

WHEN DID THE CONFLICT BETWEEN VLAD THE IMPALER AND THE TURKS BREAK OUT?

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A controversial figure in Romanian history, Vlad the Impaler was nonetheless one of the most valiant Romanian princes, who defended the interests of his country and employed all possible means in protecting his subjects, even at the cost of his own life, against the foreign powers coveting the territory between the Carpathians and the Danube.

Vlad the Impaler acceded to the throne of Wallachia in 1456, with the help of John Huniady. In the first months of his reign, he adopted the anti-Ottoman policy promoted by the latter, as one may see in his declarations to Hungary and to the town dwellers of Braşov,¹ and in the assistance given to Stephen the Great's accession in Moldavia in the spring of 1457.² However, the radical change in the political and strategic background in South-East Europe after the death of his protector, forced him into regular payment of the tribute to the Ottoman Porte, and the acknowledgement of the suzerainty of the Ottoman sultan, who was Mehmed II, the conqueror of Constantinople. In fact, Vlad the Impaler was thus acknowledging the geopolitical situation created by the peace treaty signed by John Huniady with the sultan on 20 November 1451–13 April 1452,³ by which Wallachia had been placed under a double Turkish-Hungarian suzerainty. Overthrowing this double suzerainty would be one of the main objectives of the Wallachian voivode throughout his reign.

¹ See his letters of Târgovişte, of 6 and 10 September 1456 (Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, vol. XV, 1, Bucureşti, 1911, pp. 45–46, docs LXXIX and LXXX).

² *Cronicele slavo-române din sec. XV–XVI publicate de Ioan Bogdan*, revision and additions by P.P. Panaitescu, Bucureşti, 1959, pp. 28, 49, 61 and 178; Grigore Ureche, *Letopiseşul Ţării Moldovei*, edited by P.P. Panaitescu, second edition, Bucureşti, 1958, p. 90.

³ N. Iorga, *Acte şi fragmente cu privire la istoria românilor*, vol. III, Bucureşti, 1897, pp. 23–27; idem, *Privilegiul lui Mahomed al II-lea pentru Pera (1 iunie 1453)*, in “Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secţiunii Istorice”, s. II, t. XXXVI, 1913–1914, pp. 88–91; Camil Mureşan, *Iancu de Hunedoara*, second edition, Bucureşti, 1968, p. 176; Tahsin Gemil, *Românii şi otomanii în secolele XIV–XVI*, Bucureşti, 1991, p. 129.

As an excellent politician, diplomat and soldier, Vlad the Impaler was quite aware that he would be unable to fight simultaneously against his two fierce enemies – Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. Which brings us to the title of the present paper, when exactly did the conflict between Vlad the Impaler and the Turks break out? This question calls for some clarification, as in Romanian historiography it is commonly believed that by refusing to pay the tribute to the Porte in 1459, Vlad the Impaler made a radical change in his external policy, overthrew the Ottoman suzerainty and challenged the sultan openly.⁴ I have already tried to answer this question on two previous occasions,⁵ and in the present paper I shall try to bring new arguments demonstrating that *the year 1459, albeit an important year in the reign of Vlad the Impaler, did not mark a turn, more exactly a break in the voivode's relations with the Ottoman Porte, this break only occurring by the end of 1461, when the war between the two camps became unavoidable.*

A first argument is the absence of military confrontations between Vlad the Impaler and the Turks before the winter of 1461–1462. Historian Ștefan Andreescu clearly demonstrated that the alleged expedition of vezir Mahmud Pasha, placed by two Italian sources and, based on them, by Nicolae Iorga, in 1458,⁶ actually took place only in 1462, as a first stage in the sultan's campaign against Wallachia.⁷

⁴ Nicolae Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeș*, București, 1976, p. 86; idem, *La victoire de Vlad l'Empaleur sur les Turcs (1462)*, in "Revue Roumaine d'Histoire", XV, no. 3, 1976, p. 377; Ștefan Andreescu, *Vlad Țepeș (Dracula) între legendă și adevăr istoric*, first edition, București, 1976, p. 99 and second edition, revised, București, 1998, p. 104; Emil Stoian, *Vlad Țepeș. Mit și realitate istorică*, București, 1989, p. 79; Constantin Rezachevici, *Vlad Țepeș – cronologie, bibliografie*, in "Revista de Istorie", 29, no. 11, 1976, p. 1748; idem, *Vlad Țepeș – Chronology and historical Bibliography*, in vol. *Dracula. Essays on the Life and Times of Vlad Țepeș*, edited by Kurt W. Treptow, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991, p. 257; Matei Cazacu first believed that Vlad the Impaler had ceased to pay the tribute to the Turks in 1460 and placed this decision in relation with the works of the Congress of Mantua of 1459 (Matei Cazacu, *L'histoire du prince Dracula en Europe Centrale et Orientale (XV^e siècle)*, Genève, 1988, p. 8), whereas in a recent work, he reconsidered his opinion and admitted that the break with the Turks had occurred in 1459 (Idem, *Dracula suivi du Capitaine Vampire, une nouvelle roumaine par Marie Nizet (1879)*, Paris, 2004, p. 175). See also the chapter devoted to Vlad the Impaler by historian Ștefan Ștefănescu, member of the Romanian Academy, in the fourth volume of *Istoria Românilor*, published by the Department for Historical Sciences and Archaeology of the Romanian Academy in 2001, p. 356.

