

**Book review: Marcin Marynowski, *Kupcy z Polski na moldawskich i siedmiogrodzkich szlakach handlowych w XV–XVIII wieku. Historiografia i źródła rumuńskojęzyczne (Polish Merchants on Moldavian and Transylvanian Trade Routes in the 15<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Historiography and Romanian-language Sources)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu, Przemyśl 2018, pp. 303 + 6 maps**

At the end of 2018 Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk w Przemyślu published a very interesting book by Marcin Marynowski on the activity of merchants from the territories of the Polish Crown in Moldavia and Transylvania in the early modern period. Its author is already well known for his multiple studies and source publications on the history of Polish-Romanian-Moldavian relations, hence the reviewed book is, as it were, a summary of his research to-date.

I would like to stress right from the start that we are not dealing with a typical monograph here. The history of the activity of Polish merchants on Moldavian and Transylvanian trade routes is for the author a pretext to present the current state of knowledge (mainly in Polish and Romanian, less in the Ukrainian language). On the other hand, apart from discussing major achievements of relevant historiography and a collection of sources from multiple Romanian and Moldavian archives, the author also presents many facts on the subject, so-far unknown or little known. This parallel approach makes a clear-cut evaluation of this book difficult. Without a doubt, though, one thing needs highlighting: in Polish literature on the subject so far there has not been a study on this theme, based on mainly Romanian and Moldavian sources, as those countries' archives are hardly used by Polish historians.

The book has a quite elaborate structure. The opening chapter is called *Abbreviations* (actually, it should be “List of abbreviations”) and *Mini-dictionary of pronunciation of Romanian diacritical marks*. These parts are by all means useful and necessary, although they should rather be placed at the end of the publication. It is only then that an extended *Introduction* appears, followed by two main, uneven parts: I – *Moldavia*, II – *Transylvania*. The former, much larger, is divided into four chapters: I. *Moldavian trade*, II. *Polish-Moldavian relations*, III. *Source texts*, IV. *Connections of the clergy with Moldavian trade*. These are subdivided into multiple subchapters; which also differ considerably. The second part is made up of only two chapters: I. *Transylvanian trade*, II. *Trading relations between Transylvania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth*. Here the number of subchapters is approximately even. The whole book ends with a *Conclusion* chapter, abstracts in Romanian and English, *Bibliography*, *List of names*, *Maps* and *Illustrations*, i.e. a list of illustrations. The

reader gets an impression that the layout of the first part is slightly chaotic and would have been better off if simplified; a careful reading of the book confirms that feeling.

In the *Introduction* M. Marynowski reveals that his research concerning archive sources on Polish merchants' relations with Transylvania has not been as extensive as in the case of Moldavia, thus addressing the reservation one has while reading the monograph for the first time: the two parts into which the book is divided are clearly uneven. Still, it seems right that Marynowski included Transylvania in his project, because he showed that plenty of new research areas await historians who would like to explore that field.

In the *Introduction* the author explains the assumed chronology, i.e. the stages of the merchants' involvement on Moldavian and Transylvanian routes. The 14<sup>th</sup> century was a time of establishing first contacts, which in the 15<sup>th</sup> century became part of official law. The second stage, full of intensive relations, comprises the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries until the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when trade was affected by many wars and the change of geopolitics in the region. The third stage extends to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (until the first partition of Poland in 1772), although, as the author rightly states, until the 19<sup>th</sup> century the forms of trade relations between Polish and Moldavian and Transylvanian merchants resembled those from the previous period and it was only the first years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that brought about major changes. The author presents the achievements of Polish historiography in the field and then lists the archive collections he has used. The *Introduction* seems to raise doubts as to the layout: following the acknowledgments of persons and institutions the author graphically distinguished the following subchapters: *Source publications* (plus their detailed description), *Archive aids* (catalogues and inventories), *Studies* (references to the multiple historiographic achievements in the field) and *Maps* (references to many cartographic collections). One may not accuse the author of lack of precision or accuracy in having written a very extensive *Introduction*, yet its arrangement is really puzzling.

As regards volume, Part One *Moldavia* dominates in the book. It opens with Chapter One *Moldavian trade* – crucial to understanding the whole subject. Nonetheless, the division into as many as ten subchapters suggests certain faults of the reviewed publication; the author often repeats himself and seems not to fully control the presentation of extensive source material in the context of the discussed problems. The first chapter is divided into the following subchapters: 1. *Routes in Eastern Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century*, 2. *Trade in Moldavia*, 3. *Moldavian trade routes*, 4. *Tariff system in Moldavia*, 5. *Moldavian trade cities*, 6. *Moldavia's benefits for the Ottoman Empire*, 7. *The trading monopoly of the Ottoman Empire in the 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> centuries*, 8. *Economic changes in Moldavia in the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries*, 9. *The situation of the Black Sea Basin from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century*, 10. *The guidelines of an Armenian merchant*. They are uneven both in terms of volume and quality.

The first subchapter, against its title, does not concern trade routes in Eastern Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but trade relations between Bohemia, Poland and Hungary, including the Principality of Moldavia (i.e. Central Europe). This chapter also explains the etymology of the word Wallachians. It is very laconic (p. 35–37) and

in fact does not contribute much to the subject. In the same way one can evaluate Subchapter 2. *Trade in Moldavia*, which covers slightly over two pages (p. 38–40). It is only from the third subchapter onwards that one can find detailed discussion of the presented subject matter in the context of historiography and sources. The subchapters are mostly thoroughly written and provide a lot of detailed information on the system of Moldavian settlement, tariffs, trade routes, time needed to cover particular distances, obstacles faced on the way, finally traders' ethnicity. The author also considers accounts of merchants describing their impressions of travelling around Moldavia and, above all, what they traded with. This chapter perfectly shows how backward Moldavia was compared with Transylvania or the Polish Crown: its cities, which were more of settlements than urban centres, were largely built from wood and often ravaged by hostile invasions or disasters like fires or floods. M. Marynowski describes at length particular places and shows their local colour and general appeal, but also the difficulties they had to face in the early modern era.

