



State Formation in Wallachia, 1740–1800

Regulations, Paperwork
and Metrology

VASILE MIHAI OLARU

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FOREWORD

Mihai Olaru deals from an innovative angle with a theme which has attracted many historians—the functioning of the Wallachian state during the 18th century. While other scholars have focused on elements which highlighted the exceptional nature of 18th-century Wallachia, for example, the special status of a Christian vassal-state at the margins of the Ottoman Empire, the magnitude and forms of financial extractions, the reform policies of some of the so-called Phanariot princes, which included attempts to regulate the agrarian relations or the interactions between Greek-speaking elites and the bulk of Romanian local population, Mihai Olaru embarks on a different approach. Starting from the theoretical contributions regarding the knowledge-power nexus and modern state formation, he decided to investigate systematically the extension of the infrastructural power of the Wallachian state from 1740 to 1800, as well as the related topics of symbolic power and administrative routines. This approach has an obvious polemical component, as indicated by the author in the introduction: “this book refutes the idea of an all-powerful despotic state postulated by the historiography of the Phanariot period and shifts the emphasis from the undeniably exploitative nature of the state to the study of the changing relation with its subjects. Instead of institutions and their responsibilities, my approach emphasises the technical means these institutions used to reach the subjects” (p. 13).

Yet, in spite of his polemical approach, or better said, beyond this approach, Mihai Olaru bases his investigation on a thorough analysis

of the existing academic contributions and the extensive use of the edited primary sources. This solid documentary foundation allows him to combine traditional historical critique with theoretically embedded insights. For example, inspired by Witold Kula's book on measures, he refutes the so-called jurist approach used by numerous Romanian historians, "which presupposes the existence of a norm regulating the activity of people, although the evidence of such norm lacks entirely", and highlights both the "political aspect of the measuring practices and of their historical evolution determined by the change of power relations" and the duration of the process of standardizing measures, which was by no means completed at the end of the 18th century and lasted in fact until at least the official adoption of the metric system in 1866 (p. 237).

The book focuses on several aspects of the infrastructural state power, i.e., state interference in the agrarian regulations, fiscal regulations, recordkeeping, identification papers and certificates, and the standardization of weights and measures. For each of these topics, Mihai Olaru is able to bring additional documentary knowledge and analytical insights. The author documents progress and achievements, as well as resistance to novelty and limits of the modernizing attempts of the state. He acknowledges that, in spite of its partial success, the state had not really won the struggle by 1800—see, for example, his assessment of the attempts to impose unified legal regulations: "the struggle between general regulation and local privilege continued at the end of the 18th century. The struggle itself testifies to the slow process of horizontal integration of the Wallachian subjects under the effect of a general legal text" (p. 118). The limitations in enforcing standardized measures were also significant. For example, in 1796, the tavern keepers in Bucharest were accused of selling drinks with false measures. The princely *divan* recommended that the administration should distribute to all taverns in Bucharest officially sealed measures, charging the tavern keepers with their cost; yet the same ruling specified that the sealed measures should be distributed only in Bucharest and not in the rest of the country and that the fraudulent tavern keepers should not be fined, but only beaten because if fined they would recover the loss by continuing to cheat with false measures (p. 243).

Mihai Olaru addresses briefly also the issue of foreign influences on the policies of the Wallachian princes. He acknowledges the impact of the Ottoman pressure and of the Habsburg administrative measures in Oltenia (part of Wallachia, which was under Habsburg rule from 1718 to 1739) but generally considers the expansion of state power as

being determined mostly by internal factors and concludes that “political modernization in Wallachia—albeit in an incipient phase—preceded the large-scale and conscious adoption of Western political forms in the 19th century” (p. 291). While essentially correct, this conclusion does not consider enough the fact that the princes of the 18th century had, in contrast to those of the previous centuries, acquired a more direct personal experience with the workings of the Ottoman bureaucracy and have been inspired by the practices of the Ottoman administration, especially in the use of written documents, regulations and records. At the same time, it is noteworthy that the first systematic census was undertaken by the Russian occupation authorities in the early 1770s and that the mapping of Wallachia was made by the Austrians during their occupation of Wallachia in 1789–1791, while the Wallachian authorities needed quite a lot of time to adopt these techniques of accumulating knowledge about the resources of the state they ruled. These observations do not contradict the general picture drawn by Mihai Olaru, who argues that the administrative techniques documented in his book should not be analysed in separation but should be interpreted “as new instruments whereby the state expanded its purview and acquired more institutional solidity” (p. 290).

To conclude, the book authored by Mihai Olaru represents a fine piece of scholarship. It contributes to historical knowledge both at the detail level regarding the means of state functioning in 18th-century Wallachia and at the level of the general discussion on the modernizing mechanisms which enlarged the infrastructural power of the state. And, beyond its own contribution, Mihai Olaru’s book has the potential to stimulate rethinking the ingredients of modern state formation and further research.

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My knowledge of the field has greatly expanded with the help of the late Professor Șerban Papacostea. He was among those—not many—who could look at the Phanariot period *sine ira et studio*. His challenging questions helped clarify several issues of my research. He also facilitated access to an unpublished volume of sources impossible to track without his local knowledge in the library of the Institute of History “Nicolae Iorga” from Bucharest. Professor Ovidiu Ghitta pressed me to write a book review during my research; what seemed another academic burden turned out to be a fruitful effort, opening a new vista on the perception of the Phanariots. I am much in his debt for this and dozens of bibliographical suggestions, hints and encouragements.