⁵ Eugen Denize, *Vlad Țepeș, lupta antiotomană și Veneția. Câteva considerații*, in "Revista Istorică", new series, tome 6, nos. 3–4, 1995, pp. 371–387; Ileana Căzan, Eugen Denize, *Marile puteri și spațiul românesc în secolele XV–XVI*, Editura Universității din București, 2001, pp. 55–70.

⁶ *La progenia della cassa de'Octomani*, apud N. Iorga, *Acte și fragmente*, III, p. 13 and Donado da Lezze, *Historia turchesca (1300–1514)*, ed. I. Ursu, București, 1909, pp. 24–25; N. Iorga, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. IV, București, 1937, pp. 130–131.

⁷ Ștefan Andreescu, *op. cit.*, first edition, pp. 91–92; idem, *Războiul cu turcii din 1462*, in "Revista de Istorie", 29, no. 11, 1976, pp. 1673–1674. See also Const. A. Stoide, *Luptele lui Vlad Țepeș cu turcii (1461–1462)*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie "A.D. Xenopol", XV, 1978, pp. 16–17.

Furthermore, there were no Turkish-Wallachian military clashes in 1459 or 1460, when the non-payment of the tribute and the alleged overthrow of Ottoman suzerainty by the Wallachian voivode could have been expected to stir up the wrath of the sultan.

A second argument, quite important in my opinion, is the fact that the non-payment of the tribute of 10,000 ducats⁸ to begin with 1459 did not result in an immediate or complete break with the Ottoman Porte. This can be seen in the external policy of Mehmed II, who directed none of his military campaigns at Wallachia. Had Vlad the Impaler been considered a rebel on account of his refusal to pay the tribute, the sultan would have attacked him with no hesitation, rather than waited for three years before undertaking a campaign to the north of the Danube. In reality, the sultan proceeded with conquering expeditions in areas more or less remote, all of which were successful.

Thus, in 1458, Mehmed II conquered a considerable part of Moreea, almost a third of the peninsula, including the towns of Corinth, Patras, Vostitza and Kalavryta, and forced the two local despots, Toma and Demetrios into the payment of an annual tribute of 3,000 ducats.⁹ In 1459, when Vlad the Impaler ceased the tribute payments, Mehmed II conquered Semendria (Smederevo), together with all the remaining traces of the Serbian state.¹⁰ In 1460 he conquered the entire Peninsula of Moreea.¹¹ On 1 August 1460, the Captain of the Gulf, a title borne by the commander of the Venetian fleet in the Adriatic, Lorenzo Moro, and the lords of Modon and Coron were informed about the sultan's intention to extent his suzerainty over the entire Morea, about the fact that he was the enemy of Venice, and that he had already reached the borders of the Venetian territories in the said peninsula.¹² And in 1461, pursuing with great tenacity his goal to gain control of the entire Pontic basin,¹³ Mehmed II conquered Sinope and Trapezunt.¹⁴

Therefore, one may consider that Sultan Mehmed II and his main counselors did not interpret the non-payment of the tribute by Vlad the Impaler in 1459 as an act of defiance and insubordination, calling for immediate and severe punishment.

⁸Mihai Berza, *Haraciul Moldovei și Țării Românești în sec. XV–XIX*, in "Studii și materiale de istorie medie", II, 1957, pp. 28–29.

⁹Denis A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée. Histoire politique*, London, 1975, pp. 256–260.

¹⁰Franz Babinger, *Mahomet II le Conquérant et son temps. 1432–1481. La grande peur du monde au tournant de l'histoire*, Paris, 1954, pp. 199–201.

¹¹*Ibidem*, pp. 210–215; D. A. Zakythinos, *op. cit.*, pp. 267–274.

¹²Freddy Thieriet, *Régestes des délibérations du sénat de Venise concernant la Roumanie*, tome III, 1431–1463, Paris, La Haye, 1961, pp. 233–234, no. 3118.

¹³Șerban Papacostea, *Premisele politice ale hegemoniei economice a Imperiului otoman în spațiul Mării Negre (1453–1484)*, in "Revista Istorică", new series, tom 10, nos. 1–2, 1999, pp. 15–27.

¹⁴Fr. Babinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 228–238; Șerban Papacostea, *Relațiile internaționale în răsăritul și sud-estul Europei în secolele XIV–XV*, in "Revista de Istorie", tome 34, no. 5, 1981, pp. 916–917; T. Gemil, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

On the other hand, the Wallachian voivode was in no position to assume the risk of challenging the sultan, as he was already caught in an open conflict with the Saxons in the south of Transylvania and with King Matthias Corvinus' Hungary,¹⁵ and would have been unable to carry out a war on two fronts. Under the given circumstances, and most probably for lack of resources, Vlad the Impaler suspended the payments of the tribute and his explanations were accepted as valid by the officials in Constantinople. The sultan, whose interest was to see Hungary put under constant pressure, had no doubt realized that it was exactly what Vlad the Impaler was doing and, for this reason, far from considering the prince of Wallachia a rebel, he continued to regard him as a devoted and trustworthy subject. In fact, Vlad the Impaler's conflict with the Saxons of Southern Transylvania and with King Matthias Corvinus, far from being conjectural, had deep economic¹⁶ and political¹⁷ roots. At the beginning of April 1459, the Saxons of Southern

