

CRUSADING IN THE TIME OF THE PLAGUE: THE ARBITRAGE OF FOLIGNO (SEPTEMBER 1476)

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Abstract

Since autumn 1475, the plague repeatedly ravaged Rome. Because of the renewed outbreak of the plague, in June 1476, Pope Sixtus IV left the city on the Tiber and took-up residence in Foligno, in Umbria. At that time, Sultan Mehmed II was about to enter Moldavia against the athlete of the Papacy, Stephen III the Great. The Ottoman campaign was a failure, for all combatants in effect. A 200,000 ducats crusader levy was agreed by most of the Italian states. The collection and the distribution of the sum led however to heated discussions between the ambassadors summoned to Sixtus IV's new residence, chiefly between those of Naples and of Venice. Ferdinand of Aragon, king of Naples wanted the entire subsidy to be sent to Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary, his son-in law to be. The Republic of Venice demanded the disputed sum for her Eastern favourite, Stephen. Apparently more preoccupied by the purity of the air, Sixtus delegate the highly delicate matter to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, the son of Ludovico III il Turco, margrave of Mantua. In the end, both Matthias (the Hungarian) and Stephen (the Romanian) came out empty-handed from this affair.

Keywords: Sixtus IV, Matthias Corvinus, Stephen III of Moldavia, Francesco Gonzaga, crusading, plague.

On September 24, 1476, *Iohannes Petrus Arrivabenus* (his Latinized name according to the Humanist customs of the age) wrote to *this master* in Mantua.¹ Without much ado, he reported on the imperative need to provide *the Hungarian* with the due subsidy that was difficult to collect. *Arrivabenus'* blunt lines constitute a rather rare insider perspective into late medieval crusading.

According to *Arrivabenus*, certain Italian powers (including foremost *the King*, Venice and even Florence and possibly the Duke of Ferrara), headed by

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¹ Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Mantua (ASMa), Archivio Gonzaga (A.G.), E. Affari esteri, XXV. Roma, busta 834. 1404-1499, nn. (See Appendix, no. III).

the Pope, had imposed – through an eventually mutual agreement – a collective levy of 200,000 ducats to be used against *the Turk*. From the onset, the Florentines stated that they were unable to overtly support such an agreement (which they otherwise approved) because of their trading relations with the Ottoman Empire. They were however willing to pay 15,000 ducats, plus whatever came short of the 200,000 ducats target (some additional 10,000-11,000 ducats, based on – biased – Florentine estimates).

The Pope and the ambassadors of the Italian states, involved in the said mitigated anti-Ottoman arrangement, agreed – *in Consistory* (!)² – on September 23, to accept the Florentine offer, so that the anti-Ottoman initiative would not end in (another) total failure. Hence, the three year plan was staled (if not completely abandoned). Each party involved was to contribute as much as it desired (that is: was able to politically afford). Additionally, the parties agreed – through their ambassadors – that the money thus collected was to be sent either to *the Hungarian* or to *the Romanian* (or – even – to someone else). The latter part proved in effect most delicate.

The King wanted the money for *the Hungarian*. Venice endorsed *the Romanian*. Heavy words were exchanged between the ambassadors. Albeit this less than diplomatic talks, *the Pope*, *the King*, as well as the Venetians agreed to pay at once all their due shares agreed upon in the now largely obsolete three year arrangement. This omen seemed eventually auspicious, for Mantua too. Mantua's own cardinal was to decide who was to receive the disputed subsidy.

The timing and the place, when and where this arbitrage was consented, were in return less than favourable. *The Pope* had taken court in Foligno,³ in the area of Umbria (not far from Perugia). Along with his retinue (including both largely trusted cardinals and the representatives of Italian states), *the Pope* had left Rome because of the plague, a plague that nearly caught up with him in Foligno, an estate of the Pontifical domain. Because of this, *the Pope* had ordered all orange trees to be cut down, so that the earth could breed (even though, by late September, the plague had lost its grip on Rome, tormented nonetheless by other diseases, *the Pope* and his company returned to the Tiber only on Saint Martin's Day, on November 11, 1476).⁴

² The designation was by definition employed for the (often secret) meetings of the cardinals, called by the pope. In 1476, the only known consistory was on December 18, when five cardinals were created. The consistory recorded by *Arrivabenus* was either not a proper consistory (more likely) or was pushed into oblivion (for reasons unknown).

³ He was housed in the Palazzo Trinci (see also Flavio di Bernardo, *Un vescovo umanista alla corte pontificia: Giannantonio Campano: 1429-1477*, vol. 39, *Miscellanea Historiae Pontificae*, (Rome: Università Gregoriana Editrice, 1975), 337-338.

⁴ See in comparison (1475-1480) Anne G. Carmichael, *Plague and the Poor in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986), 14-15.