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Introduction

In¹ the domain of civil litigations ... [the prince] preferring more than anything else the purest justice, as this is the brightest light and the most enduring basis of power, has proposed an undefeated and constant rule in adjudications: righteousness and impartiality. Henceforth, the public tribunal [...] was entrusted with drawing up the definitions of all particular legal cases applied to any kind of business for the use of officials and judges from the country ...; because from now on, the justice should not be for sale and the serfs should not be subject to force but, like the freemen, to the law.²

From the end of the seventeenth century, it is clear that, on the basis of the absolute monarchy, which was well-planted in the political life of the Romanian Countries, there was a transition from the prevalence of the

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author's.

² “Cronicul lui Petre Depasta Peloponesianul asupra vieții domnitorului Constantin Nicolai Mavrocordat” [The Chronicle of Petre Depasta from Peloponnese on the Life of Prince Constantin Nicolae Mavrocordat] in C. Erbiceanu, *Cronicari greci care au scris despre Români în Epoca Fanariotă* [Greek Chroniclers Who Wrote About Romanians During the Phanariot Period], ed. Andrei Pippidi (Bucharest: Editura Cronicar, 2003), 317. The quote is taken from the section where the author presents Constantin Mavrocordat's tenure in Moldavia (1741–1743), but it is meant to show the prince's methods of government, not a particular aspect of that tenure.

millenary traditions to the regime of ideas ... This is not without connection with what is going on in the West, especially in France ... There, it is the time when a certain Fénelon elaborates on theoretical bases a new State of justice, with a rationalist character and philanthropical goals³

The first quoted text above is part of an encomiastic presentation of the political career of the Phanariot prince Constantin Mavrocordat, written by one of his admirers, the “doctor-philosopher” Petre Depasta, from the Peloponnese, sometime between 1761 and 1770.⁴ The text reveals how Constantin Mavrocordat’s judicial reform in the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia was viewed by one of his supporters and, perhaps, by himself. Apparently, the reform consisted of codifying the most frequent judicial cases and extending the law’s applicability to free men and serfs. In short, the fragment evokes the rise of a state pretending neutrality with respect to all its subjects, a claim grounded—in our case—in the universalizing effects of the written law through the suppression of juridical differences among subjects.

The second text opens the seventh volume, dedicated to the eighteenth century, of the monumental *History of Romanians* by the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga. He suggested that the defining trait of the eighteenth century was the transition from a tradition-based state to a “regime of ideas”, that is, a state based on rationally designed policies. Few historians today endorse such a positive view of the Wallachian state during the eighteenth century. This period was seen—and to a large extent, the picture persists to this day—as a sort of Dark Age of Romanian history corresponding to the peak of Ottoman domination. According to this view, the state was a mere instrument of that domination, with its main features being venality, exactions and corruption. Without denying these aspects, this book argues that there is more to it and explores the state’s transformation between 1740 and 1800 along the lines indicated by Petre Depasta and Nicolae Iorga.

The Phanariot period/regime/century are names used to designate the history of Wallachia from 1716 to 1821 (1711–1821 in the neighbouring Principality of Moldavia with a similar status). The Phanariots

³ Iorga, IR, vol. VII, 3.

⁴ Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria literaturii române în secolul al XVIII-lea (1688–1821)* [The History of Romanian Literature during the Eighteenth Century (1688–1821)], vol. I, 2nd ed. (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1969), 375.

were an elite group of East Christian faith based in the Phanar district (hence their name) of Constantinople, which converted their commercial and educational capital into political influence within the Ottoman ruling elite. Among the higher offices they managed to secure, those of the princes of Moldavia and Wallachia were the highest.⁵ The Phanariots cultivated and employed two identities: Ottoman notable of Christian denomination.⁶ Informal in the last decades of the seventeenth century, the appointment of Constantinople-based Ottoman Christians as princes of the two principalities became regular in the eighteenth century—whence the name of the Phanariot period.⁷ At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Wallachia was a tributary principality of the Ottoman Empire bounded in the north and west by the Southern Carpathians and in the south and east by the Lower Danube; the Northeast border

⁵ The reader may be confused about juxtaposing prince and office. The explanation lies in the degradation of the status of the Wallachian princes from that of a (vassal) ruler to that of an Ottoman governor. I keep the word prince because it was used in the diplomatic sources of the age and because the Phanariot princes retained all the insignia of power used by previous princes: coronation ceremony, the official title used in documents claiming the divine origin of their power, etc.

⁶ Sophia Laiou, “Between Pious Generosity and Faithful Service to the Ottoman State: the Vakıf of Nikolaos Mavrogenis, End of the Eighteenth Century” in *Turkish Historical Review* 6 (2015): 159. Mavrogeni was an atypical Phanariot. Born on the island of Paros, he was never regarded as a member of the Phanariot group from Constantinople, who scornfully called him “the peasant of the Archipelago” (153). Moreover, his Christian identity was both Orthodox and Catholic, the latter having to do with the claimed Venetian origin of his family.

