significant divisions were added to the already individualized Slavic groups by their choices between Rome (Avignon for a while) and Byzantium and by the Reformation. Nowadays however, after World War II, if one looks at East-Central Europe (and at the Balkans), one cannot notice that – regardless of confession – the Slavic element has a regional majority greater than around 1000. Romanians, Hungarians, Greeks (as perceived) and – to a lesser demographic extent – Muslim Albanians and Bosnians (as we see them) or the «men of the Baltic» are – basically one could infer – the only non-Slavs¹⁴.

Substance, Legitimity and Action

Though legitimized and influenced by one of three sides (less by the «eastern» one prior to Muscovite expansion, though – for instance – the Tartars legitimized rising Wallachia and Moscow), East-Central European states and structures are – in most respects – fruits of local confessional and political emulations, involving populations already settled in East-Central Europe. From this perspective, the *Sarmatian*, in Poland, *Scythian*, in Hungary, or Roman (*Dacian* one must add),

¹³ E.g. P. Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*, London 1938; N. Serban Tanaşoca, “De la Vlachie des Assenides au Second Empire Bulgare”, *Revue des Études Sud-Est-Européennes*, vol 19, 1981, pp. 581–593; D. M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice: A Study in Diplomatic and Cultural Relations*, Cambridge 1988; G. Pistarino, *Genovesi d’Oriente*, Genoa 1990; V. Gjuzelev, *Bulgarien zwischen Orient und Okzident. Die Grundlagen seiner geistigen Kultur vom 13. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert*, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar 1993; P. Jackson, *The Mongols and the West. 1211–1410*, London 2005. Additionally, the series *Da Roma al Terza Roma. Documenti e studi*, ed. P. Catalano, P. Sinsicalco, Rome 1983–2006 is rather eloquent for the variable amounts of (real) scholarly knowledge as well as (academic) “ideology”.

¹⁴ For an overview: W. Kessler, *Politik, Kultur und Gesellschaft in Kroatien und Slavonien in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Munich 1975; Ş. Papacostea, *Between the Crusade and the Mongol Empire: The Romanians in the Thirteenth Century*, Cluj-Napoca 1998; P. Engel, *The Realm of St. Stephen: A History of Medieval Hungary. 895–1526*, London 2001; P. Stephenson, *Byzantium’s Balkan Frontier: A Political Study of the Northern Balkans 900–1204*, Cambridge 2001; I. Vásáry, *Cumans and Tartars: Oriental Military in the Pre-Ottoman Balkans. 1185–1365*, Cambridge 2005; F. Curta, *South-Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, ca. 500–1250*, Cambridge 2006.

in Wallachia and in Moldavia, identity high notes are particularly interesting. They tend to dominate (less in the *Sarmatian* case) the crossing from the Late Middle Ages to the Early Modern Age (in this respect too, the *Bohemia* of the Czechs is more than just a peculiar case study, like Wallachian *Dacia*). It is noteworthy that in most cases such high notes, destined to strengthen the (local and regional) position of the «autochthonous population», revolved around and resorted to the use of a faraway cradle. «Born» as states by the West, Poland and Hungary «came» from the East. Whether we rely on Jan Długosz's or on Martin Bielski's feathers or we turn to the violent reactions of the Orthodox magnate Constantin Ostrogski in the late 1590s, Poland «crossed» the eastern barrier posed by the legacy of Kyivian Rus'. Hungary, *Christendom's bulwark*, still searched – via the messengers of Andrew II (in the late 1230s) or Matthias Corvinus (in the 1470s) for that *Magna Hungaria*, in the North Pontic steppes). Eventually Legitimized and defined by the southern and – far less – eastern sides, Wallachia and Moldavia, reluctant and misshaped jewels of various powers, claimed – with natural Papal insensitive – their *Italian* roots already as still very young states prior to the 15th century and its «trends»¹⁵.