The Text and the Context of a Mantuan Report from Autumn 1476

The author of the report, *Iohannes Petrus Arrivabenus*, was Giampietro Arrivabene,⁵ the loyal servant of Ludovico III *Il Turco* Gonzaga, margrave of Mantua (1444-1478).⁶ *The Pope* at Foligno was Sixtus IV (1471-1484),⁷ who had left Rome in early June 1476, frightened by the plague that had largely ended the Jubilee of 1475.⁸ *The King* was Ferdinand (Ferrante) of Aragon, the master of Naples (1458-1494),⁹ under whose authority Sixtus IV had placed the Papal Estates upon his departure from Rome.¹⁰ Ferdinand's daughter, Beatrice, was about to marry (the wedding was celebrated in December 1476)¹¹ *the Hungarian*, that is King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary (1458-1490).¹² At Foligno, King Ferdinand envoys quarrelled (to put it mildly)¹³ with the Venetian representatives, the Italian and crusader advocates of *the Romanian*, Stephen III of Moldavia (1457-1504), appointed *the athlete* of the Papacy by Sixtus IV.¹⁴

Precisely in the year of the Jubilee, *the Romanian* had defeated the Ottoman host at Vaslui (January 10, 1475), the most important Christian victory since the battle of Belgrade (1456), in the end the main crusader accomplishment of Matthias' father, John Hunyadi.¹⁵ In March 1475, Stephen III had even been awaited in Rome,

⁵ David S. Chambers, "Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene (1439-1504): Humanistic Secretary and Bishop," *Aevum* 58, no. 3 (1984): 397-438.

⁶ Isabella Lazzarini, "Ludovico III Gonzaga, marchese di Mantova," *Dizionario Bibliografico degli Italiani* 66, (2006): *sub voce*.

⁷ Massimo Miglio, "Una biografia pontificia per immagini. Sisto IV e l'Ospedale di Santo Spirito," *Il Veltro* 45, no. 5-6 (2001): 111-124.

⁸ For an overview: Eva-Maria Jung-Inglessis, *Das heilige Jahr in der Geschichte. 1300-1975* (Bozen: Athesiadruck, 1974).

⁹ Ludwig von Pastor, *The History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, vol. 4 [1464-1484] (London, 1906), 283-284, 288-289 (based largely on the archives of Mantua, Milan and Modena, alike this paper).

¹⁰ Sixtus IV went to Viterbo (Stefano Infessura, Oreste Tommasini, *Diario della città di Roma*, (Rome: Forzani e c. Tipografi del Senato, 1890), 81). Then he took shelter in Foligno. He left Foligno only to attend Saint Francis' *Festa del Perdono* in Assisi in August.

¹¹ E.g., Szabolcs de Vajay, "Un ambassadeur *bien choisi*: Bernardinus de Frangipanus et sa mission à Naples, en 1476," in Balazs Nagy, Márcell Sebök *The man of many devices, who wandered full many ways: Festschrift in Honour of János M. Bak* (Budapest: Central European University Press; Plymouth: Plymbridge (distributor), 1999), 550-557.

¹² For instance: Magda Jászay, "Contrastes et diplomatie dans les rapports de Matthias I^{er} Corvin et la République de Venise," *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 35, no.1-4 (1989) : 3-39.

¹³ For Italian diplomatic practices at that time: Isabella Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict: Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350-1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 141-142.

¹⁴ See also Johannes Moravitz, *Das öffentliche Bild von Uzun Hasan und Stefan dem Großen in venezianischen Quellen* [MA thesis] (Vienna: Universität Wien, 2016).

¹⁵ Ovidiu Cristea, "The Aftermath of a Victory: An Episode of Stephen the Great's Diplomacy after the Battle of Vaslui (10 January 1475)," *Banatica* 28 (2018): 453-463.

ad limina Apostolorum,¹⁶ to be crowned king – of Bosnia nevertheless (a throne to which he had been appointed by Matthias, Bosnia’s rightful lord) – by Sixtus (this had been – falsely – reported back to Mantua by the same Arrivabene).¹⁷ Irrespective of whether they were real or just tendered rumours, such endeavours seem to have fallen victims to the plague that spread across Rome in the last months of the Jubilee year.¹⁸

The cardinal who was to decide upon the fate of the crusader funds – much to the Italian advantage of Mantua (to Arrivabene’s personal satisfaction as well)¹⁹ – was Francesco Gonzaga, the son of margrave Ludovico III.²⁰ The reluctant attitude of Medici controlled Florence,²¹ fearful of compromising its already traditional friendship with Ottoman sultan Mehmed II,²² came much to Mantua’s – envisaged – advantage in late September 1476, but halted possibly real crusader desires,²³ leading to quite minimal active anti-Ottoman stands in the Italian Peninsula.²⁴

The city on the Arno, not entirely reticent towards crusading of pro-Ottoman,²⁵ was in fact on the brink of civil war,²⁶ barely avoided less than two years later because

¹⁶ Tamás Fedeles, “*Bosniae ... rex ... apostolorum limina visit: die Romwallfahrt des Nicolaus Újlaki im Jahre 1475*,” *Ungarn-Jahrbuch*, 31 no. 2011-2013 (2014): 99-118.

¹⁷ ASMa, A.G., E. Affari esteri, XXV. Roma, busta 834, nn (March 11, 1475): [...] *Fra quattro di se aspecta qui lo Re de Bosna, el qual dicono essere un duca Stephano vaivoda intitulado re dal Re de Hungaria, al qual dicono spectar de far lo Re de Bosna [...]* (Ioan-Aurel Pop, Alexandru Simon, “România și regele Ștefan la Jubileu de la Roma (March 1475)”, *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, NS, 31 (2020):, Appendix, no. III, in press).

¹⁸ Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, 4, 283-284.