⁷ For a view “from the edge of the centre” that is, from Constantinople, of the Phanariots and their role in the Ottoman Empire see Christine Philliou’s important studies “Communities on the Verge: Unravelling the Phanariot Ascendancy in Ottoman Governance” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51/1 (2009): 151–181 and *Biography of an Empire. Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2011), ch. 1. For a view from the margin that is, from the point of view of the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, see Ion Ionașcu, “Le degré de l’influence des grecs des principautés roumaines dans la vie politique de ces pays” in *Symposium. L’Époque phanariote, 21–25 Octobre 1970. A la mémoire de Cléobule Tsourkas* (Thessaloiniki: Institute of Balkan Studies, 1974), 217–228; Andrei Pippidi, “Phanar, Phanariotes, Phanariorisme” in *Revue des études sud-est européennes*, XIII/2 (1975): 231–239; on the Ottoman-Christians playing an important role in the principalities before the Phanariot period Constantin Șerban, “Les preliminaries de l’époque phanariote” in *Symposium. L’Époque phanariote, 29–39* and M. Stănescu, “Préphanariotes et Phanariotes dans la vision de la société roumaine des XVIIe–XVIIIe siècles” in *Symposium. L’Époque phanariote, 347–358*.

was less clearly defined, a small creek—Milcov—separating Wallachia from Moldavia. It enjoyed broad internal autonomy but was not a sovereign state. It was not recognized internationally as a separate political entity but as an Ottoman territory, to the effect that treaties and conventions concluded by the Ottoman Porte included Wallachia (and Moldavia, too).⁸ The administrative apparatus was recruited on the basis of status and patron-client relations, far from any idea of professional bureaucracy. Its economy was lacking in complexity. Rudimentary agricultural techniques, modest industry development, relatively limited monetary circulation, a sparse population and negligible urban life cradled a peripheral economy integrated into the broader Ottoman world economy to become the periphery of the Western world economy.⁹

On this terrain, a series of changes in the modalities of state power occurred in Wallachia after 1740. The central power issued ordinances that were meant to regulate a wide array of activities. It legally defined the relationships between tenants and landlords and the extraction of taxes; it stored more and more information about the subjects in fixed (registers) and mobile (identification papers) forms of written evidence; it standardized (some of) the units of measurement used in the rendering of tithes, in the measuring land plots and in market transactions. The actual implementation of these measures was not smooth. Still, they heralded the beginning of the struggle against localism and the efforts to extend the boundaries of legitimate state action. Romanian historians have downplayed these changes or treated them within the narrow confines of specialized histories of agrarian relations, archives, metrology, etc. By insisting on the political dimensions of the three logistical techniques—regulations, paperwork and units of measurement—I analyse them as ways in which the state expanded its infrastructural reach and was locally

⁸ I. Ionașcu, P. Bărbulescu, Gh. Gheorghe, *Relațiile internaționale ale României în documente 1366–1900* [The International Relations of Romania in Documents]. Bucharest: Editura Politică, 1971, 202–260. Ionașcu, P. Bărbulescu, Gh. Gheorghe, *Traiatele internaționale ale României 1354–1920*. Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1975, 120–139.

⁹ Bogdan Murgescu, “The ‘Modernization’ of the Romanian Principalities During the 16th–17th Centuries: Patterns, Distortions, Prospects,” in *Modernizacja struktur władzy w warunkach opóźnienia: Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia na przełomie średniowiecza i czasów nowożytnych*, eds. Marian Dygo, Sławomir Gawlas and Hieronim Grala (Warsaw, 1999), 173–184. Florin Bonciu, Bogdan Murgescu, “The World-Approach and Romanian Economic History,” *Revue Roumaine d’Histoire*, XXIX, 3–4, (1990): 279–280.

produced as central authority. This focus opens up a new vista on state transformation, one that is obscured in studies concerned predominantly with poor administrative performance.

Chronologically, the book focuses on the six decades between 1740 and 1800. The former date marks the beginning of the so-called Phanariot reforms. The latter is arbitrary and has to do with the need to keep down the volume of the material under study. The focus on these six decades allows us to observe the innovations introduced by two reformatory princes—Constantin Mavrocordat and Alexandru Ipsilanti—and their impact on Wallachian society. In addition, after 1800, there were no other significant Phanariot reforms in Wallachia and the physiognomy of the Wallachian state during the Phanariot period was well established. However, as the reader will notice, I frequently went beyond these chronological boundaries to underline contrasts or differences. Sometimes, I compare post-1740 developments with administrative practices from approximately 1700 and those from the early nineteenth century to assess transformations in time.

The empirical basis of my study consists of normative, administrative and judicial sources published in several collections of documents. The first group contains settlements, ordinances and, above all, the Legal Register (*Pravilniceasca condică*),¹⁰ the first legal code published in Wallachia (1780) regularly used in court. However, the most important sources are the documents produced by the administrative and judiciary organs. The bulk of my evidence comes from several thousands of sources published in thematic volumes regarding agrarian relations¹¹ and fiscal problems¹² in eighteenth-century Wallachia and judiciary acts from 1775 to 1781.¹³ The underrated source collection of V.A. Urechia,

¹⁰ *Pravilniceasca condică* [The Legal Register], eds. Andrei Rădulescu et al. (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1957) (hereafter, *Pravilniceasca condică*).

¹¹ *Documente privind relațiile agrare în veacul al XVIII-lea*, [Documents Regarding the Agrarian Relations during the 18th Century] vol. I, Țara Românească [Wallachia] eds. V. Mihordea, Ș. Papacostea, Fl. Constantiniu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare România, 1961), 901.

