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**LITTERARY LEAKINGS INTO WAVRIN'S DANUBE:
THREE STRONGHOLDS AND A BROKEN BOMBARD**

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In the second half of the XVth century, Jean de Wavrin (c. 1400-1471), a noble knight from Artois and a witness of the Agincourt battle, wrote a *Recueil des Croniques et Anchiennes Istories de la Grant Bretagne, a present nomm  Engleterre*¹. His interest focused mainly on the English, Burgundian, and French affairs during and immediately after the Hundred Years' War², but among his stories there is one about an exotic Danube campaign of his own nephew, a Burgundian knight named Waleran, also de Wavrin (c. 1418-1480).

Jean de Wavrin, the uncle, was not a famous chronicler. In fact, his prose did not match the contemporary qualities and the 15th century stylistics. Moreover, out of Jean Froissart's epigones, he is the least famous of all. Even Enguerrand of Monstrelet, Georges Chastellain or Olivier de la Marche surpass him in fame, literary abilities, and in popularity. Jean de Wavrin was a famous Burgundian ambassador in Rome (1463), a refined book collector, and a generous art sponsor³.

His literary career was private and somehow uninteresting. He wrote, as a free lancer, but he lacked the painstaking efforts and the propagandistic motivation of his contemporaries. He was a noble knight, well educated and wealthy, and wrote in order to enjoy the fruits of literature. He did not write for money, he was never appointed court chronicler, and all his work is a historiographer's otium. Due to the fact that he was closely linked to Philip the Good's court (1396-1467, duke 1419-1467), his point of view is an echo of the Burgundian propaganda, but the Danube crusading fragment, the one our article deals with, breaks the entire narrative's discourse and proves to be more likely an outremer family episode.

¹ His work is in fact a collection of sources for the English history from the earliest times until 1471, mainly inspired from Froissart's writings and other authors. The period 1444-1471 is somehow original and trustworthy, even though certain aspects of the English affairs are to be carefully read. There are three editions of the text. The first one covers the events since the mythical beginning of the island up to 688, and again from 1399 to 1471 (John de Wavrin, lord of Forestel, *A Collection of Chronicles and Ancient Histories of Great Britain, Now Called England* (edited by W., E.L.C.P. Hardy), I-V, London, 1864-1891, who also provided an English translation). The second covers the events from 1325 to 1471 (Jean de Wavrin, seigneur du Forestel, *Anchiennes croniques d'Engleterre* (edited by  milie Dupont), I-III, Paris, 1858-1863). A third edition was provided by Nicolae Iorga, and it is in fact a reproduction of Waleran de Wavrin's Danube crusading expedition (Jean de Wavrin, *La campagne des crois s sur le Danube (1445). Extrait des Anciennes Chroniques d'Angleterre*, Paris, 1927; henceforth Iorga 1927). The so called edition also contained a few notes, not at all the necessary editorial notes, but historical ones. Iorga also presented and analysed the chronicle in *Cronica lui Wavrin  i rom nii* [The Chronicle of Wavrin and the Romanians], in *BCIR*, VI, 1927. The only Romanian translation available of this text is that of Maria Holban (Jehan de Wavrin, *Expedi ia de pe Dun re* [The Danube Expedition] in *Căl tori str ini despre  rile Rom ne* [Foreign Travellers on the Romanian Countries] (edited by Maria Holban), Bucharest, 1968; henceforth Holban 1968), which contains precious notes and commentaires, but neglects from time to time the lexical differences between contemporary French and 15th century Middle French.

² James Henry Ramsay, *Lancaster and York: A Century of English History (A.D. 1399-1485)*, Oxford, 1892, p. XVI; George Saintsbury, *A Short History of French Literature (from the Earliest Texts to the Close of the Nineteenth Century)*, Oxford, 1917, p. 111.

³ Michel Zink, *Litt rature fran aise du Moyen Age*, Paris, 1992, pp. 303-307.

This article's main interest does not reside in a complete reevaluation of Jean de Wavrin's 1445 Danube account. Such an approach would have been sterile and entirely unsuccessful. Our interest lies mainly in the authorship, the subjectivity, the second-hand witness factor (i.e. the relation between Jean and Waleran, his nephew and the protagonist of the Danube account), and the masked literary artifices. Still, a complete identification of these patterns in the Burgundian chronicler's narrative cannot be carried out successfully in a single presentation.

We preferred to interpret certain passages, mainly the sieges and descriptions of fortresses, extremely valuable to both the Romanian historiography and castellology, since they have been regarded as true and precise. Thus, the debate deals with the Danube strongholds of *Chastel Turquant* (Tutrakan), *Jeorgie* (Giurgiu), and *une tour* (Turnu). It also tries to identify literary or subjective patterns in another episode, that of the bombard broken by Vlad II the Devil, the Wallachian voivod (c. 1390-1447, voivod 1436-1442, 1443-1447). Due to the fact that the general approach is philological, in spite of the historical information used, the results should refresh and renew the debate concerning the late XVth century Middle French narrative.

Jean de Wavrin's nephew, Waleran, had led a fleet of Burgundian and Papal ships on a Black Sea and Danube expedition. The Burgundians had previously hired four galleys at Venice, and these ships were placed under the command of Waleran of Wavrin. They sailed in July 1444, and after failing to stop sultan Murad's army on crossing the Bosphorus, they wintered in Constantinople. It was there that they met with another Burgundian force led by Geoffroi de Thoisy.

In the spring of 1445, Thoisy engaged in piracy and in a bookish "search" of the Golden Fleece, while Waleran de Wavrin went on an expedition in search of the disappeared Hungarian-Polish king, Wladyslaw I (III) Jagiello (1434-1444, 1440-1444)⁴, following the conquest of a couple of Danube strongholds. His first target proved to be a simple pretext and the expedition, badly planned and weakly provided, did not reach the expectations. The only identifiable success was the seizure of the fortress of Giurgiu, soon to be lost again to Turkish dominion.

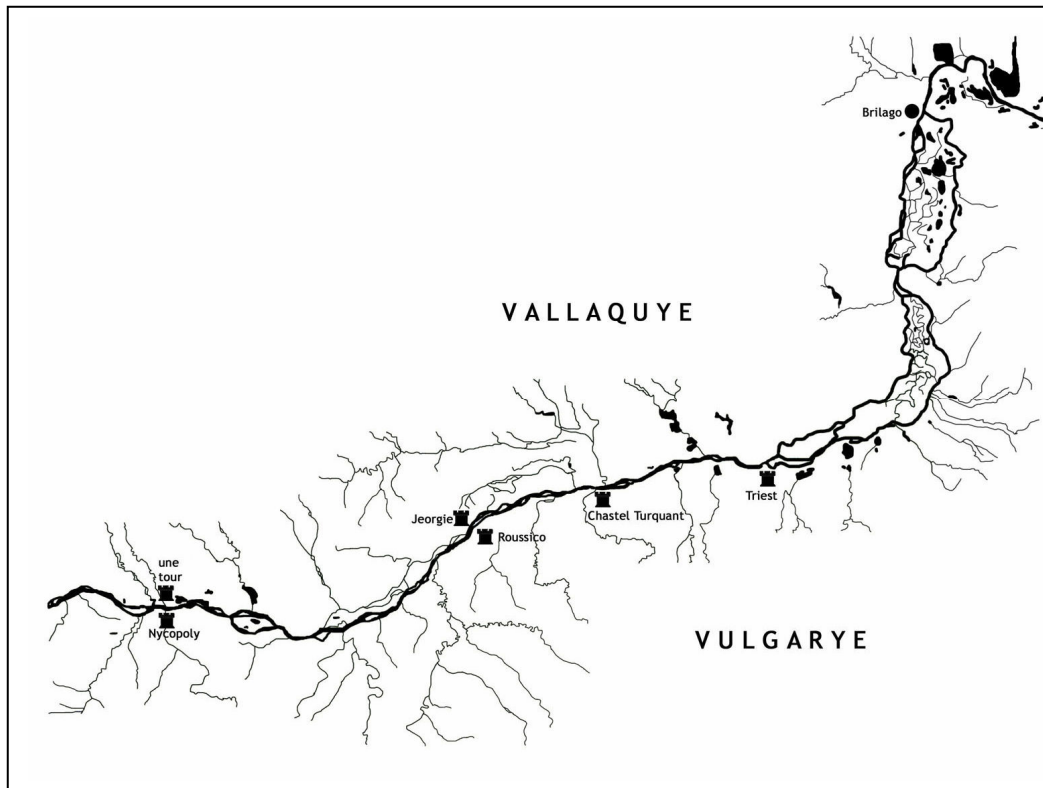
The arrival of Waleran on the Danube was as strange as his nephew's chronicle intermezzo. He was at the Dardanelles, managing four galleys lent to the duke of Burgundy by the Republic of Venice, where he was reached by the rest of the fleet. He spent the winter in Constantinople, plundered the Danube riverbanks and finally met Hunyadi at Nicopolis only in September 1445⁵.