¹⁹ For the ambitions of the House of Gonzaga and its network of informants, see also Alexandru Simon, “*Istorie e novelle de Levante din primăvara anului 1468: Uzun Hassan, Morea și cei 30 000 de morți de la Baia*,” *Revista Istorică*, NS, 28, no. 5-6 (2018) [2020], 343-352.

²⁰ I. Lazzarini, “Francesco Gonzaga,” *Dizionario Bibliografico degli Italiani*, 57 (2002): *sub voce*.

²¹ Franz Babinger’s classic study, “Lorenzo de’ Medici e la corte ottomana,” *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 121, (1963): 305-361, is worth reviewing in light of the documents (re?) discovered over the past decades.

²² E.g. Giuseppe Müller, *Documenti sulle relazioni delle città Toscane coll’Oriente Cristiano e coi Turchi fino all’anno MDXXXI* (Florence, 1879), nos. 175-183, 218-222 (October 1473-December 1476).

²³ See, in Florentine, as well as Wallachian comparison, also Albert Weber, Adrian Gheorghe, “Cezar din Florența, calamarii și valahii (1462),” *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie*, 34 (2016): 61-71.

²⁴ Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and Levant (1204-1571)* (=Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, CXIV, CXXVII, CLXI, CLXII), vol. 2, *The Fifteenth Century* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1978), 325-326 (chiefly note 41).

²⁵ E.g., Robert Black, *Benedetto Accolti and the Florentine Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 273-274; Cristelle Baskins, “The Bride of Trebizond: Turks and Turkmens on a Florentine Wedding Chest, Circa 1460,” *Muqarnas*, 29 (2012): 83-100, at pp. 94-95.

²⁶ For the main and often divergent views: Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici, 1434-1494* (Oxford, Clarendon P., 1966¹); John Law, R. Black, *The Medici: Citizens and Masters*, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2015).

of the failure of the *congiura dei Pazzi* (April 1478),²⁷ an anti-Medici conspiracy to which both Pope Sixtus IV (above all)²⁸ and King Matthias Corvinus²⁹ were no strangers. The Papacy (to be more accurate: the Pontifical House della Rovere)³⁰ and the father-in-law of *the Hungarian*, Ferdinand of Aragon, wanted to remove the House of Medici (along with her bank) from all Italian affairs.³¹ Milan, Venice and then France (approached, like Florence, by Matthias also in view of a joint attack on Venice)³² came to the aid of Lorenzo de Medici, who had survived the conspiracy.³³

The Florentine conflict (an Italian *casus belli*) largely sealed the otherwise expected defeat of Venice in her sixteen year war with the High Porte (1463-1479).³⁴ Remarkably, under these circumstances, Venice, accused since of 1474 by Florentines of falsifying information from the East,³⁵ went to great lengths in the second half of 1478 to secure at least 10,000 ducats³⁶ from Sixtus IV for Stephen III (less than ten months later, the ruler of Moldavia fortified his major Pontic harbours, Cetatea Albă and Chilia, at great financial and human costs).³⁷ Almost against her own nature, the Republic of Saint Mark held on to her Eastern favourite well after Foligno.

²⁷ Lauro Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Marcello Simonetta, *The Montefeltro Conspiracy: A Renaissance Mystery Decoded* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

²⁸ Tobias Daniels, *La congiura dei Pazzi: i documenti del conflitto fra Lorenzo de' Medici e Sisto IV. Le bolle di scomunica, la Fiorentina Synodus, e la Dissentio insorta tra la Santità del Papa e i Fiorentini* (Florence: Edifir Edizioni Firenze, 2013).

²⁹ Cesare Vasoli, "Francesco Bandini tra Firenze e Buda," *Rivista di Studi Ungheresi*, 4 (1989): 37-51; Attila Györkös, "La guerre des Pazzi et les relations franco-hongroises (1478-1481)," in *Matthias and his Legacy: Cultural and Political Encounters between East and West*, ed. Attila Bárány, Attila Györkös (Debrecen: Speculum historiae Debreceniense 1. Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi Intézet 2009), 393-404, at pp. 396-397.

³⁰ E.g. Wolfgang Strobl, "Der Papstneffe Pietro Riario als Antichrist: Zeitkritisches in einem apokalyptischen Epos des 15. Jahrhunderts?," *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, 41 (2003): 73-81.

³¹ In relation to the Balkans: T. Daniels, "The Pazzi War and Croatians in the Service of Papal Propaganda: Mato Ragnina's *Super pace Venetorum cum Magno Turco* (1479)," *Colloquia Maruliana*, 26 (2017): 189-204.

³² Györkös, "La guerre des Pazzi," 396-398.

³³ Riccardo Fubini, "La congiura dei Pazzi: radici politico-sociali e ragioni di un fallimento," in *Italia quattrocentesca. Politica e diplomazia nell'età di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, ed. Riccardo Fubini (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1994), 87-106.

³⁴ See also Diana G. Wright, Pierre MacKay, "When the *Serenissima* and the *Gran Turco* Make Love: The Peace Treaty of 1478," *Studi Veneziani*, 53 (2007): 261-277.

³⁵ Giustiniano Degli Azzi, "Un frammento inedito della Cronaca di Benedetto Dei," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 110, no. 1 (1952): 99-113, at pp. 111-113.

³⁶ Documents published already by Constantin Esarcu, *Ștefan cel Mare. Documente descoperite în Archivele Veneției* (offprint *Columna lui Traian*, V) (Bucharest: Typ 1874), nos. 7-8, 55, 61.