¹² *Documente privind fiscalitatea în Țara Românească (1700–1821)* [Documents Concerning Fiscal Matters in Wallachia (1700–1821)], eds. V. Mihordea, Ioana Constantinescu, Sergiu Columbeanu, Manuscript deposited in the library of the Institute of History “Nicolae Iorga” from Bucharest.

¹³ *Acte Judiciare din Țara Românească 1775–1781* [Judicial Acts from Wallachia 1775–1781], eds. Gheorghe Cronț et al. (Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1973).

from which I used the first seven volumes, is of enormous importance.¹⁴ Nicolae Iorga's *Studii și documente* provided several essential sources.¹⁵ In addition, I rely, to a lesser extent, on other administrative and narrative sources.

In the remainder of this introduction, I review the historiography of the Phanariot period, with a note on the Phanariot state and the available explanations of the early-modern state formation to pinpoint my contribution. Next, I will outline the theoretical underpinnings of my study by presenting the definition of the state I employ and the main concepts that I will employ in analysing my sources.

THE PHANARIOT PERIOD

This book draws on and, at the same time, contributes to the (primarily Romanian) historiography of the Phanariot period. The Phanariot period remains controversial in Romanian historiography and culture.¹⁶ A bleak picture was painted by nineteenth-century Romantic historians, who blamed the Phanariots for retarding the rise of national awareness, deterring the progress of the Romanian nation and corrupting the mores of society. The opening of the chapter dedicated to the Phanariot period in the first critical synthesis of Romanian history speaks volumes about this perception:

¹⁴ V.A. Urechia, *Istoria Românilor* [History of Romanians], tome I (Bucharest: Lito-Tipografia Carol Göbl, 1891); tome II (Bucharest: Lito-Tipografia Carol Göbl, 1892); tome III (Bucharest: Tipografia "Gutenberg" Joseph Göbl, 1892); tome IV (Bucharest: Tipografia "Gutenberg" Joseph Göbl, 1892); tome V (Bucharest: Tipografia și Fonderia de Litere Thoma Basilescu, 1893); tome VI (Bucharest: Lito-Tipografia Carol Göbl, 1893); tome VII (Bucharest: Tipografia și Fonderia de Litere Thoma Basilescu, 1894).

¹⁵ Nicolae Iorga, *Studii și documente cu privire la istoria românilor* [Studies and Documents Regarding the History of Romanians], vol. 1–2 (Bucharest: Stabilimentul Grafic Socecu, 1901), vol. 5 (Bucharest: Stabilimentul Grafic Socecu, 1903), vol. 7 (Bucharest: Stabilimentul Grafic Socecu, 1904), vol. 10 (Bucharest: Stabilimentul Grafic Socecu), vol. 14 (Bucharest: Atelierele Grafice Socec et. Comp, 1907).

¹⁶ However, this is not unique to the Romanian historiography. Christine Philliou, "The Paradox of Perceptions: Interpreting the Ottoman Past through the National Present" in *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 44, no. 5 (September 2008): 661–675 has shown how nineteenth-century postimperial narratives, engaged in the forging of national identities, construed the Phanariots as instruments of imperial oppression and hindrances to the national liberation.

Nous arrivons à une époque bien malheureuse pour la Valachie, au règne des Phanariotes. Sous ces princes fermiers, sous ces princes qui étaient changés tous les jours, sous ces esclaves despotes, la Valachie tomba en décadence avec autant de vitesse que les autres états de l'Europe montaient en grandeur et en civilisation ... Un mur de despotisme, plus puissant qu'un des pierres entourant la principauté et le séparait du reste de l'Europe ... Tous les écrivains, indigènes ou étrangers, représentent l'avènement au trône des Phanariotes comme l'événement le plus désastreux qui ait jamais accablé la Valachie.¹⁷

Hence, decadence and the unfavourable comparison with (Western) Europe, an obsessing theme in modern Romanian culture,¹⁸ were imputed, among other factors, to the ill-famed Phanariots.¹⁹ From the end of the century, a more balanced and complex picture was drawn: the notion of nationalist Phanariots (i.e., “Greeks”) was exposed as anachronistic, and the modernity of their political ideas and policies inspired by European enlightenment was highlighted. It was shown that Phanariot princes did not act alone and that the indigenous elites, far from the image of patriotic champions, monopolized top offices, collaborated with the Phanariots in the fiscal exploitation of the peasantry, and even opposed their “philanthropic” measures.²⁰ Moreover, the Phanariots’ role “in

¹⁷ Mihail Kogălniceanu, “Histoire de la Valachie, de la Moldavie et des Valaques Transdanubiens” in Mihail Kogălniceanu, *Opere* Tome I, ed. Andrei Oțetea (Bucharest: Editura Fundațiilor Regale, 1946), 429.

¹⁸ Sorin Antohi, *Civitas imaginalis. Istorie și utopie în cultura română* [Civitas imaginalis. History and Utopia in the Romanian Culture] 2nd ed. (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 280–300 analyses the origins, forms and functions of the “Romanian stigma” as a cultural trait of societies confronted abruptly with the tide of modernization, not without similarities with other cultures.