¹⁵ Hurmuzaki, *Documente*, XV,1, pp. 50–51, doc. LXXXIX; Ioan Bogdan, *Documente privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Brașovul și cu Țara Ungurească în sec. XV–XVI*, vol. I, 1413–1508, București, 1905, pp. 101–103; Constantin C. Giurescu, *Istoria Românilor*, vol. II, 1, third edition, București, 1940, pp. 43–49; N. Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeș*, pp. 70–73; Șt. Andreescu, *Vlad Țepeș (Dracula)*... first edition, pp. 66–77. The Ottoman chronicler Tursun Bei writes that Vlad The Impaler, “relying on the Sublime Porte, defeated the Hungarians, and killed many of those,” (Tursun Bei, *Tarih-i Ebu-l Feth-i Sultan Mehmed-han în Cronici turcești privind Țările Române. Extrase*, vol. I, *Sec. XV-mijlocul sec. XVII*, volume by Mihail Guboglu and Mustafa Mehmet, București, 1966, p. 68), and chronicler Laonicus Chalcocondyles notes: “And the Peons (Hungarians – n. by E. D.), not few of them, whom he believed holding some public office, not sparing any of those, he killed in great numbers,” (Laonicus Chalcocondyles, *Expuneri istorice*, Romanian translation by Vasile Grecu, București, 1958, p. 283).

¹⁶ Gustav Gündisch, *Cu privire la relațiile lui Vlad Țepeș cu Transilvania în anii 1456–1458*, in “Studii. Revistă de Istorie”, tome 16, 1963, pp. 684–686; Radu Manolescu, *Comerțul Țării Românești și Moldovei cu Brașovul (secolele XIV–XVI)*, București, 1965; Dinu C. Giurescu, *Relațiile economice ale Țării Românești cu țările Peninsulei Balcanice din secolul al XIV-lea până la mijlocul secolului al XVI-lea*, in “Romanoslavica”, XI, 1965, pp. 167–201; Matei Cazacu, *L'impact ottoman sur les pays roumaines et ses incidences monétaires (1452–1504)*, in “Revue Roumaine d'Histoire”, XII, no. 1, 1973, pp. 188 et sqq.; Pavel Binder, *Itinerarul transilvănean al lui Vlad Țepeș*, in “Revista de Istorie”, tome 27, no. 10, 1974, pp. 1537–1542.

¹⁷ Șerban Papacostea, *Începuturile politicii comerciale a Țării Românești și Moldovei (secolele XIV–XVI). Drum și stat*, in “Studii și materiale de istorie medie”, X, 1983, p. 27. Through this conflict, Vlad the Impaler may have targeted a change in the external policy of King Matthias Corvinus, who was focusing on issues related to Central Europe, especially the conflicts with the Habsburgs and the Jagellons, and gave less importance to the anti-Ottoman defense. For the external policy of Matthias Corvinus, see also Lajos Elekes, *La politica estera di re Mattia e gli Stati italiani nella seconda metà del secolo XV*, in vol. *Rapporti veneto-ungheresi all'epoca del Rinascimento*, a cura di Tibor Klaniczay, Budapest, 1975, p. 246. Also, under the circumstances in which Matthias Corvinus, since the end of 1458, had been carrying secret negotiations with the Turks for an armistice (*Monumenta Hungariae Historica. Acta extera*, vol. IV, Budapest, 1875, pp. 36–40; Lino Gómez Canedo, *Un español al servicio de la Santa Sede. Don Juan de Carvajal, cardenal de Sant'Angelo, legado en Alemania y Hungría (1399?–1469)*, Madrid, 1947, p. 199). The sultan may have seen in the

Transylvania, especially the officials of Braşov, considered Vlad the Impaler “our enemy”¹⁸, who “was unfaithful to our king <and> sided with the Turks,”¹⁹ (underlined by E.D.), whereas King Matthias Corvinus, had started to regard him, in many ways, as a troublesome neighbor. In fact, Vlad the Impaler’s goals were, on the one hand, to consolidate his reign and the principality, and on the other hand, to eliminate any claims of suzerainty by Hungary and assert the full equality of Wallachia in her relations with this country. These goals were achieved by the treaty signed with Braşov around 1 October 1460.²⁰ Along its stipulations, the Saxon merchants were regaining their commercial privileges in Wallachia,²¹ and Vlad the Impaler was resuming his alliance with Matthias Corvinus, most probably also signing with him a secret treaty²² enabling him to begin preparations for the anti-Ottoman war, one of the major goals of Vlad the Impaler’s external policy.

Undoubtedly, while making these preparations, the Wallachian prince also took notice of the favorable international political background. In the West, despite the failure of the Congress of Mantua summoned by Pope Pius II (1458–1464) and under the circumstance created by a considerable deterioration of the Turkish-Venetian relations, an important anti-Ottoman coalition was being set afoot, with the prospective Christian army being possibly led by the Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza, and the Duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good.²³ Pope Pius II, one of the most active promoters of the anti-Ottoman crusade at the time, made several attempts to pacify the conflict between Matthias Corvinus and Emperor Frederic III (1440–

action taken by Vlad The Impaler a means to exert pressure on the Hungarian King, he may have given his consent to the military operations undertaken in Southern Transylvania, and may have accepted as a natural consequence the non-payment of the tribute to begin with 1459.