³⁷ *Cronica Moldo-Germană*, in *Cronicile slavo-române din secolele XV-XVI publicate de Ioan Bogdan*, ed. Petre P. Panaitescu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Romîne, 1959), 28-37, at p. 34.

The dispute over the beneficiary (beneficiaries?) of the most likely never collected 200,000 crusader ducats of 1476³⁸ was by no means a novelty in Italian politics, but caught Italian public attention (so to say),³⁹ because of its peculiar nature: the king of Naples wanted the money for his *Latin* rite son-in-law to be, the offspring of *the Wallachian (Romanian)*, *athlete* John Hunyadi, while Venice, well seasoned in Eastern combats and intrigues, claimed the subsidy for *Greek* rite *athlete*, Stephen III of Moldavia, *the Wallachian (the Romanian)* as recorded – without any comments or doubts – by Arrivabene.⁴⁰ Moreover, the *Serenissima* had recently secured the Papal proclamation of the crusade *in those parts* (i.e. in Moldavia)⁴¹ for Stephen's benefit, whose family was housed in Venice in the summer of 1476, on the expenses of the challenged republic.⁴²

The conflict between Buda and Suceava over crusader primacy (financial and monarchical), a conflict fuelled by the Italian powers, had irrupted the latest in March that same year.⁴³ In spring, the Papal curia witnessed a heated dispute between the envoys of Stephen and those of Matthias, calmed

³⁸ Only Jan Długosz, the resolute adversary of the Hunyadis, claimed the opposite, writing that Matthias duped everybody, except the by then late duke of Milan, Galeazzo Maria Sforza (for whose life style Długosz had little respect), and wasted the Italian money on his wedding with Beatrice (*Annales seu cronici incliti Regni Poloniae* (=Jan Długosii Senioris Canonici Cracoviensis Opera omnia, XI-XIV), edited by Alexander Przezdziecki, IV (Krakow, 1887) (*Długosz*), pp. 647-648, 652-653).

³⁹ E.g. Iván Nagy, Albert Nyáry, *Magyar diplomacziái emlékek. Mátyás király korából 1458-1490* (=Monumenta Hungariae Historica, IV, 1-4), II. [1466-1480] (Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, 1876) (MDE), no. 214, 310; no. 219, 318 (the reports sent from Buda by the “triple agent,” Milanese, Venetian and Hungarian, Luca Lupo on May 19 and July 3).

⁴⁰ See for instance the Milanese synthesis of the events in Hungary and Moldavia, published by Lajos Thallóczy, *Frammenti relativi alla storia dei paesi situati all'Adria* (offprint *Archaeografo Triestino*, 3rd series, VII,1) (Trieste: Società di Minerva, 1913), 36-38. Sent from Venice to Milan on August 30, the now lost synthesis was based on the equally lost reports, from August 15 and 16, dispatched to the *Serenissima* by her representatives in Hungary (*oratore* Sebastiano Baduario/ Badoer) in Moldavia (*secretario*: Emmanuele Gerardo), and received with astonishing speed, on August 27, by her. While his colleagues fought in Italy for Stephen and against the interests of Matthias, Sebastiano Badoer was imploring the Hungarian king not to abandon anti-Ottoman warfare, because he was about to receive 80,000 ducats. At any rate, at that time, Matthias' troops were fighting in Moldavia for nearly two weeks (e.g. Eudoxiu de Hurmuzaki, *Documente privitoare la istoria românilor*, XV-1, *Acte și scrisori din arhivele orașelor ardelene Bistrița, Brașov, Sibiu, 1358-1600*, ed. Nicolae Iorga (Bucharest: Socec & co, 1911), no. 163, p. 193; letter sent from Oradea to Brașov on July 22).

⁴¹ Alexandru Simon, “Cruciada din Moldova într-un raport venețian din 1476: note asupra unui document,” in *Istoria ca datorie: omagiu academicianului Ioan-Aurel Pop*, ed. Ioan Bolovan, Ovidiu Ghitta (Cluj-Napoca, Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2015), 375-384 (see Appendix, no. II).

⁴² Cf. already [A. D. Xenopol,] “Un nou document privitor la Ștefan cel Mare,” *Arhiva*, 18, no. 7-8 (1907), p. 364.

⁴³ On Stephen's Italian embassy that also passed through Florence: Alexandru Simon, “Valahii de la Marea Neagră și valahii din Ungaria în cruciada anului 1476,” *Revista Istorică*, NS, 22, no. 3-4, (2012): 269-290, here at p. 285.

with great difficulty by Sixtus IV.⁴⁴ Stephen's messengers claimed that he was no subject of King Matthias (a vassal at best for *the Romanian*, from the perspective of *the Hungarian*). Matthias' ambassadors stated the opposite, based on the legally binding fact that in the summer of 1475, after the Ottoman conquest of Genoese Caffa in the Crimea, Stephen had (re) acknowledged Matthias as his suzerain through the treaty of Iași-Buda.⁴⁵ The eventual, almost simultaneous, failure of the renewed Ottoman attack on Chilia and Cetatea Albă (June-August 1475)⁴⁶ and – probably – in particular Venice's endorsement⁴⁷ radically altered Stephen III's attitude, who, furthermore, by January 1476 was named *athlete* by Pope Sixtus IV.⁴⁸ It is more than comprehensible why Matthias Corvinus' Italian policies were highly adjustable.⁴⁹ The events of 1476 did not nothing but increase the adaptability of the Hunyadi monarch.