¹⁹ See also Nicolae Bălcescu, *Românii supt Mihai-Voevod Viteazul* [Romanians under the Rule of Mihai-Voevod Viteazul], first published in 1878, ed. Andrei Rusu (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1973), 15, 18 and Nicolae Bălcescu, “Românii și Fanarioții” [The Romanians and the Phanariots], *Magazin Istoric pentru Dacia*, I (1845): 115–121; A.D. Xenopol, *Istoria Românilor din Dacia Traiană* [The History of Romanians from Trajan’s Dacia], 3rd Editura (Bucharest: Editura “Cartea Românească,” 1930), vol. IX, 5–6, 87; Pompiliu Eliade, *Influența franceză și spiritual public în România* [The French Influence and the Public Mind in Romania], original French edition in 1898, trans. Aurelia Dumitrașcu (Bucharest: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006).

²⁰ Already A.D. Xenopol, *Istoria Românilor din Dacia Traiană* [The History of Romanians from Trajan’s Dacia], vol. 11 (Iași: Editura Librăriei Școalelor Frații Șaraga, 1896) and A.D. Xenopol, *Războaiele dintre Ruși și Turci și înriurirea lor asupra Țărilor Române*

preserving both the existence and relative autonomy of the Principalities” through skilful diplomatic manoeuvring was highlighted.²¹

During the twentieth century, the two perceptions coexisted, sometimes in the same work, but there was a trend towards a dispassionate discussion of the Phanariots. Tirades against corruption and fiscal exploitation²² coexisted with more neutral studies of social, administrative and cultural history.²³ The negative image of the Phanariots in Romanian culture was deconstructed,²⁴ and the myth of economic regress

[The Wars Between Russians and Turks and Their Consequences for the Romanian Principalities], ed. Elisabeta Simion (Bucharest: Editura Albatros, 1997), 30–34, claimed that the Phanariot period witnessed the culmination of a decadent trend which had started before the coming of the “Greek” princes. For the revisionist interpretation see: Urechia, *Istoria Românilor*, tomes I–VII; Nicolae Iorga, “Cultura română sub fanarioți,” in *Donă conferințe* (Bucharest: Editura Librăriei Socecu & Comp., 1898), 53–108; Iorga, “Le despotisme éclairé dans les pays roumaines au XVIIIe siècle” in *Bulletin of the International Committee of Historical Sciences* IX (1939): 101–115; Nicolae Iorga, “Au fost Moldova și Țara Românească provincii supuse fanarioților?” [Were Moldova and Wallachia Provinces Subject to the Phanariots?], *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice* (1937); Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria Românilor* [History of Romanians], vol. 7 (Bucharest: S.N., 1938), 5–10.

²¹ I.C. Filitti, *Rôle diplomatique des Phanariotes de 1700 à 1821* (Paris: Librairie de la Société du Recueil general des lois et des arrêts et du Journal du Palais, 1901), 208.

²² Hurezeanu, “Regimul fanariot,” 399–412; Bogdan Bucur, *Devălmășia valabă. O istorie anarhică a spațiului românesc* [The Wallachian Melange. An Anarchic History of the Romanian Lands] (Pitești: Paralela 45, 2008).

²³ *Istoria României* [History of Romania], vol. 3, Editura Andrei Oțetea (Bucharest: Editura R.P.R., 1964) (hereafter, *Istoria României* 1964). For a review of this strand see Cornelia Papacostea-Danielopolu, “État Actuel Des Recherché Sur L’Époque Phanariote,” *Revue des études sud-est européennes*, XXIV/3 (1986): 227–234. *Symposium. L’Époque phanariote*. A plea for a dispassionate discussion of the Phanariots was made by Mihail Berza, “Conclusions” in *Symposium. L’Époque phanariote*, 469.

²⁴ Traian Ionescu-Nișcov, “L’Époque Phanariote dans L’Historiographie Roumaine et Étrangère” in *Symposium. L’Époque phanariote*, 145–157; Ștefan Lemny, “La critique du régime Phanariote: clichés mentaux et perspectives historiographiques” in *Culture and Society. Structures, Interferences, Analogies in the Modern Romanian History*, ed. Al. Zub (Iași: Editura Academiei R.S.R., 1985), 17–30. Bogdan Murgescu, *Istorie Românească-Istoria Universală* [Romanian History-World History] (Bucharest: Universitas, 1999), 185–186. Similar views at *Idem*, “Fanarioți și ‘pământeni’”. Religie și etnicitate în definirea identităților în Țările Române și în Imperiul Otoman” [Phanariots and Indigenes. Religion and Identity in the Definition of the Identities in the Romanian Principalities and the Ottoman Empire] in *Țările Române între Imperiul otoman și Europa creștină* [The Romanian Principalities between the Ottoman Empire and Christian Europe] (Iași: Polirom, 2012), 57–59.

and the unbearable fiscal burden on Wallachian subjects was debunked.²⁵ Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu studied the ruling class between 1750 and 1860, concluding that, despite several modernizing changes—salary, clear definition of the boyar status—it retained its hold on administrative offices and an aristocratic culture hostile to any notion of meritocracy.²⁶

The complexity and nuances introduced in the discussion of the Phanariot period as a whole are missing in the evaluation of the state during the same period. The historiography of the eighteenth-century Wallachian state is limited to a thoroughly negative judgement thereof, without an inquiry into how this state functioned and how its interaction with the subjects changed. Scattered remarks regarding the nature and function of the state can be found in the syntheses of Romanian history and several other studies. Herein, the state is viewed exclusively in institutional terms, with each institution having a set of responsibilities attributed, performing mainly extractive functions and attending to sectional interests. The authors of these works depict the state as an essentially despotic system of power whose operations were largely abusive.²⁷

²⁵ Bogdan Murgescu, *România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice (1500–2010)* [Romania and Europe. The Accumulation of Economic Discrepancies (1500–2010)] (Iași: Polirom, 2010), 50–54 and “Lumea românească în economia europeană până la 1859” in *Țările Române între Imperiul otoman și Europa creștină* [The Romanian Principalities between the Ottoman Empire and Christian Europe] (Iași: Polirom, 2012), 279–284 showed that the period actually witnessed extensive economic development and a stabilization, or even reduction, of the fiscal burden as a result of demographic growth.