¹⁸ I. Bogdan, *Documente privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Braşovul...*, vol. I, p. 102, doc. LXXIX.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ Gustav Gündisch, *Vlad Țepeş und die Sächsischen Selbstverwaltungsgebiete Siebenbürgens*, in “Revue Roumaine d’Histoire”, VIII, no. 6, 1969, pp. 981–992. This treaty of peace and alliance seems to have been the natural consequence of a previous agreement with Matthias Corvinus (N. Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeş*, p. 89, n. 17; Radu Lungu, *À propos de la campagne antiottomane de Vlad l’Empaleur au sud du Danube (hiver 1461–1462)*, in “Revue Roumaine d’Histoire”, XXII, no. 2, 1983, pp. 149–150).

²¹ Ş. Papacostea, *Începuturile politicii comerciale a Țării Românești și Moldovei...*, p. 29.

²² I. Bogdan, *Documente privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Braşovul...*, I, p. 107; *Urkundenbuch zur Geschichte der Deutschen in Siebenbürgen*, VI, Bucureşti, 1981, pp. 90–91, doc. 3237; G. Gündisch, *Vlad Țepeş und die Sächsischen...*, pp. 986–992; N. Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeş*, p. 89, n. 17; Şt. Andreescu, *En marge des rapports de Vlad l’Empaleur avec l’Empire ottoman*, in “Revue des Etudes Sud Est Européennes”, XIV, no. 3, 1976, p. 374; Sergiu Iosipescu, *Conjunctura și condiționarea internațională politico-militară a celei de a doua domnii a lui Vlad Țepeş (1456–1462)*, in “Studii și materiale de muzeografie și istorie militară”, no. 11, 1978, p. 182; R. Lungu, *art. cit.*, pp. 149–150.

²³ G.B. Picotti, *La dieta di Mantova e la politica de’ Veneziani*, în *Miscellanea di storia veneta*, serie terza, tomo IV, Venezia, 1912.

1493) over the Hungarian Kingdom,²⁴ and on 4 January 1460, read the bull announcing the organization of the anti-Ottoman crusade.²⁵ On 20 February, the Pope offered Matthias Corvinus 40,000 ducats for a war with the Turks, on condition that he would not settle a separate peace with the Sultan,²⁶ and Matthias Corvinus committed himself to take part in the planned anti-Ottoman crusade with 12,000 soldiers.²⁷

In the East, another anti-Ottoman coalition was taking shape, with the princes of Georgia, Mingrelia, Guria and Trapezunt, and with Uzun Hasan, the Turcoman ruler of Persia, seeking possible allies in Europe. Vlad the Impaler may have met with their messengers who, accompanied by Monk Lodovico da Bologna,²⁸ crossed the Danube, traveled through Hungary and the German Empire, visited Venice, Florence, Rome, and eventually reached Philip the Good, the Duke of Burgundy.²⁹

Quite unfortunately for the Wallachian voivode, the evolution of the international political background was unfavorable. The anti-Ottoman coalition of the eastern princes was defeated in 1461, when Mehmed II conquered Sinope and Trapezunt. The western anti-Ottoman coalition was only set on foot in 1463, with great difficulty, and under the circumstances of the outbreak of a decisive war between Venice and the Ottoman Empire, and its functioning was greatly deficient, owing to the divergent interests of the participants. The outbreak of Vlad the Impaler's major conflict with the Ottoman Empire occurred exactly between these two events, when the Turks, under no other imminent threat, were perfectly able to concentrate their war effort, and when the Wallachian voivode could only rely on the assistance of Matthias Corvinus, notorious for never living up to his promises.

Given the fact that Vlad the Impaler had signed a peace with the Saxons of Southern Transylvania, had ended his conflict with Matthias Corvinus and, most probably, had carried out negotiations with the embassy of the eastern princes, the

²⁴ I.A. Fessler, F. Klein, *Geschichte von Ungarn*, III, Leipzig, 1876, pp. 20–21; Karl Nehring, *Mathias Corvinus, Kaiser Friederich III und das Reich. Zum hunyadisch-habsburgischen Gegensatz im Donauraum*, München, 1975, pp. 15–16.

²⁵ Nicolae Iorga, *Notes et extraits pour servir à l'histoire des croisades au XV^e siècle*, IV, Bucarest, 1915, pp. 166–168.

²⁶ Augustino Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica Hungariam sacram illustrantia*, vol. II, Roma, Paris, 1860, pp. 351, 356–357.

²⁷ L. Gómez Canedo, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

²⁸ Angelo Bargellesi Severi, *Nuovi Documenti su fr. Lodovico da Bologna, al secolo Lodovico Severi, Nunzio Apostolico in Oriente (1455–1457)*, in "Archivum Franciscanum Historicum", annus 69, fasc. 1–2. 1976, pp. 3–22; Jean Richard, *La Papauté et les missions d'Orient au Moyen Âge (XIII^e–XV^e siècles)*, Paris, Torino, 1977, pp. 274–278.