We do not have a lot of information concerning the career of Waleran de Wavrin, the prime character of his uncle Jean's relation of the crusading expedition on the Danube. He was the lord of Wavrin, of Lillers and of Malannoy, he was married to Liévine, daughter of Jean, seignior of Roubaix and of Herzele (1369-1449). His father-in-law was a first promotion knight of the Toison d'Or (Bruges, January 10th 1430), but Waleran was not a Golden Fleece knight himself⁶. Thus, one may wonder what was the precise mission of the Burgundian fleet on the Danube, what connections did it have with duke Philip the Good's own crusading plans, and what is the exact role played by Waleran. Apart from that, one may also wonder about the sincerity of the chronicler and about his family ties with Waleran.

⁴ Norman Housley, *The Later Crusades 1274-1580: From Lyons to Alcazar*, Oxford, 1992, p. 93.

⁵ Pierre Bonenfant, *Philippe le Bon: Sa politique, son action*, Bruxelles, 1996, p. 70.

⁶ Monique Somme, *Jean de Roubaix*, in *Les chevaliers de l'Ordre de la Toison d'or au XV^e siècle* (edited by Raphaël de Smedt) Frankfurt am Main, 2000, p. 6.



1. Important locations mentioned in Jean de Wavrin's 1445 Danube crusade account
Brilago (Brăila), *Triest* (Durostol), *Chastel Turquant* (Tutrakan), *Jeorgie* (Giurgiu),
Roussico (Ruse), *Nycopoly* (Nicopolis), *une tour* (Turnu)

Burgundy's "Danube presence"

First of all, we must question ourselves on a rhetorical basis: was there a Burgundian interest for Wallachian lands? Did Philip the Good, duke of Burgundy, have in mind a Danube campaign? Did he make any plans concerning this new crusading area? Or was he simply planning to prove his Christian worthiness in no matter what crusading campaign?

This Burgundian interest for the Wallachian lands did not rely on a historical basis, because Burgundian territorial ambitions have been for a long time directed towards the German Empire⁷, and almost every further development of the Burgundian state in the time of John the Fearless (1371-1419, duke 1404-1419) impinged on imperial territories and infringed imperial rights. Nevertheless, the fact that the very same John the Fearless had led a crusade on his father's behalf in 1396 against the Ottoman Turks, being captured and remaining for some time a prisoner of war of the sultan Bayazid (c. 1354-1402, sultan 1389-1402), this fact could have reminded the 1445 Burgundian descendents of the 1396 nobles about the Wallachian lands on the Danube. However, no special notice is

⁷ Richard Vaughan, *John the Fearless: The Growth of Burgundian Power*, Woodbridge, 1966 (reprint 2002), pp. 251-254; John the Fearless was constantly concerned with the rulers of the Empire: Wenzel, Rupert and Sigismund, but the reaction of imperial rulers to the Burgundian expansion has always been more often diplomatic than political.

made concerning the father of Vlad the Devil, when the chronicler mentions the siege of Giurgiu (Jeorgie) and the builder of that fortress⁸.

Philip the Good of Burgundy was born in the very year of the Nicopolis crusade, and was brought up in the best crusading tradition, for, when only five years old, he used to play in the Hesdin park dressed as a Turk. His interest in the Ottoman territories led him to a certain foreign policy. In 1421 he sent (on his behalf and on that of Henry the Vth of England) Guillebert of Lannoy, who travelled two years through Prussia, Russia, Crimea, Constantinople, Rhodes, Jerusalem, Cairo, Crete, and Venice. In 1425, he sent his bastard brother, Guyot, together with the lord of Roubaix and four other pilgrims to the Holy Sepulchre. On May the 8th 1432, another group of Burgundian nobles set out from Venice to Jerusalem; in 1437 he paid for a stained-glass window with his coat of arms to be installed in the church of Our Lady at Mount Sion, near Jerusalem. In 1435 and in 1440 he was visited by ambassadors from Egypt.

In 1436 he was already planning to attack the Turks, and in 1438 the formation of the Burgundian fleet had already begun. Once the Burgundian fleet appeared in the Mediterranean, generally speaking its activity was due to the duke's crusading aspirations. In particular it was a response to the appeal of the Hospitallers of Rhodes for help against the Egyptians. Philip the Good appointed Geoffroi de Thoisy captain of the ducal army going to Rhodes on March the 25th 1441, and on May the 8th the duke went there himself⁹.

The duke of Burgundy's plans were not conducted towards the Balkans. All his foreign and Mediterranean policy shows an excessive interest in the affairs of the Holy Land, and consequently in the affairs of the Ottoman state. The arrival of Waleran de Wavrin on the Danube was but a shadow of a great plan the duke was conceiving, and such a plan had nothing to do with the Danube, Hungary, or with the Wallachian lands.

One should also bear in mind that in the aftermath of the battle of Varna, following the great loss of Cesarini, Poggio shifted his rhetorical discourse upon Hunyadi. In one of his letters, he revives the crusading spirit and compares Islamism and Satanism, speaks of *liberandam Europam ab oppresionem barbarorum*, and plays with the Holy War rhetoric¹⁰. Following the fall of Constantinople, the 1453 crusade rhetoric portrayed the Turks as barbarians¹¹. It is the same rhetoric that attracted the Burgundian forces to the Danube area. Philip the Good's men fought for the progressive liberation of the Holy Land, not for the Danube frontiers.

It seems that apparently there has been no connection between the Burgundian participation in the Nicopolis crusade and the 1445 Danube expedition of Waleran de Wavrin. There is however a fragment, during the *grosse tour ronde* narrative of the 1445 Nicopolis events, where John the Fearless and Sigismund of Hungary (1368-1437, king of Hungary 1387-1437, Holy Roman Emperor 1410-1437) are both mentioned in close relation to the regretted Nicopolis disaster¹²:

⁸ *Et lors, comme celluy auquel ledit chastel apartenoit (car son pere l'avoit faite faire, si <le seigneur de la Vallaquie> avoit esté dedens plusieurs fois, et neantmoins ne s'estoit jamais aparcheu de la fenture), quant il la vey, fut mesmes d'opinion que ce eust voirement fait la bombarde* (Iorga 1927, p. 72).

⁹ R. Vaughan, *Philip the Good: The Apogee of Burgundy*, Woodbridge, 1970 (reprint 2004), pp. 268-270.

¹⁰ Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks*, Philadelphia, 2004, pp. 24-25.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

¹² Iorga 1927, p. 83; the Romanian translation reads: *Și în timp ce trăgeau din bombarde a venit „gubernorul” fiului <domnului> Țării Românești, în vârstă de optzeci de ani, să-l vadă pe*

Et, tandis que les bombardes gectoient, le gouverneur du filz de la Vallaquye, qui estoit bien quatre-vingz ans, vint veoir le seigneur de Wavrin, et lui dist: «Il y a maintenant L ans, ou environ, que le roy de Hongrye et le duc Jehan de Bourguoigne estoient a siege devant ceste ville de Nycopoly que veez la, et a moins de trois lieues d'ycy est le lieu ou fut la bataille. Se vous poviés lever le chief, et venir a ceste fenestre, je vous moustreroie le lieu, et comme le siege estoit». Et lors ledit seigneur de Wavrin, envollepé en une robe de nuit, se fist porter a la frenestrelle. Si luy dist le gouverneur: «Veez la ou le roy de Hongrye et les Hongres se tenoient. La estoit le connestable de France, et la se tenoit le duc Jehan», qui estoit contre une grosse tour ronde, laquele, comme il disoit, ledit duc Jehan avoit fait miner: sy estoit toute estagié pour y bouter le feu, le jour que nouvelles vindrent de la bataille. Disant, oultre, que lors estoit serviteur au seigneur de Coucy, quy tousjours voullentiers retenoit vers lui les gentilz compaignons vallaques qui scavoient les aguez du pays de Turquye. Et prisoit ledit gouverneur grandement le seigneur de Coucy; lequel, comme il lui dist, avoit, le jour devant la bataille, rué jus bien VI^m Turcqz quy estoient venus en intencion de surprendre les fourrageurs crestiens. Et, pour habregier, il conta au seigneur de Wavrin toute la maniere de la bataille, et comment il fut prisonnier auz Turcqz, vendu esclave aus Genevois, ou il avoit aprins le languaige qu'il parloit.