²⁶ Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, *Evgheniți, ciocoi, mojiți. Despre obrazele primei modernități românești* [Aristocrats, Upstarts, Boors. On the Characters of Early Romanian Modernity] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2013), 27–105.

²⁷ A.D. Xenopol, *Istoria românilor*, vol. 10, 141, concluded that “the state was considered then as an enormous company of exploitation; the people like a flock of sheep from which it collected the products without any effort than to let them graze”. Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria Românilor* [History of Romanians], vol. 3, Original work published 1942–1946 (Bucharest: Editura Bic All, 2007), 338 emphasized the exploitative function of the state. *Istoria României* (1964), 692 writes that “by its administrative, judicial and fiscal functions, the Phanariot state was the instrument destined to repress the opposition of the peasantry, to satiate the Turks, to enrich the prince and to subsidize the boyars”. Vlad Georgescu, *Istoria Românilor. De la origini până în zilele noastre* [History of Romanians. From the Origins to Present Day], 1st edition 1984 (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992), 89–91. *Istoria României* [History of Romania], eds. Mihai Bărbulescu et al. (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998), 300 (hereafter *Istoria României* 1998). *Istoria Românilor* [History of Romanians], vol. 6, eds. Paul Cernovodeanu and Nicolae Edroiu (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2002), 223 (hereafter *Istoria Românilor* 2002).

The present study argues that, far from the all-powerful and ruthless exploiter, the Wallachian state was visibly in the making during the eighteenth century, making its first steps towards direct control of the territory and direct contact with the subjects.

More useful for the purpose of this book, institutional history traces the transformations of state institutions during the eighteenth century: the emergence of new administrative and judicial institutions, territorial reorganization, the printing of legal texts and advancements in record-keeping. The downside of these studies is that they rarely convey a sense of historical transformation in the nature and functions of the state. It is unclear by which historical process new institutions emerged or printed legal texts became more important.²⁸ Alternatively, the Phanariot reforms²⁹ figure prominently in any account of the period. Designed to improve the situation of the peasants—to be able to pay taxes—and reduce the malfunctions of the administrative and judicial apparatus, the various reforms are considered by many historians to have failed because of the boyars' hostility and Ottoman domination, which prevented continuity of administration.³⁰ Marxist historiography presented the reforms concomitantly as “an attempt to modernize the state and to curtail the officials' abuses”³¹ and as “privileges for the consolidation of the boyar

²⁸ Giurescu, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. 3, 344, 375; *Istoria Românilor* (2002), 302–309. Valentin Al. Georgescu și Petre Strihan, *Judecata domnească în Țara Românească și Moldova (1611–1831)*, *Partea I. Organizarea judecătorească, vol. II (1740–1831)* [The Princely Justice in Wallachia and Moldavia (1611–1831). Part I. The Judicial Organization, vol. II (1740–1831)] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1982), 65–89 (hereafter, Georgescu și Strihan, *Judecata domnească* I/II).

²⁹ By reforms, historians refer to a set of measures—fiscal, agrarian, administrative and judicial—meant to sustain or increase fiscal extraction without undermining the taxable basis. In this sense, it was an effort to rationalize taxation, social structure and the state apparatus so that the fiscal burden of the peasantry and the administrative workload of the official were more equally distributed.

³⁰ Xenopol, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. 9, 79–88, 112, 171–173. Georgescu, *Istoria românilor*, 97. *Istoria României* (1998), 301. Keith Hitchins, *The Romanians, 1774–1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 18–19 adopts a more balanced position suggesting that the reforms set in motion modernizing trends, although with somewhat ambiguous effects on the state; for him, modernization implied separation of powers and local political participation, none of these being achieved during the eighteenth century.

³¹ *Istoria României* (1964), 438. The charge of mechanical application of Marxist theory in the latter work (simple inversion of the order of chapters, with economy coming first and culture last) and the persistence of old, “bourgeois” themes and interpretations, see Florin Constantiniu, *De la Răutu și Roller la Mușat și Ardeleanu [From Răutu*

class”.³² However, in neither case is there a discernible preoccupation with the long-term impact of reforms upon the state.