²⁹ A. Bryer, *Lodovico da Bologna and the Georgian Embassy of 1460–1461*, in "Bedi Kartlisa. Revue de kartvélogie", XIX–XX, 1965, Paris, pp. 181, 184, 191; Lajos Tardy, *Il ruolo di Venezia nei rapporti persiani e georgiani dell'Ungheria*, in the vol. *Rapporti veneto-ungheresi all'epoca del Rinascimento*, p. 258.

non-payment of the tribute was beginning to lose justification and raise concerns in Constantinople. In order to avoid a major clash with Vlad the Impaler and, implicitly, the opening of a new front at the Lower Danube, which may have also led to a clash with Hungary the outcome of which was difficult to fathom, and having just ended his campaign in the northeast region of Anatolia and begun preparations for a decisive war with Venice liable to settle the question of who held preponderance in the Levantine trade, Sultan Mehmed II tried to solve the issue peacefully, through negotiations.

Having learned of the agreement between Vlad the Impaler and Matthias Corvinus,³⁰ the Sultan sent an embassy to Wallachia, requesting that the voivode should abandon the alliance with Hungary and the project of marrying into the king's family.³¹ The embassy was unsuccessful. Vlad the Impaler agreed to resume the payments of the tribute. However, he refused to make these payments in person³² or supply children for the Janissary troops, which up to then had not been a custom in Wallachia.³³ Undoubtedly, the Wallachian voivode and the conqueror of Constantinople had started to grow suspicious of each other.

The sultan gave no more credit to Vlad the Impaler's explanations,³⁴ among which a possible threat from Hungary, and decided to replace him. Still wishing to avoid a major clash at the Lower Danube, Mehmed II attempted to do so by ruse, and not through a military campaign whose outcome was uncertain. But the ambush set up by Hamza bey and the Greek Catabolinos, near Giurgiu, ended in disaster, the two being captured and impaled. At this point, the war with the Turks had become unavoidable, and Vlad the Impaler decided to wage it vigorously and employ all the possible means and methods so as to achieve victory.

I shall invoke here *a third argument* in support of the break between Vlad the Impaler and the Ottoman Porte having occurred not in 1459, but only towards the end of 1461, more exactly the contemporary or subsequent Turkish-Byzantine and Ottoman chronicles, in which the same sequence of events is thoroughly maintained.

Laonicus Chalcocondyles in his *Demonstrations of History* notes that Vlad the Impaler fought against the Hungarians with the consent of the Sultan, and that

³⁰ Most probably, from the spies infiltrated in Hungary (Fr. Babinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 246–247).

³¹ These details appear in the well-known letter of Vlad the Impaler to Matthias Corvinus of 11 February 1462, after the attack on the Ottoman positions at the Danube (I. Bogdan, *Vlad Țepeș și narațiunile germane și rusești asupra lui*, București, 1896, p. 79; N. Iorga, *Scrisori de boieri. Scrisori de domni*, third edition, Vălenii de Munte, 1931, p. 165; Andrei Corbea, *Cu privire la corespondența lui Țepeș cu Matia Corvin*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie și Arheologie 'A.D. Xenopol'", XVII, 1980, p. 677).

³² Tursun-Bey, *op. cit.*, ed. cit., p. 68.

³³ N. Stoicescu, *Vlad Țepeș*, p. 91, n. 24.

³⁴ Radu Florescu and Raymond T. McNally, in *Dracula. A Biography of Vlad the Impaler (1431–1476)*, New York, 1973, believe that Vlad the Impaler refused to travel to the Porte because the Turks were suspecting some improvement in his relations with Matthias Corvinus (pp. 90–91).

only subsequently did the Wallachian voivode consider a direct clash with the Turks: “And the Peons (Hungarians – n. by E.D.), not few of them, whom he believed holding some public office, not sparing any of those, he killed in great numbers. When he believed he had thus secured the throne of Dacia, he considered severing the ties with the Emperor. But these people he punished with the knowledge of the emperor, to strengthen his reign and avoid all troubles, lest the noblemen in Dacia should rebel again and call their allies, the Peons, to their relief.”³⁵ The events of the winter of 1461–1462, when the real break between Vlad the Impaler and Sultan Mehmed II occurred, are presented in a completely different light: “And then, in the winter, when the emperor heard that he was nurturing evil thoughts, and had turned to the Peons to settle agreements and an alliance with them, he considered it to be a terrible thing; and sending over a faithful man of the Porte, a Greek clerk, he summoned him to the Porte, for if he came to the Porte, the Emperor would do no harm to him, on the contrary, as he had served the interests of the emperor, he would gain favors and rewards far exceeding the good he had done the emperor. This was the order with which the clerk of the Porte Catavolinos was sent over to him. And to Chamza, called the falconer, who had been appointed governor of Vidin and of a large territory at the Istrus and, he sent secret instructions, and promised a great reward if he could catch that man and deliver him, either by ruse or by any other means.”³⁶ Mehmed II’s intention to have Vlad the Impaler captured by ruse clearly shows that between the two, in the second part of 1461, there was at least a semblance of good relations.