These «Europe's» *oriundi*, in fact, under ideological terms, regardless of their real or claimed East-Central European antiquity, developed an *ius vitaene-cisque* on their area(s). This right of life and death, though it did not prevent (medieval) imperial expansions, slowed them down. On the other hand, given this geographically and ideologically mixed background, and taking into account only the crusader perspective, it is hardly surprising that these political structures were generally (perceived as) pawns and tools of Christendom's great designers, as regional stakes were very high for all parties. Finances were a key aspect (identity high notes often accompanied explicit or implicit demands for external military and financial subsidies from the West mainly), a natural fact for a sea based, if not seaborne, «triangle». Its eastern side, basically identical with the old route *from the Varegians to the Greeks*, connected Baltic resources (disputed by Teutonic Knights, transferred by Rome from the Palestinian to the Transylvanian and then Baltic borders of Christendom, Poles, Muscovite Russians or Swedes) to Pontic perspectives (disputed by Poles, Tartars, Lithuania, Hungary, Moldavia, Genoa or the most enduring victors in Istanbul and Moscow). The calmer western side linked the Adriatic to the Baltic and created four centres Vienna, Prague, Danzig, and later Trieste (Venice's self-standing angle tended to focus on the central and southern parts of the «western front»), vital for western cultural, political and commercial expansion. Nature (rocks were strongly limiting continuous fluvial trade between the Mid and Lower Danube) and strategy (the southern bank of the Lower Danube

¹⁵ E.g. L. Tárdy, „Ungarns anti-osmanische Bündnisse mit Staaten des Nahen Ostens und deren Vorgeschichte“, *Anatolica*, vol 4–5, 1971–1972, pp. 151–156; A. Armbruster, *Der Donau-Karpatenraum in den mittel-und west-europäischen Quellen des 10.-16. Jahrhunderts: eine historiographische Imagologie*, Cologne-Vienna 1990), pp. 151–168; E. Potkowski, „Sarmatismus als politische Ideologie der jagiellonischen Dynastie“, *Zeitschrift für Ost-Mitteleuropa Forschung*, vol 14, no 3, 1995, pp. 364–380; B. A. Gudziak, *Crisis and Reform. The Kyvian Metropolitanate, the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Genesis of the Union of Brest*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 94–101; A. Kubinyi, „Az 1505-ös rákosi országgyűlés és a szittyia ideológia [The Diet of Rákos (1505) and the Scythian Ideology]“, *Századok*[Centuries], vol 140, no 2, 2006, pp. 361–374 (an English translation of this study is much needed).

towers over the northern one) prevented a similar blossoming of the southern side. In return, once northern bridgeheads were established, the side allowed especially the Porte to make the most of its Adriatic and Pontic forces¹⁶.

Two opposite trends thus naturally developed both within and – more often – outside «East-Central Europe» in regard to its real value and importance. In part this is due also – again – to the fact that its eastern side was and still is frequently perceived as open for chiefly – Western expansion (an impression contradicted on more than one occasion throughout the centuries). On one hand, the area is viewed as an entity of reduced general value and questionable stability. She has to be exploited and used to the best extent possible in order to reduce further reasons for concern. As renaissances, like decays, met in «East Central Europe», shaping perceptions turned traditions, prior to the «invention» of *Eastern Europe* or the *Orient*; an example can be recalled from the 1470s. Milan, a synonym for extreme *Realpolitik*, was literary disgusted that *Easterners* (Tartars or Wallachians too) had learnt the *bad habits of the Hungarian* and came to the peninsula promising great (anti-Ottoman) support in return for small – by Italian standards – sums. Prior and after 1453, the Byzantines had by no means a better opinion of northern, *Greek* rite in particular, Christians, often deemed and judged as *Barbarians* or even *Pagans*, while their lands, in particular Wallachia, were viewed – at times – as real Orthodox *El Dorados*. Yet, in parallel, this line of reasoning led to the other distinctive – «domestic» and «foreign» – perception of «East-Central Europe». High-profile voices (Coluccio Salutati or Andrea Biglia) regarded the moral decay of the flamboyant West as the main cause for Ottoman success. *Turks*, like Tacitus' Germans, were moral, simple, even primitive, and strong, just the «qualities and weaknesses», ascribed to the *Latins* or *Greeks* of the *East*. Irrespective of their post-1453 stands, Byzantine writers, Michael Dukas or Michael Critobulos in particular, extended – shared might be too strong – general similar views. The (modern especially) result was eventually that «East-Central Europe» appeared to be a land of great potential that – voluntarily as well – sacrificed for the *others*¹⁷.