The underlying theme in all these approaches is the low quality of governance. As I already indicated, many historians considered the Wallachian state during the eighteenth century a mere instrument of exploitation. Exploitation, inefficiency and corruption are seen not only as inherent traits of this state but also as the principal cause of the failure of the reforms. Damian Hurezeanu argued that “any economic, fiscal or juridical reform is almost ridiculous as long as the system of administration and taxation functioned in a state of abnormality” and that “there was only arbitrariness and corruption as a norm of behaviour”.³³ Embracing a more nuanced perspective, Bogdan Murgescu holds that “the precariousness of the functioning of the state and the minimal degree in which this was implied in the stimulation of the economic activities” characterized the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries in the principalities.³⁴ The economic performance of the Phanariot rule and the corruption and inefficiency of the state apparatus are undoubtedly topics that deserve attention.³⁵ I suggest, however, that, for a fuller understanding of the Wallachian state in the eighteenth century, it is necessary to bypass these

and Roller to Muşat and Ardeleanu] (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2007), 235–267 seems farfetched. The part covering the 18th and early nineteenth centuries was written by Andrei Oşetea, a historian who employed Marxist theory before it was mandatory in the Romanian academia (that is, before the Second World War) and places the transformations it charts in the context of the second serfdom and the transition from feudalism to capitalism.

³² *Istoria României* (1964), 436.

³³ Hurezeanu, “Regimul fanariot,” 407.

³⁴ Murgescu, *România și Europa*, 62–63. Bogdan Murgescu debunked two myths related to Ottoman domination, particularly the eighteenth-century history of the principalities: the economic debacle and the unbearable fiscal burden upon the Wallachian subjects. The period actually witnessed extensive economic development and a stabilization, or even reduction, of the fiscal burden as a result of demographic growth.

³⁵ It must be stressed, nevertheless, that the Phanariot reforms were measures of reconstruction of countries devastated by repeated wars and severely depopulated. Moreover, the lack of sovereignty led to Wallachia’s (and Moldavia’s) inability to defend their economic and commercial interests. The asymmetric trade deals concluded by the Ottoman Empire, on the one hand, and the Habsburg and Tzarist empires, on the other, during the eighteenth century had a negative impact on the economy of Wallachia as well. Thus, any comparison with territories experiencing fast economic development in the eighteenth century—and such comparisons are always explicit or implicit in the evaluation of the “Phanariot century”—is misleading.

limits and see the reforms as modernizing experiments that impacted how state power was exercised and perceived. The failure of the concrete aims of various policies adopted by the Phanariot princes should not obscure the real and significant changes in the way the state functions.³⁶ In truth, openings and suggestions were made in this sense, and they deserve more attention.

In his rebuttal of clichés associated with the Phanariots, Nicolae Iorga mentions the storing of information in writing, the introduction of county *ispravnici* and paid judges, the attempt to fix the fiscal address of the peasants and their obligations towards landlords and the growing number of regulations.³⁷ He emphasizes especially the advances made in recordkeeping, which indicate that “a precise and complicated bureaucracy” replaces the old one based on “a few ledgers of the simplest accounting”.³⁸ This overhauled bureaucracy contributed to knowledge production, a central dimension of state formation anywhere and anytime. Unfortunately, Iorga’s remarks on the topic of state are cursory, and he did not try to articulate them in a reflection on the nature of the state during the Phanariot period. He stops at the simple evocation of reforms without looking at their long-term effects.

The agrarian reform of Constantin Mavrocordat received some important insights worth pursuing. P.P. Panaitescu³⁹ and Ioana Constantinescu⁴⁰ noted that the agrarian reform meant the intervention of the principedom in the relations between landlords and tenants and—at odds with the failed reform thesis—that such a reform was never abandoned. Șerban Papacostea considered that the intervention of the principedom in the relations between landlords and tenants aimed at the “consolidation of the princely power and the suppression of privileges and particularisms”.

³⁶ For a similar argument, see Călin Cotoi, *Inventing the Social in Romania, 1848–1914. Networks and Laboratories of Knowledge* (Leiden: Brill, Ferdinand Schöningh, 2020): “By the ‘failure’ of modernization projects, I mean only the failure of the more or less explicit objectives, not the lack of induced social changes”, 3–4, footnote 7.

³⁷ Iorga, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. 8, 129–133.

³⁸ Iorga, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. 8, 136. Although these appreciations refer to Moldova, they are also valid for Wallachia, as the reforms in the same country were introduced by the same prince, Constantin Mavrocordat. Even if, factually, there might have been some differences, the sense is similar.

³⁹ *Istoria României* (1964), 445.

⁴⁰ *Istoria Românilor* (2002), 159–160, 165.

Far from the image of failed reforms, the Phanariot princes “exercised permanent control of the agrarian relations” until the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁴¹ Florin Constantiniu went as far as to say that “the abolition of serfdom has removed any obstacle from the way of effective and direct exercise of the princely authority”. While this is an overstatement, Florin Constantiniu brilliantly captured one consequence of the reform when he noted that the prince could appear “in principle, as a sovereign to other classes and social categories”.⁴² Șerban Papacostea’s studies on agrarian relations covered only the first half of the eighteenth century. Florin Constantiniu concentrated on agrarian relations (the only study that studies one of the Phanariot reforms from a long-term perspective). Therefore, none of these studies have investigated the changes in the Wallachian state after 1740.

In short, this book refutes the idea of an all-powerful despotic state postulated by the historiography of the Phanariot period and shifts the emphasis from the undeniably exploitative nature of the state to the study of the changing relationship with its subjects. Instead of institutions and their responsibilities, my approach emphasizes the technical means these institutions used to reach the subjects.

STATE FORMATION IN EARLY-MODERN EUROPE

The transformations in the form, function and capacity of early-modern states go under the related terms of state formation, state-building or state-making. The literature on this process constitutes an enormous body of research, of which I will refer to a few representative works. They can be divided into studies of historical sociology and historical studies of individual cases that apply, revise or reject sociological models. The historical sociology of early-modern state formation focuses on comparatively large and successful states and combines various variables to explain the outcomes of the state formation processes. The studies belonging to the

⁴¹ Papacostea, “La grande charte”.