In his *Byzantine-Turkish Chronicle (1341–1462)*, Ducas speaks of two Ottoman embassies sent to Vlad the Impaler, and of the Wallachian voivode’s campaign south of the Danube, events placed in 1461: “In 6970 (1461 – n. by E.D.) he sent a messenger to the Wallachian voivode, summoning him to come to pay homage and bring with him 500 boys and the annual tribute, that is ten thousand gold pieces. The voivode answered: he had the gold pieces ready, but not the boys; as to paying homage in person, this could no longer be done. Upon hearing it, the tyrant was seized with rage and, sending over one of his valiant men together with one of his secretaries, he ordered: “Bring me the tribute! And I shall see what else is to be done.” And when they came to the Romanian and told him what the sultan had ordered, he had them impaled, making them suffer an inhuman, painful and ugly death. Then he crossed with his army and wreaked havoc in Dristra and, taking many prisoners among the little people, he took them all in Wallachia and put them to death in the same way.”³⁷

³⁵ Laonic Chalkokondyles, *op. cit.*, ed. cit., p. 283.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 283.

³⁷ Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină (1341–1462)*, critical edition by Vasile Grecu, București, 1958, p. 430.

Kritoboulos of Imbros, who also places the break between Vlad the Impaler and Mehmed II in 1461, writes the following: “While the emperor (sultan) was undertaking this (the conquest of Sinope and Trapezunt – n. by E.D.), he heard that Draculea, the prince of the Gaetes (Romanians of Wallachia), trying to bring about some change, had rebelled, and, having gathered a large army, horsemen and weapons, had turned against the emperor (sultan) who had given him this voivodeship ...

And having crossed the Istros with great might and a large army, he had ravaged the neighboring country that belonged to the emperor (sultan), namely the region of Nicopolis and Vidin, also taking a lot of booty; and after having inflicted much bloodshed, he crossed (the Danube) back into his country.”³⁸

Georgios Sphrantzes makes a brief note of the sultan’s expedition of 1462 into Wallachia.³⁹ However, all the Turkish-Byzantine chronicles⁴⁰ agree on the fact that the year 1459 did not mark a break in the relations between Vlad the Impaler and the Ottoman Porte, this break occurring at a later time, in 1461, during or immediately after the sultan’s campaign against Trapezunt.

A similar approach is given by the Ottoman chronicles, which one may consider, in the absence of any eloquent Romanian sources for the related period, the most reliable sources describing the developments of 1459–1462 at the Lower Danube.

Thus, *Enverî*, a contemporary chronicler who finished his *Düsturname* (The Vezir’s Book) in 1465, is quite clear as to the evolution of the conflict between the Wallachian prince and the sultan:

“After the shah had conquered Trapezunt (*Tarabuzun*)
 He set out from there to Rumelia.
 He bestowed great richness upon that land
 And all enemies were punished.
 While the shah was in those parts (in Trapezunt – n. ed.),
 And the Romanian was here,
 He wreaked such havoc that everybody was awestruck.
 (.....)
 The shah summoned the voivode
 Then Iunus was sent out on an embassy.
 Iunus-bey and Hamza-bey died a martyr’s death,
 And the villain also wreaked havoc on the Danube bank.
 When the year 866 came (1461–1462 – n. by E.D.),
 The padishah launched a holly expedition against him.”⁴¹

³⁸ Kritoboulos of Imbros, *Din domnia lui Mahomed al II-lea. Anii 1451–1467*, edition by Vasile Grecu, Bucureşti, 1963, p. 290.

³⁹ Georgios Sphrantzes, *Memorii. 1401–1477*, critical edition by Vasile Grecu, Bucureşti, 1966, p. 129.

⁴⁰ Mihail Guboglu, *Vlad Ţepeş şi Mehmed al II-lea în lumina cronicilor turco-bizantine*, in “Revista arhivelor”, LIII, vol. XXXVIII, no. 4, 1976, pp. 381–390.

⁴¹ Enverî, *Düsturname*, in *Cronici turceşti privind Țările Române. Extrase*, vol. I, Sec. XV–mijlocul sec. XVII, volume by Mihail Guboglu and Mustafa Mehmet, Bucureşti, 1966, pp. 41–42.

Another contemporary chronicler, *Tursun-bei*, who wrote his chronicle between 1497 and 1500, clearly states that Vlad the Impaler's revolt occurred at a time when the sultan was involved in military operations against Trapezunt, and not earlier: "Thus, relying on the Porte, he defeated the Hungarians, killing many of them... But glory made him too confident in his own strength, and when the sultan was far away, on his expedition against Trapezunt, stirred by pride and by his warring nature, he considered causing damage to the Moslem countries... To test his loyalty, they asked of him the tribute and ordered him to come to the Porte. But this cowardly villain, putting aside all submission, invoked many a pretext and excuse. Thus, he declared he could not pay the tribute, because his enemy the Hungarian was strong and standing up against him. He also pretended that being far away from the Porte, he could not travel there; and that he had spent that year in battles everything he had, in order to prevent a victory of his enemies... He did not come and neither did he pay the tribute."⁴² One can see from Tursun-bey's account that Vlad the Impaler was actually trying to buy time, invoking arguments no longer valid for the new international political background. Thus, if in 1459 the sultan had understood and accepted the reasons invoked by the voivode, in 1461 he was no longer prepared to do so.

Chronicler *Aşîk-paşa-zade*, who was contemporary with events taking place at the Lower Danube in 1459–1462, also places the moment of break between the Wallachian voivode and Mehmed II in 1461. According to him, the sultan did not intend to capture Vlad the Impaler by ruse. The responsibility for the episode is fully attributed to the Romanian voivode who, in his evilness, was striving to do as much harm to the Turks as possible: "then he <the sultan> returned to Istanbul from his expedition (against Trapezunt – n. by E. D.)⁴³ ... Messengers started to arrive from all the neighboring lands. A messenger from the bey of Wallachia also arrived. Upon his messenger's return, they sent a messenger to him, summoning the bey of Wallachia to the Porte.