In this fragment, Mircea I the Old (1355-1418, voivod 1386-1394/1395, 1397-1418) remains an unknown Wallachian ruler, his Nicopolis crusade contribution is neglected or entirely unnoticed, and Wavrin's attitude proves a single interest in his chronicle: he deals with a new people, the *Vallaques*, whom the reader encounters for the first time. The previous contributions of the same *Vallaques* do not provide the writer with an interest to linger into a longer narrative. Jean de Wavrin suddenly stops and tells his readers that *pour habregier, il conta au seigneur de Wavrin toute la maniere de la bataille*. Although one may want to know if there is a hidden purpose for this abridgement, the easiest answer is always available, and it is not hidden at all.

Jean de Wavrin does not know the precise evolution of the conflict he describes. In this part of his chroniques, he is no longer the direct eyewitness, but a second-hand one. He knew only what his nephew had told him. He had no other sources at hand and he appealed to try literary artifices, by which means he wanted to fill in the gaps of the plot with his own words. Still, the narrative itself forced him to take precautions and never exaggerate. It is for this reason that Wavrin's subjectivity is unique.

*seniorul de Wavrin și i-a spus: „Sunt acum 50 de ani sau cam pe atâta de când regele Ungariei și ducele Ioan de Burgundia asediau această cetate a Nicopolei pe care o vedeți acolo și la mai puțin de trei leghe de aici este locul unde s-a dat lupta. Dacă ați putea să ridicați capul și să veniți la această ferestruică, eu v-aș arăta locul și chipul cum s-a purtat asediul”. Atunci seniorul de Wavrin, înfășurat într-un anteriu de noapte, a poruncit să fie dus la ferestruică. Și acel „gubernor” i-a spus: „Priviți, acolo <este locul> unde stăteau regele Ungariei și ungurii. Dincolo era conetabilul Franței și acolo stătea ducele Ioan”, adică lângă un turn mare rotund, pe care zicea el că pusesse ducele Ioan să-l mineze; și era totul pregătit pentru a-i da foc în ziua când au venit vești despre bătălie. Și a mai spus el că el era atunci slujitorul seniorului de Coucy care reținea întotdeauna pe lângă sine cu dragă inimă pe vitejii ostași români ce cunoșteau împrejurările din țara turcească. Și acel „gubernor” îl prețuia mult pe seniorul de Coucy care, după cum spunea, a culcat la pământ șase mii de turci care veniseră cu gândul de a lua pe nepregătite pe invadatorii creștini (Holban 1968, pp. 115-116). The translation lacks precision and the right choice of words. For example, the Middle French *gouverneur*, who refers to the tutor of the Wallachian voivod's child, a westerner's probable misinterpretation, is translated via a barbarism. In the same manner, the verb *ruer*, referring to the defeat of the Turkish troops, is badly understood and gains the value of a true massacre, while the crusaders in search of supplies are translated as invaders. The note explaining this last choice is superfluous, due to the fact that the immediate context is rather clear.*

For example, the son of Wallachia (probably the son of the Wallachian voivod) had a *gouverneur*, a title which stands probably for “tutor”. This tutor spoke Italian and had taken part in the battle of Nicopolis. Although anyone may question the exact title of the old man in Wavrin’s narrative, but such matters are irrelevant to our analysis. Jean de Wavrin did not cite this passage, he did not appeal to a previously written source, there were probably no letters. It must have been a conversation that he used, because Waleran de Wavrin is *envolpé en une robe de nuit*, the kind of a detail which is not usually mentioned in a chronicle, and there is also an obsessing presence of the locative adverb *la*, which draws our attention towards the direct speech and moreover to a missing image.

When confronted with certain literary practices of the late Middle Ages, the passage reveals itself as highly literary and less historical. For example, the older chronicles devote the largest part of their text to storytelling and almost ignore the direct speeches of the involved characters. Later on, Robert de Clari or Joinville used the direct speech as much as the indirect one. Thus, the narrator gives greater importance to the actions he witnessed or he heard a witness talking about, and due to this fact the direct speech of the characters is rarely used. He does not pretend to cite exactly, and from time to time he prefers using the indirect speech in order to include the words of the characters in his own text, in as much as to control and even manipulate the idea¹³.

Still, what we find in the aforementioned fragment is neither the indirect speech, nor the direct one. The “free indirect speech” represents the narrator’s wish to clearly identify the speakers of each of the cited passages, in order to establish a certain difference between the narrator’s discourse and that of the characters¹⁴. He presents a historical fact in the form of a discourse, but he is not sure of the exact words. The direct speech in the beginning represents a small lie, while the indirect speech ending allows the readers to perceive a certain mark of subjectivity.

Other narrator marks and commentaries deployed throughout the text are usually signalled through deictic passages. The romans and the chronicles often use the expressions *le conte dit que*, *l’histoire dit que* or *le livre dit que*. The use of such deictic passages becomes more frequent after 1200, and, by the 15th century they had already invaded the literary prose¹⁵. Still, there are no signs of such deictic passages in Wavrin’s crusading Danube story, nor particularly in this last episode analysed. The only deictic words he uses are the stereotypical temporal and spatial references that structure the discourse circumstantially, leading to the material shaping of the story.

Jean de Wavrin wants his readers to believe what he says, even though he is not sure of the real events. He has certain beliefs, probably based on his nephew’s tales or on a lost account, but, being a second-hand eyewitness, the chronicler was forced to use certain literary artifices in order to mask his narrative gaps. Due to the immediate availability of such literary exercises, one may be tempted to search for a whole literary schema in the entire Danube account, but what Jean de Wavrin writes is not literature, but history, and his main interest is that of providing his readers with a real plot and with real events.

His target is not that of inventing a story, but that of writing it down. For him, the story exists. It is not literature. It is genuine. Thus, the 1445 Danube expedition is transcribed in a historiographical fashion, and no researcher could ever criticize the historical facts provided by Wavrin. No one may ever doubt that the fortress of Giurgiu was taken, or

¹³ Sophie Marnette, *Narrateur et points de vue dans la littérature française médiévale: Une approche linguistique*, Bern, 1998, p. 121.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 121.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

that Vlad the Devil had broken a Burgundian bombard. One may question only the details, and Wavrin's chronicle has been used by Romanian castellologists to fill in the gaps concerning the architectural features in a couple of Danube strongholds.

Three Strongholds ...

In medieval literary sieges, the plot is developed around a fixed schema: Christians are usually the defendants, while the Saracens / Turks are the attackers. Due to these fixed roles, the medieval siege follows a certain pattern. For example, in *Romans de la armada del Soldà contra Rodes*, a poem by Francesco Ferrer, contemporary to Wavrin's account (more precisely, the afore mentioned poem refers to events prior to the Danube campaign), one may find details of siege craft, but the author seems more interested in dealing with the Faith and Courage of the knights of St. John and of their leader than with their proficiency as soldiers. He describes battles which are more likely hand-to-hand combats beneath the towers and walls, and the chief weapon of the defenders is faith¹⁶. This rhetorical artifice resorts to antique models, probably perpetuated via the *Romans de l'Antiquité* (the Troy, Thebes, and Eneas cycles).

A siege is depicted as a struggle between believers and a pagan army. Emphasis is placed upon the defenders as a whole, and upon piety, which is born from their tribulation. The author gives the struggle a spiritual signification by emphasizing the religious belief of the defenders and the miracle of their salvation. Thus, the siege becomes a crusading conflict between Christ's soldiers and His enemies¹⁷.