The Crusader Front in Moldavia

At the time when Pope Sixtus IV fled Rome in early June 1476, Sultan Mehmed II, who felt personally humiliated by the defeat of his troops at Vaslui in January 1475, was about to enter Moldavia.⁵⁰ Until mid-August 1476, Moldavia was ravaged by warfare,⁵¹ paying its tribute as a land of crusading. This was what the Venetian envoy in Moldavia, Emmanuele Gerardo, almost involuntarily conveyed to the *Serenissima* on August 19, from Brețcu, at the Transylvanian border between *the Hungarian* and *the Romanian*.⁵² It was also

⁴⁴ Alexandru Simon, "The Walls of *Christendom's Gate*. Hungary's Mathias Corvinus and Moldavia's Stephen the Great Politics in the Late 1400s," *Quaderni della Casa Romana*, 3 (2004): 205-224, at pp. 212-216.

⁴⁵ Ioan Bogdan, *Documentele lui Ștefan cel Mare*, vol. 2 (Bucharest, Atelierele Grafice Socec & Comp., 1913), no. 146, 335.

⁴⁶ Al. Simon, "The Western Impact of Eastern Events: The Crusader Consequences of the Fall of Caffa," *Istros*, 18 (2011): 383-396.

⁴⁷ E.g. the reports sent to Milan from Rome in March 1476 in I.-A. Pop, "La Santa Sede, Venezia e la Valacchia nella crociata antiottomana di fine Quattrocento," *Transylvanian Review*, 10 (2011): suppl. 1 [2012], 7-22, at pp. 16-18.

⁴⁸ Al. Simon, "Pellegrini ed atleti del Signore ai confini della cristianità: Skanderbeg, Stefano III di Moldavia e le loro relazioni con Roma e Venezia," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome-Moyen Age*, 125, no. 1 (2013): 71-92.

⁴⁹ E.g. Alexandru Simon, "Anotimpurile cruciate ale unui rege: documente milaneze asupra politicii lui Matia Corvin în anul 1475," *Archiva Moldaviae*, 4 (2012), 319-334.

⁵⁰ For an overview of Mehmed II's Moldavian campaign based on the traditional sources, see Ștefan S. Gorovei, Maria-Magdalena Székely, *Princeps omni laude maior. O istorie a lui Ștefan cel Mare* (Suceava: Sfânta Mănăstire Putna, 2005), 150-157.

⁵¹ E.g. *Acta et epistolae relationum Transylvaniae Hungariaeque cum Moldavia et Valachia* (= *Fontes Rerum Transsylvanicarum*, IV, VI), ed. Endre Veress, vol. 1 *1468-1540* (Budapest : Typis Societatis Stephaneum Typographicae, 1914), no. 19, 22.

⁵² Simon, "Cruciada din Moldova," 377-378 (see Appendix, no. II).

in accordance with the Christian status granted to Moldavia, and to her main harbour, Cetatea Albă, by the same Pope Sixtus IV.

Alike Bologna at the time of the plague in Rome during the protracted Jubilee of 1475,⁵³ Cetatea Albă⁵⁴ had been turned in January 1476 into an alternative pilgrimage site through the Papal bulla *Redemptor Noster*.⁵⁵ Whereas in Bologna, the pilgrims had to visit to the churches of Saints Peter, Petronius, Anton and Francis,⁵⁶ in Cetatea Albă, at the shores of the Black Sea, their destinations were the two cathedral churches in the city (*duas ecclesias cathedrales*)⁵⁷. Two cathedrals (i.e. the seats of two prelates/ hierarchs) of different rites in one place was an absolute Christian rarity,⁵⁸ that is a transgression (double episcopate), additionally explicitly forbidden at the Lateran IV Council.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, pilgrims listened to the Papal Pontic call and came to Moldavia, and even found the country in good order on the eve of Mehmed II's campaign.⁶⁰

The Italian peninsula was well aware of the pivotal importance of Cetatea Albă (Moncastro), formerly one of Genoa's Pontic jewels.⁶¹ Precisely by mid-1476, Giovanni Mario (Gianmario) Filelfo (1426-1480),⁶² born in Constantinople, where his father, Francesco (1398-1481), was serving Emperor John VIII Palaeologus,⁶³

⁵³ Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, IV, p. 284, note [1]. The transfer to Bologna was usually dated to 1475, but according to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga the transfer was accomplished only shortly before May 6, 1476.

⁵⁴ For Cetatea Albă under Stephen III, see the data in O. Cristea, *Acest domn de la miazănoapte* (Bucharest: Editura Cetatea de Scaun 2018²).

⁵⁵ Cf. Oskar Halecki, *From Florence to Brest (1439-1596)* (= *Sacrum Poloniae Millennium*, V) (Rome: Sacrum Poloniae Millennium, 1958¹), 102.

⁵⁶ E.g. Antonia di Paolo Masini, *Bologna Perlustrata*, II (Bologna, 1666), 92.

⁵⁷ Augustin Theiner, *Vetera monumenta historica Hungarica sacram illustrantia*, vol. 2 *Ab Innocentio PP. VI. usque ad Clementem PP. VII. 1352-1526* (Rome: Typis Vaticanis, 1859), no. 636, 453-454.