Béla IV of Hungary apparently provided us with most of the political guidelines of «East-Central Europe» in relation to any major (outside) power, not only

¹⁶ E.g. *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, ed. M. M. Postan, vol 4. *The Economy of Expanding Europe in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. E. E. Rich, C. H. Wilson, Cambridge, 1967, passim (foremost Frank Spooner's and Fernand Braudel's chapter), Z.P. Pach, *The Transylvanian Route of Levantine Trade at the Turn of the 15th and 16th Centuries* (= *Studia Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, vol 138), Budapest 1980; *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire. 1300–1914*, vol 1, ed. H. Inalcik, D. Quataert, Cambridge 1997; *The Economic History of Byzantium From the Seventh through the Fifteenth Century*, ed. A. E. Laiou, vol 2, Washington 2002, passim (especially, the studies of Anne Bortoli, Michel Kazanski, John Day, Nikos Oikonomides as well as of A. E. Laiou).

¹⁷ For an overview: E. Motta, "Un ambasciatore tartaro a Venezia. 1476", *Ateneo Veneto*, vol 19, 1889, pp. 147–148; N. Iorga, "Două texte grecești privitoare la țerile noastre [Two Greek Texts on Our Countries]", *Revista Istorică* [Historical Review], vol 19, no 1–3, 1933, pp. 1–2; N. Ș. Tanașoca, "Les Mixobarbares et les formations politiques paristriennes du XI^e siècle", *Revue Roumaine d'Histoire*, vol 12, no 1, 1973, pp. 61–82; V. Spinei, "La signification des ethnonymes des Daces et des Gètes dans les sources byzantines des X^e-XV^e siècles", *Études Byzantines et Post-Byzantines*, vol 2, 1991, pp. 123–129; M. Meserve, "Italian Humanists and the Problem of the Crusade", [in:] *Crusading in the Fifteenth Century: Message and Impact*, ed. N. Housley, New York 2004, pp. 13–39 (in this case, chiefly pp. 16–19).

the Papacy. He claimed that he could not do (exactly) as Rome commanded him to do, for people and lands were different here, and stated that if he did fail to receive his freedom of action, he had to follow a different – Tartar under the circumstances (late 1240s) – path. Additionally, largely because of our modern way of representation, a *TIA* like sound emerges from the same message and entrenches itself around East-Central Europe. Six centuries later, we encounter the *n'oublions pas que nous sommes ici aux Portes de l'Orient*, the Bucharest statement of the future French president Raymond Poincaré regarding Western schemes accomplished in «regional fashion». The lawyer was both intrigued and anxious to make the most of the local *legèrité*, a trademark for, at the same time, local success, backwardness and survival. Events and trends had shaped space and time as a two-sided collision between civilizations within the «triangle», whether the mental conflict between attitudes was represented as an East-West clash (given the evolution of the political course over the past two centuries) or a North-South conflict (in accordance with common Western «domestic» divisions, and far less with substantial local experience). Eventually, these twists and turns, joined by the modern variety (often contextualized in simple and very simplistic dichotomies) recreated a – if not the – «triangle (of the Year Thousand)» for East-Central Europe. If the (three) sides of the «triangle» fragmented the European mid-land space they contained, they also united an area in relation to fragmentation, change, as well as to themselves¹⁸.

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¹⁸ *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages to the Early Twentieth Century*, ed. D. Chiro, Berkeley 1989; *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*, ed. F. Adanir, S. Faroqhi (Leiden-Boston-Cologne 2002); N. Berend, *Hungary, “The Gate of Christendom”*, [in:] *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. D. Abulafia, N. Berend, Ashgate 2002, pp. 195–215. See also: A. Simon, *Pământurile crucii. Românii și cruciada târzie* [The Lands of the Cross: The Romanians and the Later Crusades], Cluj-Napoca 2012.

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