In the very same way, in *Tirant lo Blanc*, Joanot Martorell is more concerned with using the siege of Rhodes to illuminate the chivalric qualities of loyalty, courtesy and etiquette, generosity, skill in warfare, and graceful eloquence, as exemplified by the protagonist himself¹⁸. In *Capystranus*, a 15th century Middle English poem dealing with the siege of Belgrade, the author is emphasizing how the Christian defenders cannot match the weapons or numbers of their assailants, and are in immediate peril of suffering the slaughter seen at Constantinople. Technological inferiority on the part of the Christians is stressed in order to show their reliance on spiritual strength.

As for the literary part, such sieges draw the author towards older traditions of heroic poetry. He shows traditional fighting methods winning against the better-equipped Turkish forces. The siege turns into a model of older virtues proving their worth against technical advances which are not supported by Christian faith.

In common with several chroniclers, the author of *Capystranus* reduces the number of battles to one, fought after a long and continued bombardment. No interest is shown in details of strategy. Instead, the besieged army is seen relying on the strength of the spirit, going into battle behind Capistrano, who holds the banner of Christ aloft¹⁹.

Every literary siege is surmounted by a charismatic character, who proves that he possesses unknown resistance powers, and is also inspired. Such are Richard in Richard Coeur de Lion, who recovers from illness to besiege Acre successfully; Vespasian in The Siege of Jerusalem, who besieges Jerusalem after miraculously being cured of a cancer; and Turpin in The Siege of Melayne, who sustains wounds that would not fell other heroes²⁰. This pattern, prone to a certain literary deviation, was probably influenced by the late medieval crusade proposals and by their militant rhetoric.

¹⁶ Malcolm Hebron, *The Medieval Siege: Theme and Image in Middle English Romance*, Oxford, 1997, pp. 68-70.

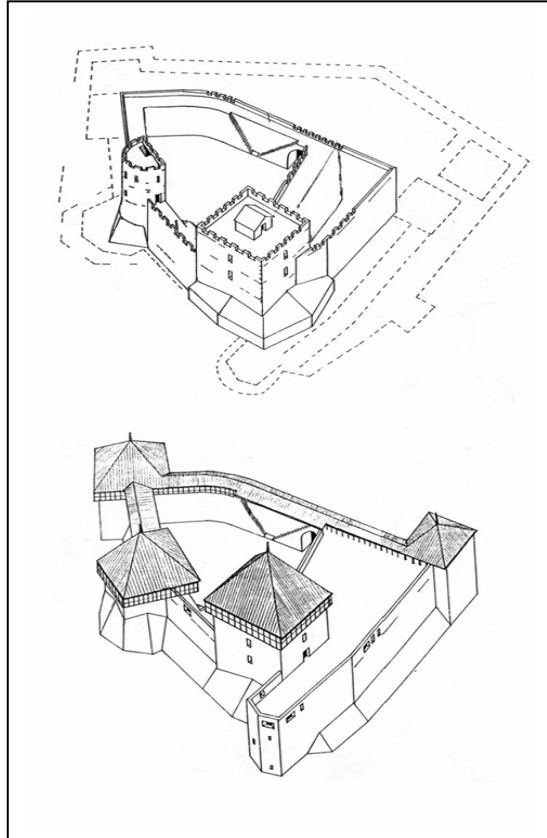
¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 70-72.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 72.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 86-87.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 88-89.

From this specific point of view, Wavrin's chronicle seems far different, for it does not sustain any militant anti-Saracen rhetoric. Still, it falls into another category, that of the crusade treatises, such as the treatise of Emmanuel Piloti (1420; *De modo, progressu, ordine ac diligenti providential habendis in passagio Christianorum pro conquesta Terrae Sanctae*) or those of Gilbert de Lannoy (also 1420) and Bertrandon de la Broquiere²¹.



2. Probable reconstruction of the Giurgiu stronghold

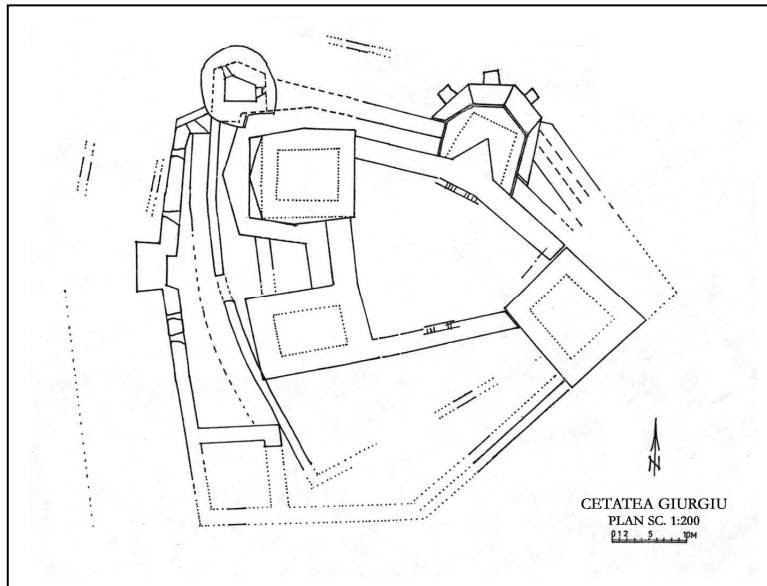
(based on the archeological data and on the 1968 Romanian translation of Wavrin's chronicle) a. In the time of Mircea the Old. b. During the 1445 siege (by architect Gh. Sion)

The main Westerner threats to the Ottoman east Mediterranean and European conquests were the better equipped ships. This Christian naval supremacy led the *Turks* to a desperate need of fortresses in the 15th century. Such fortresses were needed not only to protect the seashore, the bridges, and the riverside arsenals housing the Ottoman Danube fleet, which amounted to almost 100 vessels²², but also the Balkan roads. The Danube strongholds did not have a peripheral importance, for they guarded the Ottoman positions in Europe and the future gateways towards Central Europe,

²¹ Antony Leopold *How to Recover the Holy Land: The Crusade Proposals of the Late Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000, pp. 198-200.

²² Simon Pepper, *Ottoman Military Architecture in the Early Gunpowder Era: A Reassessment*, in *City Walls: The Urban Enceinte in Global Perspective* (edited by James D. Tracy), Cambridge, 2000, pp. 315-316.

Hungary and Transylvania. Hunyadi and Vlad probably had strong reasons to conquer them, and the Burgundian fleet commander easily complied with their plan.



3. Giurgiu stronghold layout
(by architect Gh. Sion)

According to this strategic location of the fortifications and to the contemporary geographical and literary taste for extensive descriptions of the Ottoman defensive system, one may hope to find in Wavrin's narrative some important features of the Danube fortresses, but this does not happen all the time. For example, Wavrin gives us no reference concerning the Triest (Durostol) town fortifications. Instead, he concentrates on a story involving fighting strategy, deceiving Turks, and Christian prudence²³:

Adont les Turcqz quy aparcheurent qu'on ne les assauldroit point et que aulcunement ilz estoient descouvers de leur embusche, commencerent a gecter de canons et serpentines; mais, par la grace de Dieu, nulls des gallees ne furent