⁵⁸ On the two cathedrals in Cetatea Albă, see most recently Liviu Pilat, Ovidiu Cristea, *The Ottoman Threat and Crusading on the Eastern Border of Christendom during the 15th Century* (= *East Central and Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages, 450-1450*, XLVIII) (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 180.

⁵⁹ In direct relation to Moldavia's genesis, with its Greek and Latin rite seats of Siret, Suceava and Cetatea Albă: Alexandru Simon, "Moldova între Vilnius și Moscova. Anii trezecii de la Roma la Constantinopol (1386-1388)," *Studia Universitatis Babeș Bolyai. Historia*, 48, no. 1-2 (2003): 3-56.

⁶⁰ Reinhold Röhrich, Heinrich Meisner, *Das Reisebuch der Familie Rieter* (Tübingen: Gedruckt für den litterarischen Verein in Stuttgart, 1884.), 61 (cf. Adolf Armbruster, "Un călător necunoscut prin Moldova lui Ștefan cel Mare," *Magazin Istoric*, 9, no. 1 (1975): 12-15). Sebald Rieter Junior's text was recently (re)translated and commented by Alexandru Ciocîltan in *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, suppl. II, general-editor Ștefan Andreescu (Bucharest, 2016), 433-436.

⁶¹ For the importance of the harbour the Dniestr Mounds, see also Andrei Pippidi, "Din nou despre inscripțiile de la Cetatea Albă," in *In honorem Paul Cernovodeanu*, ed. Violeta Barbu (Bucharest: Editura Kriterion, 1998), 75-85.

⁶² Franco Pignatti, "Giovanni Mario Filelfo," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 47 (1997), *sub voce*.

⁶³ John Monfasani, "Filelfo and the Byzantines," in *Francesco Filelfo: Man of Letter*, ed. Jeroen De Keyser (Leiden; Boston: Brill 2019), 13-21.

completed his (in)famous treatise *Amyris* on Sultan Mehmed II's career.⁶⁴ Unlike his father, Giovanni Mario Filelfo repeatedly emphasized the Roman roots of the Romanians (in Stephen III's Moldavia)⁶⁵ and highlighted Mehmed's failed attempts to take Cetatea Albă.⁶⁶ This he did quite in the manner of his father, who, in support of the cause of the *Hungarians and of the Wallachians of the Black Sea* (in the exact words of Sixtus IV)⁶⁷ had advocated in February 1476 the Pontic pillars of Stephen III's Romanians.⁶⁸

Noteworthy enough under the circumstances, both Francesco and Giovanni Mario Filelfo were closely tied to Mantua.⁶⁹ Giovanni Mario spent his last years in Mantua, where he was the preceptor of the sons of margrave Federico I Gonzaga (1478-1484), the son and heir of Ludovico III.⁷⁰ Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene had been one the favourite students of Francesco Filelfo,⁷¹ who had personally travelled to the Wallachian lands while in Byzantine service in the 1420s.⁷²

⁶⁴ Giovanni Mario Filelfo, *Amyris. De vita et gestis Mahometi Turcorum imperatoris*, ed. Aldo Manetti, (Bologna: Pàtron, 1978). Cf. already Nicolae Iorga, *Studii istorice asupra Chilie și Cetății Albe* (Bucharest, 1899), 143. For Giovanni Mario Filelfo's otherwise controversial work: Nancy Bisaha, *Creating East and West: Renaissance Humanists and the Ottoman Turks* (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 89-92.

⁶⁵ Francesco Filelfo was much rather a pro-Byzantine and then pro-Ottoman "lobbyist", than a Latinizing crusader (Margaret Meserve, "Nestor Denied: Francesco Filelfo's Advice to Princes on the Crusade against the Turks", *Osiris*, II), 25 (2010): 47-65). He avoided as much as possibly any reference to the increasingly popular at that time Roman roots of the Romanians (see the entries in Francesco Filelfo, *Collected Letters*, ed. Joerden De Keyser, vol. I-IV (Alessandria, 2018²)). Immediately after news on the battle of Vaslui began to spread, Francesco Filelfo, settled in Milan, urged Galeazzo Maria Sforza, not to consider (Roman) Dacia as a realm in the East (Ioan-Aurel Pop, Alexandru Simon, "Regele Daciei din familia Basarabilor: mărturie despre români și domnii lor din secolul al XV-lea," in *Cel care a trecut făcând bine. Nicolae Edroiu*, ed. Macarie Motogna, Mihai Hasan, Victor Vizauer (Cluj-Napoca, 2019² [2020]), 60-64).

⁶⁶ A. Pippidi, "1475: atacul otoman asupra Cetății Albe," *Analele Putnei*, 7, no. 1 (2011), 29-36.

⁶⁷ Edgar Artner, *Magyarország mint a nyugati keresztény művelődés védőbástyája. A Vatikáni Levéltárnak azok az okiratai, melyek őseinknek a Keletről Európát fenyegető veszedelmek ellen kifejtett erőfeszítéseire vonatkoznak (cca. 1214-1606)*, ed. Szovag Kornel (Budapest, 2004), no. 101, 111-112.

⁶⁸ Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milano, Ms. 873, f. 510^v (February 18, 1476). See Appendix, no. I. The letter was sent by Filelfo to his friend Cicco Simonetta, the highly influential ducal secretary of Milan.