On his arrival, the messenger informed the bey of Wallachia about the purpose of his mission. But the latter gave the following answer: 'The people in my vilayet are unfaithful to me, and if I leave my vilayet and go there, they will bring over the Hungarian and give this country to him. I wish the sultan would soon send here, to the Danube bank, one of his border beys, to watch over this vilayet. Then I will set out to pay homage to my sultan.'

The sultan trusted this infidel, and sent over Hamza Ceakîrdjibaşı, who traveled to the border of the Danube, which then had frozen, and settled there. On this bank, the Muslims went about their chores peacefully. The Danube had frozen thoroughly.

The bey of Wallachia, this accursed son of a bastard, attacked Hamza-bey by midnight. He killed many Muslims, captured Hamza-bey, and had the infidels cross

⁴² Tursun-bei, *op. cit.*, ed. cit., p. 68.

⁴³ Aşîk-paşa-zade, *Tevarih-i al-i Osman*, in *ibidem*, vol. I, p. 92, n. 47.

the Danube over in several points. They raided the region and caused much damage to that vilayet.

He had Hamza-bey beheaded, and sent his head, together with the heads of many other Moslems, to the Hungarian king, saying: 'I have become the Turk's enemy.' All the beys heard of it and understood that this infidel had become the enemy of the padishah."⁴⁴ Leaving aside all the propagandistic inaccuracies, it clearly appears that, according to Aşık-paşa-zade, Vlad the Impaler became the enemy of the sultan only in 1461.

Chronicler Mehmed Neşri gives the same propagandistic and fantasist approach to the events,⁴⁵ attributing the entire responsibility of the war to Vlad the Impaler, whom he accuses of having captured by ruse and murdered Hamza bey and the Greek Catabolinos. Quite important is the fact that Neşri dates the events to the same period: "When Sultan Mehmed returned to Istanbul from his expedition against Trapezunt."⁴⁶ Upon sending the head of Hamza bey to Matthias Corvinus, Vlad the Impaler also let him know that, "I have become the enemy of the Turk."⁴⁷ Mehmed Neşri adds: "Everybody knew that infidel to be an enemy of the sultan. In short, when the padishah learned about the treachery of the accursed infidel, he gathered the Islamic army and set forth, announcing that he intended to make a holy expedition."⁴⁸

The Ottoman chroniclers who wrote about these events at a later time are unanimous about placing the break between Vlad the Impaler and Mehmed II not in 1459, but towards the end of 1461, after the sultan's expedition against Trapezunt.

Thus, according to Şemseddin Ahmed bin Suleiman Kemal-paşa-zade, who died in 1535, "He (Vlad the Impaler – n. by E.D.) caused much trouble in the lands at the border with Wallachia, and did much harm to the Moslems living there. During the aforementioned expedition (against Trapezunt – n. by E.D.), Ishak-pasha had been given the task to remain in the capital of Adrianople and guard the throne; thus, having no power to trample down that conceited lunatic or strike him in any way, he had no other choice than endure it."⁴⁹ And, further on: "In 866 (6 October 1461–25 September 1462 – n. by E.D.), acting unlike himself, he was seized with fear ... As the voivode of Wallachia had not come to the Porte of Happiness that year, and had shown no interest in sending over the money for the *gizie*; for this reason, from the Nest As High As the Sky a men set out with an order calling for submission and summoning him to the Court That Protects the

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 92–93.

⁴⁵ Mehmed Neşri, *Djihannuma. Tarih-i al-i Osman*, in *ibidem*, pp. 125–126.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 126.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ Şemseddin Ahmed bin Suleiman Kemal-paşa-zade, *Tevarih-i al-i Osman*, in *ibidem*, p. 200.

World. But he took no notice of it, and started making excuses.”⁵⁰ The Ottoman chronicler accuses Vlad the Impaler of having started the hostilities by capturing and murdering Hamza bey and Catabolinos, and attributes him the following words, sent to Matthias Corvinus: “although a long time enemy of his, deciding to befriend him, he told him: ‘From now on, having put an end to the false friendship with the Turk, I have decided to take the path of hatred. Scattering his army, which had come to guard my country, I wreaked havoc in the neighboring lands belonging to him.’”⁵¹

Sa’adeddin Mehmed hodja efendi (1536–1599) gives an approach similar with other chroniclers’, and adds that Vlad the Impaler “thought that the expedition against Trapezunt would be a good occasion and, reaching out greedily, he embarked upon an evil path, in accordance with his treacherous nature.”⁵²

Mehmed bin Mehmed (?–1640) is quite eloquent: “When the praiseworthy shah was besieging Trapezunt, he learnt of the rebellious and inimical acts of Kazîkî, the prince of Wallachia.”⁵³