²³ Iorga 1927, p. 56; the Romanian translation reads: *Și atunci turcii, dându-și seama că nu vor fi atacați, și că li se descoperise cursa pe care o pregătiseră, au început să tragă din tunuri și din „serpentine”; dar, din mila Domnului, nu a fost atinsă nici una dintre galere, care au fost silite să o ia din loc și să se ducă să arunce ancora mai departe. S-a luat hotărârea ca să se ducă toți să prânzească, și să nu se încumete să pornească asaltul dacă nu vor afla alte știri. Dar turcii dinăuntrul orașului au folosit un vicleșug; căci au dat foc la unul dintre capetele <orașului> și, strigând tare, mâneau pe femei și pe copii să fugă din oraș. Și românii spuneau că așa obișnuiesc să facă turcii pentru a-i amăgi pe creștini ca să dea asaltul împotriva orașului. Dar cu toate acestea ei s-au retras în corturile lor pentru a prânzi și cei din galere s-au dus așijderea să ia masa. Și pe când prânzeau a alergat afară din oraș un turc călare, îmbrăcat numai în roșu, cu o sulită scurtă și cu o flamură mică și a alergat de mai multe ori pe malul aceluia râu. Și curând după el au alergat trei sau patru sute, cu un stindard roșu; și au început să se plimbe pe malurile și câmpiile din jurul orașului; după aceea, a ieșit din acel oraș o flamură mare roșie cu o măciulie de aur cu șase fășii, întru totul asemănătoare cu a principelui turc Saudji; și apoi au mai ieșit multe alte steaguri. Și spuneau românii că după părerea lor ar putea fi între douăzeci și cinci sau treizeci de mii de călăreți turci, după spusa sarazinului prins (Holban 1968, p. 89-90).*

ataintes; ausqueles fut force d'eslongier et aller plus avant ancrer. Si fut conclu que chascun s'en yroit disner, et ne se adventuroit-on pas d'assaillir si on n'oiot autres nouvelles. Mais les Turcqz de dedens la ville firent une faulseté; car ilz boutterent le feu a ung des deboutz d'ycelle, et faisoient courir a grans cris les femmes et enfans hors de la ville. Nonobstant laquele chose, ilz se retrayrent en leurs tentes pour aller disner, et aussi allerent ceulz des gallees prendre leur repas. Et, entandis que ilz se dignoient, sailly de la ville un Turcq a cheval, tout rouge vestu, atout une courte lance et ung petit penon, lequel courut plusieurs fois sur le rivage de ladite riviere. Et tost apres luy, saillirent biens trois ou quatre cens, atout une baniere rouge, quy se commencerent a pourmener sur les rivages et plaines d'entour la ville. Apres, sailly de ladite ville une grande baniere vermeille, a ung pommeau d'or par dessus, atout VI lambeaux, toute pareille a celle du seigneur turcq Saoussy; puis issirent plusieurs autres enseignes. Sy disoient les Vallaques, a leur exstimation, qu'ilz povoient voirement bien estre de XXV a XXX^m chevaulz turcqz, selon le dit du Sarrasin prisonnier.

Even though his interests lie in describing the fights, the political plots, the strategic plans and the few protagonists emerging from the army's mass, Jean de Wavrin provides us with a couple of descriptions of the Giurgiu and Tutrakan fortresses, and with a few disparate features of the Turnu fortification. Romanian historians, art historians, and archaeologists have taken a great interest in these descriptions, for they are the only ones available in order to reconstruct the exact appearance of the long debated and hardly tried Romanian Danube strongholds.

On the right bank of the Danube laid the fortress of Tutrakan, nowadays in Bulgaria, briefly occupied by Mircea I at the end of the 14th century, and an important Ottoman stronghold in the time of Waleran de Wavrin. His fleet, doubled by Wallachian forces, attacked this stronghold and moved on towards Giurgiu, of which the Burgundian chronicler tells us that²⁴:

Apres ce que le cardinal, le seigneur de Wavrin et les Vallaques se furent partis de Chastel Turquant, le second jour ilz arriverent en l'isle de Jeorgie, ou il souloit avoir ung tres puissant et fort chastel quarré, de quatre grans pans de murz, et au coing de chascun pan y avoit une tres grosse tour toute quarree, dont la moindre estoit plus grande et plus forte que celle du Chasteau Turquant, et samblablement garitee et bacicollee de bois. Et si avoit, envers la riviere, deux petits pans de murs, qui partoient du chastel en venant jusques a ladite riviere; et, auz boutz d'iceulz, y avoit aussi deux tours pareillement bacicollees comme les autres.

Gariter is mentioned in the sense of *garnir de guérites*, while a *guarite* (Mod. Fr. *guérite*) is a *petite loge, tourelle destinée à protéger et abriter celui qui est de guet sur une zone de défense*²⁵. The Romanian translation, which juggles on the etymology,

²⁴ Iorga 1927, p. 70; the Romanian translation reads: *După ce cardinalul, seniorul de Wavrin și românii au plecat de la castelul Turcan, a doua zi ei au ajuns în insula Giurgiului, unde era o cetate foarte puternică, pătrată, cu patru laturi lungi de zid și la colțul fiecărei laturi era câte un turn foarte mare, cu totul pătrat, și cel mai mic din aceste turnuri era mai mare și mai puternic decât turnul castelului Turcan și tot astfel întărit cu gherete și cu galerii de lemn. Și erau înspre râu două mici parapete de zid care porneau de la cetate ajungând până la acel râu și la capetele lor erau de asemenea două turnuri tot așa de întărite cu galerii ca și celelalte* (Holban 1968, p. 103).

²⁵ Base de Lexiques de Moyen Français, Analyse et Traitement Informatique de la Langue Française, *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français*, <http://www.atilf.fr/blmf/> (henceforth BLMF, ATILF), entrée *guérite*. ... *fait faire par le maistre du cloz de noz gallees a Rouen et par le maistre des garnisons de nostre dicte armee et par leurs commis certaine quantité de blefz, bescuiz, vins, lars, moulins a braz et a chevaulx, paliz, guerites, pavaiz, lances, viretons, poudres a canon, cloux, manteaulx, clayes, tonneaulx, queues et rondeles wides et pour autres choses neccessaires et convenables au fait de nostre dicte armee* (Clos galées Rouen M.-C., t.2, 1385, 174). ... *faire faire*

uses the word *gheretă*, which means in fact a lodge, a cage or a box, depending on the context. The Middle French word has a different connotation and refers to a complex wooden structure related to the *bacicols*, which are the machicolations in a phonetic altering of the nasal labial into a simple one. The transitive verb *machicouler* is attested since the middle of the 14th century²⁶. In a 1436 Middle French chronicle one may find a similar passage: *Il fist lever la grosse tour du donjon d'Alençon d'un estage et faire IIIJ tourelles es IIIJ coings et machicoler tout autour*²⁷. Still, Wavrin does not speak of two clearly distinct architectural features, for the *bacicols* and the *garites* are made of wood and occupy the upper part of the walls, as a supplementary feature. All this detailed description must refer to a wall-passage, a common feature of all medieval fortifications.

Later on, when speaking of the Giurgiu stronghold, Gheorghe Cantacuzino discerns five different construction levels according to the archaeological information available. The oldest part of the entire fortification could be a strong tower, of c. 13 m wide, of a heptagonal layout. It could have been a keep, but its incorporation into Mircea the Old's fortress transformed it into one of the four corner towers. This is the nowadays NW tower. The stronghold built by the very same Wallachian voivod had four corners, with curtain walls flanked by three outer towers (in the NW, SW and SE corners) and a protruding bastion of a triangular shape to the NE. The stronghold had a ditch, no more than four feet deep according to Wavrin's description. Cantacuzino also assumes that the towers were at least 94 feet high²⁸. He tries to reconstruct the rest of the fortification according to Wavrin, but does not even try to deal with the chronicler's *deux petits pans de murs* or with the *deux tours pareillement bacicollees comme les aultres*, for the traces of these features are nowadays lost due to Danube's waterbed changes.

The fact that Wavrin speaks of two little walls and two towers that create a second enceinte should not be taken literally. The two towers could be in fact two smaller bastions, and the *petits pans des murs* just an additional Zwinger or some other fortified feature. In support of this hypothesis we bring a literary fact. When speaking of the Turnu fortress, Wavrin mentions the *faulses brayes*, which are – as we will analyse later on – a *second enceinte*.

The Burgundian chronicler might have used certain literary artifices in order to describe fortresses he did not see. He could have used his own imagination, based on his nephew's account, but interpreting Waleran's information according to his own architectural knowledge in order to create a more vivid image of the strongholds he described. Given the fact that the southern part of the Giurgiu fortress is nowadays lost, one may never formulate a true critical approach to Wavrin's description. Nevertheless, any Middle French scholar may question not its layout (the square four-towered fortress), but Wavrin's probable exaggerations (two small walls and two towers).

As for the strange comparison between the Tutrakan and Giurgiu fortresses, one may regard cautiously the expression: *la moindre estoit plus grande et plus forte que celle du Chasteau Turquant*, for the Tutrakan fortress is also described in a literary fashion²⁹:

foussez, murailles, tours, tourelles, garites, ponslevys et toutes manières de fortifications (Doc. Poitou G., t. 12, 1478, 209). *Les tours et bastides, avec les maisons, loges et guerites estans entre lesdictes tours et bastides, tant couvertes que descouvertes, sans les eschiffes* (Comptes Paris M., t. 2, 1488-1489, 409).