A separate part in the first chapter are subchapters on the role of Moldavia in the system of the Ottoman Empire. In order to help the readers understand the complex economic situation, the author discusses politics and diplomacy, which, on account of the location of the territory, were unstable and dynamic. The frequent changes of rulers and their manoeuvring between the Ottomans and Poland resulted in frequent invasions and destructions of Moldavia and Wallachia. The author has proved that, paradoxically, it was not the 17<sup>th</sup>-century wars that weakened trade relations but only the new reality of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century; before, armed conflicts would restrain trade only temporarily, after which it returned to the previous shape. It is a pity Subchapter 9 is so short, as it discusses geopolitical changes from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, including the interesting idea of appointing an ephemeral Trade Company Poland in 1783 to deal with Black Sea trade. Subchapter 10, on the other hand, which does not take even one page, is superfluous. It was a mistake to even mark it graphically.

Chapter Two *Polish-Moldavian relations* is divided into three subchapters: 1. *The beginnings of trade relations between the Polish Crown and Moldavia*, 2. *Lviv in relations with Moldavia*, 3. *Armenian merchants from Poland on Moldavian routes*. This is one of the better and more coherent parts of the book, even though quite short compared with other chapters (p. 89–104). The author has thoroughly discussed the role of Alexander the Good's 1408 privilege for Polish merchants and the way it is interpreted in historiography. He emphasizes the role of Lviv as the largest urban centre in the south-east of the Polish Crown and the way that city's trading significance has been presented in literature. Marynowski also shows, which is only too logical, the outstanding role of the Armenians in the south-eastern trade of the Commonwealth.

The third chapter contains Polish translations of trade documents between Poland and Moldavia from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century from selected collections of printed sources. Here the author also describes Polish coins from selected Romanian and Moldavian museum collections, as well as presents a lot of accounts of the journeys of merchants from Poland and other countries to Moldavia. This is a very valuable part of the book. It ends with Subchapter 9. *In a Moldavian shop*, which contains a list of goods from a small shop probably in Iași. The inclusion of

this source is a great idea. It is a shame, therefore, that the author has not used the opportunity to write something more about such shops. Stating that the owner was a spice merchant but his shop sold various groceries and household products seems to be too little when presenting a full source.

The first part of the publication ends with Chapter Four, discussing the connections of the clergy (Orthodox and Catholic) with Moldavian trade. It is a very good recap of the author's argument on Moldavia. The reader learns how historiography has presented the role of monasteries and bishoprics in the development of trade and sees how much influence the Poles had in the structure of Roman Catholic Church in Moldavia; that resulted from, e.g., appointing mainly Poles for bishops in Siret, Baia and Bacău. With their pull and connections with the country of origin they contributed to strengthening religious and trading relations between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Moldavia.

Part Two *Transylvania* is much weaker than the Moldavian part, for which the author excuses himself in the *Introduction*. It should be seen more like a reconnaissance, the more so because – in compliance with the title of the publication – the author based his argumentation exclusively on Romanian- and Polish-language historiography. What weighs in favour of publishing this part, though, is including plenty of documents, so far little known or remaining beyond the scope of interest of Polish historiography, concerning trade, cities and bourgeoisie of Transylvania in the early modern era. This fragment of the book is divided into two parts: *Transylvanian trade* and *Trading relations between Transylvania and the Commonwealth of Poland*. The author discusses in detail the role of Braşov and the significance of the Braşov route for the trade. As before, the strongest point are the multiple references to documents stored in different archives in that part of present Romania, which provide a lot of new, surprising information. An example may be the completely unknown *Projectum de Comercio Transylvaniae* (Project on Trade in Transylvania) from the Archive in Cluj-Napoca. The author presents the original document and its translation into Polish by Rev. Tadeusz Baj. The document, written in 1702, shows that even in the period of decline of trade in that part of Europe, as a consequence of many armed conflicts, for Transylvanian merchants important trading points on the map of the Polish Crown still remained Jarosław and Gdańsk.

It is not easy to sum up the review of Marcin Marynowski's book. First of all, it provides Polish historiography with a multitude of so-far unknown facts and is an effect of the author's long-term research on the subject. The number of archive sources used (including many completely unknown to Polish science) is impressive. No one has researched that field on such a scale before Marynowski. The publication reveals the author's great passion and love of the region; the author also shares with the readers personal experience of the difficulties he had accessing sources in particular archives. Analysis seems to be a technique chosen too seldom (what prevails in the book is definitely description), but there are some very apt comparisons. For example, the author emphasizes a large civilization gap between Moldavia and Transylvania. As he indicates, "As late as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Westerners visiting Moldavia wrote that its cities resembled medium-sized French villages." (p. 223). Transylvania

was a territory of clear European influences, with rich cities and influential bourgeoisie. What is important is also one more statement, actually an essential one in this book: “The archive sources from Romania show the activity of Polish merchants was most intensive in Moldavia, moderate in Transylvania and very slight in Wallachia” (p. 222). What downgrades the value of this monograph is the author’s failure to control the multitude of his sources, which frequently results in a chaos; a lot of things are repeated or (like subchapter 1.10) redundant. Despite some critical remarks, the book is definitely to be recommended as a good compendium of the literature on the subject and archive collections, with the reservation that it is not an easy read.

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