⁶⁹ Alessandro Luzio, Rodolfo Renier, "I Filelfo e l'umanesimo alla corte dei Gonzaga," *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 16 (1890): 119-127.

⁷⁰ Gino Benzoni, "Giovanni Gonzaga," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, 57 (2001), *sub voce*.

⁷¹ E.g. *Francisci Philelfi Epistolarum Familiarium Libri XXXVIII*, Venetia, 1502, f. 195^r (January 1467); Filelfo, *Collected Letters*, I, p. 48 (Francesco Filelfo's top correspondents were Nicodemo Tranchedini, addressed by Filelfo in 73 letters, Senofonte Filelfo, on 54 occasions, Cardinal Bessarion, on 53, and Arrivabene, addressed 52 times by Filelfo).

⁷² Șerban Papacostea, "Un humaniste byzantin au service de Byzance en Europe Centrale au XV^e siècle," *Études Byzantines et Post-Byzantines*, 5 (2006): 365-375.

The crusader hopes that poured towards the North-Western shores of the Black Sea in the first half of 1476⁷³ ended in disappointment when Stephen failed to trap Mehmed, both because of the delayed arrival of the Hungarian host and because of the wavering faith of several of his subjects.⁷⁴ Mehmed too failed to defeat Stephen or, at least, to take one of his major fortress, due largely to the subjects that had remained loyal to *the Romanian*.⁷⁵ Eventually, the troops of Stephen's contested suzerain, King Matthias, entered Moldavia and Mehmed hastily retreated south of the Lower Danube in mid-August, when Pope Sixtus IV was still in Assisi.⁷⁶ Sixtus IV returned to Rome only in late autumn 1476,⁷⁷ when the Hungarian and Moldavian armies were already fighting in Wallachia, loyal to the sultan,⁷⁸ who moreover had returned in person north of the Danube, in an unsuccessful – for the time being – attempt to halt Matthias and Stephen.⁷⁹

The “Pawns” and “Pillars” of Crusading

In the final months of 1476, tensions rose high (again),⁸⁰ as the need for anti-Ottoman funds dramatically increased.⁸¹ Florence's unwillingness to jeopardize her

⁷³ For a quite balanced approach of anti-Ottoman crusading in 1476, see also Jacopo Ammannati Piccolomini, *Lettere (1444-1479)*, ed. Paolo Cherubini, vol. 3 *Pontificato di Sisto IV* (Rome, 1997), no. 755, p. 1875; no. 767, p. 1891.

⁷⁴ E.g. Krzysztof Baczkowski, “Nieznane listy Baltazara z Piscii do papieża Sykstusa IV z lat 1476-1478 ze zbiorów weneckich”, *Prace Historyczne*, 89 (1989): 239-251, Appendix, no. 1, 242-248 (the report sent on September 16, by the Papal legate to Hungary, Bohemia and Poland, Baldassare of Piscia, who had returned from Wrocław to Bratislava); “Acta et epistolae,” in *Acta et epistolae*, ed. Andreas Veress (Cluj-Napoca; Budapest: Fontes Rerum Transylvanicarum; Stephaneum Nyomda R.T., 1914) no. 20, 23-24 (the letter sent on August 25, from Brețcu, by the judge of the royal court, Stephen Báthory, who had marched into Moldavia, together with Vlad III the Impaller).

⁷⁵ See, from Mehmed II's camp, the “memoirs” of Donado da Lezze: Giovanni Maria Angiolello, Ioan Ursu, *Historia turchesca (1300-1514)* (Bucharest, 1910), 136-137.

⁷⁶ Pastor, *The History of the Popes*, vol. 4, 289.

⁷⁷ Stefano Infessura, Oreste Tommasini, *Diario della città di Roma di Stefano Infessura scribasenato* (Rome 1890), 82 even claimed that Pope Sixtus IV returned to Rome only after Christmas 1476.

⁷⁸ For the traditional perspective on these events: Székely, *Princeps omni laude maior*, 161-165.

⁷⁹ E.g. Alexandru Simon, “Mehmed II's Return to *Moldavia* in 1476 and the Death of the *King of Dacia*,” *Transylvanian Review*, 29, suppl. 1 (2020): 53-64.

⁸⁰ We redraw attention to a passage in Gerardo's badly damaged report from August 19: [...] *recentemente Vestra Signoria [Venice] faci de hano la cruciata in queste bande [...]* (see Appendix, no. II). Due to the intervention of Venice, a crusade was under way in Moldavia, not a Moldavian-Ottoman conflict, with Hungarian participation. This explains the hostile drive of the combatants, including their allies, that echoed in the disputes at Foligno.