²⁶ Algirdas Julien Greimas, Teresa Mary Keane, *Dictionnaire du moyen français*, Paris, 1992, p. 391.

²⁷ BLMF, ATILF, entrée *machicouler*.

²⁸ Gheorghe Cantacuzino, *Cetăți medievale din Țara Românească: sec. XIII-XVI* [Middle Fortresses of Wallachia in the 13th-16th Centuries], Bucharest, 2001², pp. 201-210.

²⁹ Iorga 1927, p. 61; the Romanian translation reads: *Acest castel Turcan așezat pe malul Dunării era alcătuit dintr-un pătrat de ziduri ce se întretăiau în așa fel că la trei dintre unghiuri*

Ce Chastel Turquant, seant sur la rive de la Dunoe, estoit de quatre pans de mur en quarrure, en tele maniere que a chascune des trois quarrés avoit une petite tour, et a la quatriesme quarré desdis pans de mur y avoit une grosse tour quarrée quy estoit massice, bien de dix piedz de hault. Et y montoient les Turcqz par une montee de bois, quy estoit toute couverte de grandes plates plures de bois, ainsi qu'on les poille quant les arbres sont en seve. Et il y avoit, par deseure, ung grand bacicol, et grandes allees d'aisselles de bois, duquel bacicol se deffendoient fort les Turcqz; et par deriere estoit la basse-court, qui avironnoit les trois pans de mur et la tour, et y avoit grans fosses et pallis de bois entour ycelle. Laquele, nonobstant, fut prinse comme vous avez oy, de venue, au tres villain reboutement des Turcqz, lesquelz furent si radement poursievys qu'ilz n'eurent pas loisir de le deffendre, de haste d'eulz enfuyr dedens lesdis tour et chastel.

It seems that, when speaking of the Tutrakan stronghold, Jean de Wavrin tells his readers that it had *quatre pans de mur en quarrure*³⁰, a huge *bacicol*, and *allees d'aisselles de bois*. This last Middle French syntagma probably refers to the wall-passage, placed upon the curtain wall, providing the defenders' circulation inside the stronghold.

The fact that the grand *bacicol* is linked to these allees proves us that Wavrin imagined himself a *bacicol* that had to look like all the smaller *bacicols* he knew. The grand *bacicol* had to be a *bacicol* first of all. Consequently, the chronicler diverges from the general outline of the description in order to tell us a strange feature of the wooden Tutrakan structures (*ainsi qu'on les poille quant les arbres sont en seve*). This might imply that the wood had been recently cut, and that the entire wooden structures were built on the spot, just before the Burgundian's arrival. A comparison with the Giurgiu stronghold description would provide us nonetheless with a different perspective.

For example, there are parallel features. The first one that strikes is the shape of the fortresses. Giurgiu is a fort *chastel quarré*, while Tutrakan *estoit de quatre pans de mur en quarrure*. Next, Giurgiu stronghold is *bacicollee*, while Tutrakan has a *grant bacicol*. Giurgiu is *garitee*, while Tutrakan has *grandes allees d'aisselles de bois*. And, last but not least, Giurgiu has *deux petits pans de murs* and *deux tours*, while Tutrakan has a *basse-court*.

It seems that Giurgiu is a bigger scale copy of Tutrakan, and they both resemble the chateaux-forts developed out of the mote and bailey fortresses of Western Europe. They have an inner yard, an outer yard, machicolations, they are, each in its own *turn, chasteaulx*. Moreover, Jean de Wavrin tells us in his own words that of the Giurgiu stronghold was *samblablement garitee et bacicollee* like *celle du Chateau Turquant*.

The only explanation we are able to provide is that Wavrin has read or heard two distinctive descriptions of the two Danube fortresses, but he had never seen any of them.

*avea câte un mic turn iar la al patrulea unghi era un turn mare, pătrat, masiv și înalt de zece picioare. Și turcii se urcau în el pe o schelă de lemn care era acoperită în întregime de tăblii mari din coajă de copac care se jupeaie atunci când sunt arborii plini de sevă. Deasupra era o mare galerie și pridvoare mari de scândurele de lemn, din care galerie se apărau cu îndârjire turcii; în spate era curtea de apărare de jos care era înconjurată de cele trei laturi ale zidurilor, de turn, de șanțuri mari și întărituri de pari de jur împrejurul ei. Cu toate acestea a fost cucerită, cum ați auzit, de la primul atac, cu rușinoasa alungare a turcilor care au fost urmăriți așa de năvalnic, încât în graba lor de a se refugia în acel turn și în acel castel, nu au mai avut răgaz să-l apere (Holban 1968, p. 94). The translation proves to be once again wrong, for the *aisselle* is not the *peel of a tree*, but a simple *plank*. Wavrin speaks of freshly cut wooden planks, an information which leads us to the conclusion that the upper part of the fortification, the *garites* and the *bacicols*, have been recently built; *Planche de bois*: BLMF, ATILF, entrée *aisselle* 2, I, 1.*

³⁰ The Romanian translation is rather faible, for *quatre pans de mur en quarrure* are not a *square of walls*. The Middle French *pan de cloison* or *pan de mur* means *une partie d'une cloison, d'un mur*; BLMF, ATILF, entrée *pan*, réponse 2, A.

He was used to a certain military architectural pattern and tried to adapt, for his own sake and for that of his readers, the features he had to describe to the features he already knew.

This does not imply at all that Giurgiu fortress was not square, or that Tutrakan fortress didn't have a great machicolation, this implies only the fact that certain aspects have been reinterpreted and we are unable to reconstruct any of the two strongholds according to Wavrin's description. For example, it is extremely improbable that the Giurgiu fortress had an outer yard. Giurgiu fortress could have had two smaller walls that ended not into two towers, but into two smaller bastions. Also, the entire description of the upper wooden structures of Tutrakan and Giurgiu could refer to some defence construction raised just before the two sieges. All these interpreting problems could be easily solved through a careful examination of the miniatures with which Wavrin's manuscripts must have been ornamented with, because the painter must have clearly understood Wavrin's own interpreting pattern, and must have turned it into an image. Unfortunately, such manuscripts still remain hardly available for eastern European researchers.

After dealing with these two descriptions, Wavrin turns each time to his story. He is not at all interested in describing the strongholds. The plot is much more interesting. Such is the case of the Turnu fortress, which does not have true description. This stronghold's features can be discerned only through the Nicopolis 1445 fight description³¹:

Lors s'en alla le seigneur de la Vallaquie devers le cardinal, avecques luy ces deux vaillans chevalliers: messire Pietre Vaast et messire Regnault de Comfide. Lesquelz ledit seigneur de Wavrin y envoya en son nom. Si fut conclu entr'eulz que la tour serroit assegié tout a l'environ, comme: par terre par les Vallques, et des gallees par la riviere. Si feroient dilligence d'aprochier ladite tour au plus prez qu'ilz porroient. Les Turcqz qui estoient dedens Nycopoly se doubterent, et percheurent que les chrestiens vouloient assegier et combattre la tour. Si misrent, par nuit, une petite galliote en l'eaue, bien armee de rimes, et misrent dedens vivres et artillerye. Ceste nuit fist-il grant bruyne, et, au point du jour, ladite galliote party de Nycopoly. Laquele estoit legiere, si sambloit qu'elle vollaist sur l'eaue et passast par devant les gallees. Celles qui le veyrent s'esleverent hastivement, et allerent aprez. Mais elle se boutta dedens la posterne de la tour qui estoit sur l'eaue, et ceulz de ladite tour le deffendoient de trait et de pierres. Si fut necessité a nos gallees quy alloient aprez, de retourner. Mais il fut ordoné que l'une des gallees feroit le guet sur elle, adfin que, quant elle retourneroit, elle feust ruee jus.

The archaeological investigations (the 1936-1943 and 1978-1980 archaeological digging campaigns) conducted on the Turnu stronghold archaeological site revealed the existence of a number of stone and brick structures centered on a round tower. The nucleus of these fortifications is the very same tower, which has a 17.40 m diameter. The 1978 diggings did not reach the foundation, due to the high waterbed, thus disarming all probable hypotheses³².