⁴² Constantiniu, *Relațiile agrare*, 124. The interpretation of the reforms as the penetration of the “mur épais entre le prince et le serfs” is exposed by both authors in a common article, Constantiniu et Papacostea, “Le réformes des premiers phanariotes”. Again, the abolition of serfdom is seen as a tactical move by the principedom, which consolidated his power at the expense of the boyars in Constantiniu, “Constantin Mavrocordato et l’abolition du servage”. For similar views, see also Constantiniu “Epoca fanariotă”.

so-called fiscal–military theory draw on the “military revolution” concept to argue for the impetus given by war to state-making via taxation. In the oft-repeated dictum of Charles Tilly, “war made the state, and the state made the war”.⁴³ Writing in the Marxist tradition, Perry Anderson sees the early-modern or absolutist state as “a redeployed and recharged apparatus of feudal domination”.⁴⁴ However, he also argues that East European absolutism (Russia) originated in the military pressure of the more advanced Western absolutist states, “which obliged the Eastern nobility to adopt an equivalently centralized state machine to survive”.⁴⁵ For Immanuel Wallerstein, the state was a function of the position in the

⁴³ Tilly, “Reflections on the History of European State-Making,” in Charles Tilly ed., *The Formation of National States*, 42. Fiscal bellicists combine variables (availability of capital, structure of representative assemblies, timing of geopolitical competition, etc.) to account for the differences in the forms and power of early modern states. See Charles Tilly ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975); Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990–1992* (Cambridge MA & Oxford UK: Blackwell, 1992); Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime”. *Bringing the State Back In*, eds. Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, 169–191. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Brian M. Downing, *The Military Revolution and Political Change: Origins of Democracy and Autocracy in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Thomas Ertman, *Birth of Leviathan. Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. A historical study in this paradigm, linking war to the growing fiscal apparatus of England Brewer, *The Sinews of Power* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989). Other studies stress the confessionally driven discipline or the patriarchal organization of power to explain the rise to power of early-modern states: Philip Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution. Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), Julia Adams, *The Familial State. Ruling Families and Merchant Capitalism in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974), 18–20. The idea that the absolutist state, “the new political carapace of a threatened nobility,” also repressed nobility looks quite problematic to some historians. Especially they accuse Anderson of not explaining satisfactorily why the nobles sometimes rebelled against the state, which was presumably furthering their interests, and why the rulers acted at times against nobles, Karin J. MacHardy, *War, Religion and Court Patronage in Habsburg Austria. The Social and Cultural Dimensions of Political Interaction, 1521–1622* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 8–9. Similarly, James B. Collins, *The State in Early Modern France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–2 tacitly criticizes Anderson when saying that “if we want to make the ‘bourgeoisie’ (however defined) the ally of the monarchy against the nobility or if we want to claim that the absolutist monarchy represented the final stage of a feudal monarchy, we will have to bend reality”.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 195–198.

world system. The central position in the world system guaranteed the existence of a centralized state machinery and a national culture whose role was to justify and protect the disparities within the world system. On the contrary, “one characteristic of a peripheral area is that the indigenous state is weak, ranging from nonexistence (that is, a colonial situation) to one with a low degree of autonomy (that is, a neocolonial situation)”.⁴⁶

The accounts of early-modern state formation I outlined above conceptualize the state in materialist terms as political organization, territory and monopolization of means of coercion. Moreover, most of them emphasize war as a primary vector of state formation. As such, they cannot account for the process of state formation in a small, tributary principality such as Wallachia, which lacked an army and did not participate in wars on its own.⁴⁷ The focus on sovereignty, extraction and warfare would obscure processes of administrative extension. As Mara Loveman argued, it is important, especially in cases outside the Western European “core”, to pay attention to “the dynamics of early administrative extension - dynamics that enabled the accumulation of symbolic power and helped make sustained extraction and coercion possible”.⁴⁸

Historical studies, which usually focus on one state, propose new angles of analysis of early-modern states and cast fresh light on their inner working. The revisionist trend in Ottoman studies in the last three decades also encouraged a reconsideration of the early-modern Wallachian state. At odds with the long-held views of Ottoman decline or stagnation, recent studies have emphasized the transformation of governance in the empire responsible for the resilience of the Ottoman state in a period of European ascendancy. Rifa’at ‘Ali Abou-El-Haj refuted the thesis of Ottoman immobilism in the “middle centuries” (16th–18th) and made “the case for a transformative process prior to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries”.⁴⁹ Bazi Tezcan wrote about the second Ottoman Empire (which succeeded the classical empire during the sixteenth century), one

⁴⁶ Ibid. vol. I, 349.

⁴⁷ Unless we consider the Ottoman fiscal pressure as extraction to finance its wars with the neighbouring powers Austria and Russia. However, even in this case, state-building was not an expression of an empire-wide effort but was conducted autonomously.

⁴⁸ Mara Loveman, “The Modern State and the Primitive Accumulation of Symbolic Power,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 110/6 (May 2005):1652, footnote 3 and 1654.

⁴⁹ Rifa’at ‘Ali Abou-El-Haj, *Formation of the Modern State. The Ottoman Empire Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 82. The