Kodja Husein (1570–1650) also places the break between Vlad the Impaler and Mehmed II in 1461, the year when the expedition against Trapezunt was undertaken: “While the sultan was on an expedition against Trapezunt, which took longer than expected, and while the emperor’s armies were far away from the serhat of Wallachia, that infidel, showing ungratefulness to his benefactor, surpassed himself in evilness and reached out greedily to seize the raya of the Islamic lands.”⁵⁴ Unlike the other Ottoman chroniclers, Kodja Husein, who wrote his account at a later time, when he was no longer under the obligation of taking into account sultan Mehmed II’s susceptibility, asserts that the sultan had ordered army preparations before his exchange of messengers with the prince of Wallachia, and that the final decision to launch the campaign was made after the capture and execution of Hamza bey and Catabolinos.⁵⁵

The break between Vlad the Impaler and Mehmed II is also placed in 1461 by another Ottoman chronicler, Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi (?–1658), who clearly states: “when the Shah of the World’s Shahs <Mehmed II> was besieging Trapezunt, the prince of Wallachia, voivode <Vlad> the Impaler, finding in this an opportunity for looting and taking advantage of the fact that those lands were unguarded, reach out for the inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire.”⁵⁶ And Solakzade,

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 201.

⁵² Sa’adeddin Mehmed hodja efendi, *Tadj-üt-Tevarih*, in *ibidem*, pp. 317–318.

⁵³ Mehmed bin Mehmed, *Nuhbet-üt-tevarih ve’l ahbar*, in *ibidem*, p. 406.

⁵⁴ Kodja Husein, *Beda’i ul-veka’i*, in *ibidem*, p. 455.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁶ Solakzade Mehmed Hemdemi, *Tarih-i Solakzade*, in *ibidem*, vol. II, *Sec. XVII-inceputul sec. XVIII*, volume by Mihail Guboglu, București, 1974, p. 139.

like Kodja Husein, can note with no fear of offending the sultan that a call up was ordered before the messengers were sent to the prince of Wallachia.

Therefore, one should note that all the Turkish-Byzantine chronicles clearly place the break between Vlad the Impaler and Mehmed II during the sultan's campaign of 1461 against Trapezunt, or immediately after, the year 1459 bearing no significance in this respect. Analysing the information in the documentary and narrative sources currently at hand, one may consider that the year 1459 was an important year in the reign of Vlad the Impaler, but did not mark the break in the relations of the Wallachian prince with the conqueror of Constantinople. *This break should be placed, based on all the information at hand, during or immediately after the sultan's campaign against Trapezunt, namely in 1461 or, at the latest, in the winter of 1461–1462.*

A fourth argument in support of this assertion would be the attitude of Venice towards developments taking place at the Lower Danube. Venice, being aware of the imminence of a major and decisive clash with the Ottomans over the Levantine trade, was the Italian and Mediterranean power most interested in any event liable to hinder the expansion policy of sultan Mehmed II. In 1459, the year in which the break between Vlad the Impaler and the sultan allegedly occurred, Venice showed little interest in the area, no doubt because the events taking place there announced no major changes. Quite different was the situation in 1461 and 1462. By the end of 1461, the Venetian diplomats warned the Hungarian King, Matthias Corvinus, about the imminence of a war with the Turks⁵⁷ and tried to mediate his reconciliation with Emperor Frederic III,⁵⁸ albeit unsuccessfully. On 4 March 1462, Venice's envoy to Buda, Pietro Tomasso (Petrus de Thomassis), informed the Senate that he had been called by the king and invited to read some letters from a messenger sent by him to Vlad the Impaler, in which the Wallachian prince was informing him about all the damage he had caused the Turks, about the great number of killed people he had seen, "judging by the multitude of severed heads, to say nothing of the people who had been burned in those places." Therefore, the Venetian diplomat was requesting from his superiors "denarij per subventionem".⁵⁹ In addition, the news about Vlad the Impaler's insurgence traveled to Venice with no delay, and from there, almost immediately, on 20 March, to Rome.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Monumenta Hungariae Historica. Acta extera*, IV, pp. 92–93; Ş. Papacostea, *Venise et les Pays Roumains au Moyen Âge*, Firenze, 1973, estratto da *Venezia e il Levante fino al sec. XV*, p. 608.

⁵⁸ *Monumenta Hungariae Historica. Acta extera*, IV, pp. 111 and 120. See also Roberto Lopez, *Il principio della guerra veneto-turca nel 1463*, in "Archivio Veneto", series V, XV, 1934, pp. 45–131.

⁵⁹ Ioan Bianu, *Ştefanu celu Mare. Câteva documente din Arhivulu de statu de la Milanu*, in "Columna lui Traian", January–February 1883, pp. 34–35.

⁶⁰ On 20 March 1462, the Venetian Senate sent to Rome the report of the Venetian ambassador in Buda and a copy of what one may term a genuine war coverage, sent by Vlad The Impaler to Matthias Corvinus: "simul cum certis exemplis litterarum per vaivodam Valachiae scriptarum Regi

As the developments to follow are well known in Romanian historiography, I shall no longer dwell on them. On the contrary, I think it quite appropriate to reaffirm that the year 1459, an important year in the reign of Vlad the Impaler, was in no respect a turning point in his relations with the Ottoman Porte, the actual break occurring in 1461 or in the winter of 1461–1462, during or immediately after sultan Mehmed II's campaign against Trapezunt.

Hungariae nonnulla nova felicia continentium.” (*Monumenta Hungariae Historica. Acta extera*, IV, pp. 121–122; Ș. Papacostea, *Venise et les Pays Roumains...*, p. 608; N. Stoicescu, *Vlad Ţepeş*, p. 95).