Gheorghe Cantacuzino interprets the Turnu stronghold according to four features presented by Jean de Wavrin: the existence of a wooden-roof tower, surrounded by reinforcements (*brayes, faulses brayes*), with a barbican (a feature that we did not manage to identify in Wavrin's chronicle) and a postern (a secondary gateway to the river)³³. According to Cantacuzino's interpretation, the wooden-roof tower is the exact nucleus of the Turnu fortress, the so-called round tower. A postern could have existed, even though the nowadays ruins cannot prove its existence due to the high waterbed of the Danube.

³¹ Iorga 1927, pp. 82-83.

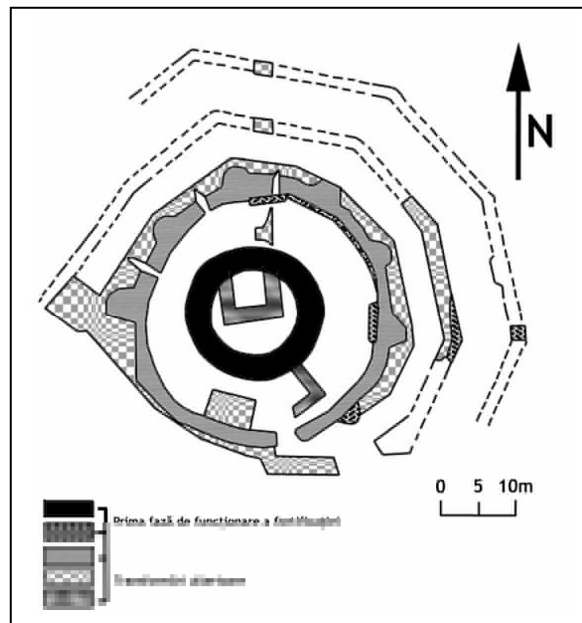
³² Gh. Cantacuzino, *Cetăți medievale*, pp. 188-189.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 198.

On the other hand, the barbican, unidentified in Wavrin's chronicle, may be the by-product of a text misunderstanding. As for the Middle French word *braye*, it refers either to a "defence palisade"³⁴, or to an element of defence constructed on the counterscarp, having a gateway or a fortification point³⁵. Cantacuzino relates it to the wall, presumably reconstructed after the 1395-1396 battles by sultan Bayazid³⁶. He also implies that *the chronicle lets us think that the walls of the stronghold were not that big*.

This last consideration is a compromise between the text of the chronicle and the archaeological information available. Cantacuzino knew that the *brayes* could not refer to the curtain walls of the stronghold because a *braye* was a rudimentary rampart. He also thought that the Turnu stronghold had already been endowed by the year 1445 with a curtain wall.

In fact, he assumed that the construction of the wall took place prior to 1397, because he also knew the Slavonic inscription. Thus, he had all the elements of a puzzle and wanted them to fit in neatly. He adapted the four pieces of information he found in Wavrin's chronicle to the archaeological material available. He interpreted the literary information according to the archaeological material, for all text is but a shadow of doubt, while a ruin must always reveal the real status of a construction. Still, Cantacuzino probably misunderstood the chronicler's text, for the *brayes* may never refer to real brick or stone walls.



4. Turnu stronghold layout

(by architect Gh. Sion, in *CAMNI*, IV, 1981, p. 101, fig. 1)

They are only palisades, comprising wooden structures. Bayazid's presumed walls could not have been built out of wood. In fact, the 1397-1398 inscription does not speak

³⁴ BLMF, ATILF, entrée *braie*, réponse 8.

³⁵ BLMF, ATILF, entrée *braie*, réponse 1, II.

³⁶ Gh. Cantacuzino, *op. cit.*, pp. 190-191, 198; the supposition is closely related to the discovery of a Slavonic inscription mentioning the name of Bayazid, which is dated between 1397-1398.

of a wall construction. It says only that *this Holavnic stronghold has been renewed during the reign of Bayazid Ildirim and the subasha D..., in the year 1...*³⁷. The inscription mentions thus of a renewal and not a rebuilding. Moreover, Wavrin's chronicle does not speak of brayes, but of faulses brayes. Up to this level, Gh. Cantacuzino's hypothesis (Wavrin's brayes = Bayazid's walls) could have been possible, but when confronted with a Middle French lexicon, it does not stand a single chance, for a *faulse braye* is *une seconde enceinte terrassée comme la première, et qui n'en est pas séparée par un fossé, mais dont le terre-plein joint l'escarpe de la première enceinte*³⁸. The faulse braye of the Turnu stronghold cannot be a wall, it is an outer yard.

In the end, we are left with two possibilities. The first one is that the round curtain wall of the Turnu stronghold has not been built in 1445 yet, and that the fortification comprised only a round tower, a postern, and a yard encircled by a wooden palisade. Still, the existence of a faulse braye is conditioned by the pre-existence of a curtain wall encircling an inner yard. One may easily think that the Burgundians could not see the inner structure of the stronghold, because they did not reach it. They must have seen only the outer ramparts, and a high curtain wall that could have been easily mistaken for the tower's own walls.

... and a Broken Bombard

During the Giurgiu siege, the chronicler tells us how the Wallachian voivod, confident in his own plans, has broken the best bombard the Burgundian fleet possessed³⁹.

Les crestiens, doncques, cuidans la pierre avoir ce fait, rechargerent derechief et le firent gecter ou premier lieu. Si fist pareille pouldriere que le cop devant; laquele passee, chascun disoit que, pour vray, la fenture estoit beaucoup plus grande que devant. Si recommenca pareille huee, qui alla jusquez auz oreilles du siegneur de la Vallaque, lequel demanda que c'estoit. Et on lui dist que la bombarde des gallees faisoit merveilles et que ancores dedens deux ou trois copz gectez elle auroit abatu une tour. Pour lesqueles nouvelles il monta a cheval; si vint celle part adfin d'en veoir la maniere. Et lors, comme celluy auquel ledit chastel apartenoit (car son pere l'avoit faite faire), si avoit esté dedens plusieurs fois, et neanmoins ne s'estoit jamais aparcheu de la fenture), quant il la vey, fut mesmes d'opinion que ce eust voirement fait la bombarde. Pourquoi il pry qu'on le vouldist rechargier et faire gecter devant luy. Et, adont, le seigneur de Wavrin, pour ce qu'il estoit heure de disner et si n'avoit ancores mengié du jour, dist au seigneur de la Vallaque: «Je metz la bombarde et les canonniers en vostre main; si la faites jecter a vostre plaisance; car je m'en vois disner en ma gallee». Et emmena avec luy messire Regnault de Comfide mengier. Tost aprez, le seigneur de Vallaque fist chargier ladite bombarde et gecter a son bon plaisir. Aprez lequel cop, la pouldriere passee, la dite fenture lui sambla, aussy, plus large que paravant, et mesmes que la tour clinoit. Pourquoi il fist rechargier de plus balles, et jecter ancores ung cop: si luy sambloit que tousjours la fenture croissoit et que la tour clinoit de plus en plus. Adont, messire Regnault de Comfide, qui disoit avec le seigneur de Wavrin, lui dist: «Ce Vallaque fera ycy si dru gecter nostre bombarde, qu'elle rompera; il fust besoing d'y envoyer, adfin qu'on le laissast refroidir et qu'elle ne gectast plus jusques a ce que vous venriez la». Mais, avant que le messagier y peust oncques venir, le Vallaque le fist gecter, et rompirent deux cercles d'ycelle, quy tuerent deux galliotz, genz de bien et vaillans hommes, selon leur stille; lesquelz furent fort plains et condolus. Desqueles nouvelles, quant ilz le sceurent,

³⁷ Gh. Cantacuzino, *op. cit.*, p. 198.

³⁸ BLMF, ATILF, entrée *braie*, réponse 1, II.

³⁹ Iorga 1927, pp. 71-72.

lesdis de Wavrin et Comfide, ilz furent grandement courouchiés. Mais le committre de la gallee leur dist <que>, moyennant qu'il n'y eust que deux cercles rompus et que les deuves ne feussent pas adommagiés, il le remettrait bien a point.

