Proposal for the 3rd MMHN Conference

Cristian Luca,
Lower Danube University of Galați

The Emergence and Development of the Greek ‘Conquering Merchants’ In The Trade Between The Eastern Mediterranean And The Romanian Principalities (16th–17th Centuries)

The suitable definition by which Trajan Stoianovich described, in his classic essay published almost half a century ago, the significant role played by the Balkan merchants, mainly Greeks, in the development of the capitalist economy in South–Eastern and Central Europe was entirely supported by the conclusion of the emblematic work in which Immanuel Wallerstein expounded the evolution of the Modern European World–Economy. The dynamics of trade in this semi-periphery and periphery of the European World–Economy was greatly influenced by the Greek merchants and shipowners’ massive involvement in trading South-Eastern European raw materials and Venetian merchandises. The complementariness between the Venetian Republic’s capitalist economy and the agro-pastoral economic structure of the South–Eastern European states favoured the development of significant commercial transactions with specific merchandises. Using their mercantile experience, their resources of capital and the facilities in shipping – as owners of commercial ships and experienced seafarers – and in caravan transports, the Greeks took over the Romanian Principalities’ foreign trade; thus, they exported on the Venetian market large quantities of wax, hides, wool, salted fish and caviar, and imported luxury articles, textiles, glassware, paper, products of the Italian pharmacopoeia etc. The Greek merchants and ship-owners, subjects of the Serenissima (residents of the Orthodox colony from Venice – members of the St. George Confraternity) or inhabitants in the Ionian Islands, but also Ottoman subjects from insular and continental Greece, especially in Epirus, became the main protagonists of the medium and long distance trade, on the maritime and land routes, in the Balkans and the Romanian Principalities, conducting their business either by accepting the intermediation of the large Constantinopolitan market or by trading directly with the destination markets of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania.

On the basis of unpublished or insufficiently used Venetian documentary sources from the 16th–17th centuries, this paper stresses the decisive contribution of the Greek merchants and ship-owners, enjoying the protection of Venice’s Stato da Mar or Ottoman subjects, to the development of the trade between the Serenissima and South–Eastern and Central Europe. A special stress will be devoted to the three autonomous

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states of Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania, buffer zones between the Ottoman Empire and Respublica Christiana, principalities whose role on the map of the European World–Economy has been ignored or superficially evaluated in the Italian and, generally speaking, Western historiography. By their mercantile activity, the Greeks, as well as other Balkan tradesmen, proved to be important vectors of the capitalist economy in the semi-periphery and periphery of the European World–Economy, with an enormous contribution to the economic and social progress and thus to the relative decrease of the considerable gap in development between South–Eastern Europe and the Western capitalist economies.
CV

Last Name: LUCA
First Name: CRISTIAN
Current position: Assistant Professor

Office Address:
“Lower Danube” University
Faculty of History and Philosophy
Department of History
111th Domnească Street
RO–800201 GALATI
ROMANIA

Telephone: (00 40) 236 41 56 41 int. 69 (Office)
Fax: (00 40) 236 47 21 01 (Office)
E-mail: cristiluca_ugal@yahoo.com; cristiluca_univ@yahoo.it

Education:
2006 Ph.D. in History (magna cum laude) University of Bucharest
2001 MA in Eastern European Medieval and Early Modern History University of Bucharest
1999 BA in History University of Bucharest

Professional Affiliation:
“Sever Zotta” Romanian Institute for Genealogy and Heraldic Studies – Iasi (Romania)
Society of Mediterranean Maritime History – La Valletta (Malta)
Associazione Nazionale Archivistica Italiana – Rome (Italy)
Romanian Academy Commission for the History of the Cities of Romania – Sibiu (Romania)
Romanian Historical Association – Bucharest (Romania)
American Historical Association – Washington (USA)
Economic History Association – London (Great Britain)
Interdepartmentally Center for Balcanic Studies at Ca’ Foscari Venice University – Venice (Italy)
Commission of History of International Relations – Milan (Italy)

Research Interests:
Political, Commercial and Cultural Relations between Venice, the Romanian Principalities and the Eastern European Area during the 16th and the 17th Centuries
The Relations of Venetian Bailo in Constantinople with the Romanians Rulers
The Levantine Trade during the Seicento
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