When reading this fragment, one may take a close look not to the historical material provided by Jean de Wavrin, but to the general esthetical outline. On a historical basis, one may find a single major event: Vlad the Devil had broken the Burgundians' bombard. On a literary basis, the very same information turns itself into an interesting distortion. It becomes a tale, and, as much as any other tale, is prone to a certain literary subjectivity. Certain passages seem superfluous. For example, the *mais avant que le messagier ... ilz furent grandement courouchiés* refers to an action that is already expected or understood by the reader and could be the *respiro* moment of the entire fragment. Others contain precious historical material: *et lors comme celluy ... voirement fait la bombarde*, providing Romanian historians with awaited confirmations.

When reading carefully the bombard fragment, one may discern six narrative knots:

1. The introduction of the fenture theme (*Les crestiens doncques ... que devant*).
2. Vlad the Devil finds out about the bombard miracles (*Si recommence pareille hue... adfin d'en veoir la maniere*).
3. Waleran de Wavrin leaves Vlad the Devil the bombard (*Et lors comme celluy... messier Regnault de Comfide mangier*).
4. Vlad carelessly uses the bombard (*Tost aprez le seigneur de Vallaquie ... clinoit de plus en plus*).
5. Regnault de Comfide predicts the disaster (*Adont messier Regnault de Comfide ... vous venriez la*).
6. The disaster actually takes place (*Mais avant que le messagier ... remettrait bien a point*).

Oddly, the aforesaid six narrative knots are organised in couplets, such as the first part of the couplet (knots 1, 3, and 5) represents a Burgundian action, while the last (knots 2, 4, and 6) the Wallachian response. In fact, the story can be easily summarised this way into cause (knots 1+2), action (knots 3+4), and effect (knots 5+6). Moreover, these narrative knots contain a repetitive vocabulary: fenture, tour, and bombarde, and the only characters available, apart from Vlad and his two Western counterparts are the *committre* and the *galliotz*. The *committre* is an *officier qui commande l'équipage d'un navire*⁴⁰, while the *galliotz* are the rowers of the galleys⁴¹.

The Burgundian fleet was rather young and still inexperienced⁴², or better saying unsure of its own resources. Thus, Renault de Comfide's behaviour was natural. He was

⁴⁰ BLMF, ATILF, entrée *comite*, réponse 1.

⁴¹ For a debate concerning the name *galliotz*, see: BLMF, ATILF, entrée *galiot*, réponse 1, B: *Rameur de galère: ... a esté interrogué Jehan Deglaz, escripvain dudit Gimart sur les gaiges, despences des nauchers, galiotz, compagnons de guerre et autres gens et officiers qui estoient en la galée Saint-Michiel* (Aff. Jacques Coeur M., 1453-1457, 219). À *Guillemin Labarbe, le XVle jour d'octobre, pour donner aux galliotz qu'estoient échappés d'une galée qui estoit enversée en Catheloingne, en ung escu et ung ducat* (Comptes roi René A., t.3, 1479, 229). The *galliotz* seem to be simple rowers, completely untrained in manoeuvring large guns.

⁴² The first two galleys were built in 1386, at the order of duke Philip, in order to support the planned passage to England. Three more were constructed at Nice under the command of Geoffroi de Thoisy, and probably with Genoese assistance, during 1443-1444. Four more galleys were rented from the Venetian republic in 1444, and only later (1446-1449) four more galleys were built at Anvers (Jacques Paviot, *La politique navale des ducs de Bourgogne 1384/1482*, Lille, 1995, p. 294).

concerned about the guns as well as the galleys. Their ships' capacity was still limited (200-300 men), for the first two Burgundian-built galleys had 166 rowers and 44 soldiers, while the ones built later, during 1446-1449, had 168 rowers and a lot of other specialised personnel. The galleys used in the 1449 and 1463 Burgundian expeditions comprised:

| Personnel | 1449 expedition | 1463 expedition |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Rowers | 168 | 168 |
| <i>Aliiers or portenas</i> | 6 | 0 |
| Nochers | 10 | 10 |
| Their servant | 1 | 0 |
| <i>Proiers</i> | 8 | 4 |
| <i>Soubre-sailans</i> | 30 | 40 |
| <i>Compagnons de la bonne- veuille</i> | 20 | 0 |
| <i>Bombardiers</i> | 2 | 0 |
| <i>Canonniers</i> | 0 | 2 |
| Surgeon and his servant | 2 | 0 |
| Barber | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Trompettes</i> | 4 | 2 |
| Argousin and his servant | 2 | 0 |
| Comite and his servant | 2 | 1 |
| <i>Sous-comite</i> | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Pilots</i> | 2 | 1 |
| <i>Conseillers</i> | 2 | 1 |
| <i>Maitres d'hache</i> | 1 | 2 |
| Remolat and his servant | 2 | 1 |
| <i>Calfat</i> | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Ecrivain</i> | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Sous-ecrivain</i> | 1 | 1 |
| <i>Senechal</i> | 1 | 0 |
| <i>Palollier</i> | 1 | 0 |
| Cook | 2 | 1 |

If Jean de Wavrin used his nephew's letters or an *ecrivain's* log, the *deux dead galliotz* must have had different jobs. They could have been named *bombardiers* or *canoniers*, for it was not the rowers duty to shoot the bombard. All these narrative characteristics point out that originally the story has not been written. It had been probably told, for the careful disposition of action-counteraction passages according to a Wallachian-Burgundian pattern, the repetitive vocabulary, and the imprecise jobs of the much regretted dead men cannot be the results of a ship's log, neither that of a campaign description.

There were probably no written sources. The only source must have been Waleran himself, and he must have told the story personally. Moreover, closely linked to this fragment is another one about Waleran de Wavrin's illness and his retirement aboard one of the galleys.

In the end, we may easily speculate that the entire episode has a bookish connotation, that the only discernable historical fact is that Vlad the Devil had broken a Burgundian bombard, and that he planned on taking over the Giurgiu fortress without destroying its towers. The rest of the story – as interesting as it may seem – could be a literary invention, a funny tale about barbarian Wallachians mistreating a great western up-to-date canon.

Are we to believe what Jean de Wavrin narrates? We probably have to, for his intentions were more than responsible. He wanted to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about his nephew's Danube expedition. He used all the material he could get.

He is not to be blamed in any other way, and the somehow subjective marks used in his relation are not his faults, but the faults of a prose style that determined him to write adapting the story, through his own eyes, for those of a western audience. Since the works of Jean Froissart and Commines, the chroniclers of the Late Middle Ages used the first singular persona (*je*) in order to disseminate a certain degree of subjectivity throughout their work: a *je* narrator, a *je* character, and even a *je* speaker. This extended use of the first singular persona does not give way to mistrust, but refers to a literary authorship, closely related to the interpretation of truth.

One may find surprising the fact that this type of subjectivity is used in order to create a true narration⁴³. Wavrin did not use this obsessive *je*. He seldomly cites in direct speech and tries to keep a third person narrator, totally different from the true protagonist of his account.

Due to this second-hand eyewitness factor, the testimony of Jean de Wavrin is somehow doubtful, as put by various studies⁴⁴. One may never completely trust the stories he tells, for they must have been distortions of the stories he has heard, themselves distortions of the real historical facts. One may never trust the descriptions of the Danube fortresses, for Wavrin interprets all the descriptions according to his own knowledge of western military architecture. One may also take the broad facts for sure, but never the details.

Moreover, what we do have is the manuscript tradition, not the autograph manuscript of Wavrin. This tradition may be in its own turn distorted. Manuscripts were copied, and a few of the copies might be mistaken. Moreover, there is no contemporary edition of Wavrin's text. Apart from this, nobody has ever tried to see the miniatures, which must have illuminated the folios of certain manuscripts preserving the *Anchiennes Istories de la Grant Bretagne*. The analysis of these miniatures might provide us with a better understanding of Wavrin's descriptions.

⁴³ Claudio Galderisi, *Conscience littéraire et émergence de l'individu au Moyen Age*, in *Histoire de la France littéraire*, I, *Naissances, Renaissances: Moyen Age – XVI^e siècle* (edited by Frank Lestringant, Michel Zink), Paris, 2006, p. 675.

⁴⁴ Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and His Time* (translated by Ralph Manheim), Princeton, 1978, p. 34.