⁸¹ Quite intriguingly, the number of documents in Italian archives (in Milan, Mantua or Modena, because the medieval archives of Naples and Venice were largely lost in early modern and contemporary fires) on the events in Moldavia and Wallachia diminishes the closer we come to the end of 1476, a dramatic in fact decrease in comparison to the multitude of reports preserved from the first half of the year (until August, to be more precise).

standing relation with Mehmed (in spring 1476 Lorenzo de Medici⁸² had virtually pushed out of his city the envoys of Matthias and of Stephen)⁸³ and to contribute more than 15,000 ducats (at least in September 1476) to the crusader budget placed at 200,000 ducats⁸⁴ was more than detrimental to the cause of the Cross. Even if Ferdinand of Aragon's, *the King's*, other son-in-law, Ercole d'Este, duke of Modena,⁸⁵ was willing to contribute some 15,000 ducats, it was most doubtful that the 200,000 ducats were ever to be collected.⁸⁶ In fact, they never were, at least not three years in a row (1476/1477, 1478 and 1479) and not up to the ultimately wishful amount of 200,000 ducats.⁸⁷

⁸² He followed in fact the policy of his father, Cosimo (Franco Cardini, "La Repubblica di Firenze e la Crociata di Pio II," *Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia*, 3 (1979): 455-482; Vincente Iardi, "The Banker-Statesman and the Condottiere-Prince: Cosimo de Medici and Francesco Sforza (1450-1464)" in *Florence and Milan. Comparisons and Relations*, ed. Craig Hugh Smyth, Gian Carlo Garfagni, 2 (Florence: La Nuova Italia editrice, 1989), 217-237).

⁸³ Simon, "Valahii de la Marea Neagră și valahii din Ungaria," 284-286. On Florence's peculiar relation with Buda, we quote the words of Gerardo de Colli (Francesco Filelfo's friend), Milanese ambassador in Venice (March 26, 1468): [...] *qui [in Venice] certezza ch'el Re de Ungaria, per mezo de la excelsa comunita di Firenze fuse acordato con la liga de Italia, et rivoltarsi contro lo stato de la Signoria, et per questo dichano che la rotta ha havuto in Transilvania he stata iudicium Dey et la salute de Stato de essa Signoria [...]* (MDE, 2, no. 46, 76).

⁸⁴ Beatrice of Aragon's dowry was also valued at 200,000 ducats (170,000 *incontanti*, that is in cash), according to the data sent in mid-May 1476 from Buda to Milan (MDE, II, no. 214, p. 310). Given the practices and the hostilities of the age (including those depicted by Arrivabene), it is not unlikely that the crusader contribution (placed at 200,000 ducats), desired by Ferdinand of Aragon only for his son-in-law to be Matthias Corvinus, and the dowry of Ferdinand's daughter (estimated at 200,000 ducats) were voluntarily confused.

⁸⁵ See also Paul M. Dover, "Royal Diplomacy in Renaissance Italy: Ferrante d'Aragona (1458-1494) and his Ambassadors," *Mediterranean Studies*, 14, no. 1 (2005): 57-94, at p. 61, note 20.

⁸⁶ The Gonzagas should have been perfectly aware of this fact. On September 1476, Ercole d'Este had beheaded his relative, Niccolò d'Este, who, in spring, had attempted to seize power in Ferrara and Modena, with the support of Mantua and of Venice (Guido Antonioli, "*Bone parole, ma niuna provisione. Politica e diplomazia nelle vicende della successione di Ercole I d'Este a Borso (1471)*," *I Quaderni della Mediae Aetatis Sodalitium*, XVI (2018): 247-279). Quite rapidly however, both Venice and Ludovico III decided that the odds did not fully favour Niccolò and abandoned him. Arrivabene completely omitted the matter in his report on the Italian talks held at Foligno.

⁸⁷ On December 9, 1478, Sixtus IV wrote to Emperor Frederick III of Habsburg that he had recently sent 80,000 ducats, due to Matthias, to Venice in order to prevent the republic from making peace with the Porte, a peace that was concluded at that very moment (Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Vatican City, Miscellanea, Armadi, [reg.] II-30, f. 59 (64)^r; calendared under 1478, without additional comments, in Adolf Bachmann, *Urkundliche Nachträge zur Österreichisch-Deutschen Geschichte im Zeitalter Kaiser Friedrich III.* (=Fontes Rerum Austriacarum, II, 46), (Wien: F. Tempsky, 1892.), no. 435, 444-445). Because Venice then arranged for a truce between Frederick and Mehmed and because Ottoman attacks on Hungary multiplied (Ioan Aurel Pop, Alexandru Simon, "Documents on the Prequels and the Aftermath of the Battle of Câmpul Pâinii (Kenyérmező, Brotfeld)," *Hadtörténelmi Közlemények*, 124, no. 1 (2011): 229-238), it is difficult to place any trust in such statements, especially at the end of troublesome 1478.

An immediate consequence was the clash of May 1477 between Venice's requests and Stephen's demands,⁸⁸ a clash that ended with the republic reminding the *athlete* that, in summer 1475, as well as in autumn 1476, both she and Pope Sixtus IV had turned a blind eye to Stephen's profitable Caffese business, valued by the *Serenissima* at precisely 200,000 ducats.⁸⁹ Matthias, who in 1477 had also the fall of Vlad III the Impaller (*Dracula*), his relative by marriage,⁹⁰ to account for, was by no means more satisfied than Stephen. This led to public discussions between Matthias and the envoys of Mehmed.⁹¹ King Casimir IV Jagiello of Poland, Matthias' adversary and Stephen's (co-) suzerain,⁹² was possibly the main Christian beneficiary of the situation.⁹³

Although, according to the lines of his sons' preceptor, Jan Długosz,⁹⁴ Casimir had lost his chance at eternal glory, by not attacking Mehmed, when the sultan was cornered in Moldavia in the summer of 1476 (less than two months before Arrivabene's cited report from Foligno),⁹⁵ the Polish monarch made the most out "the third <crusader> option" allowed by the talks at Foligno.⁹⁶ In Arrivabene's words, the Italian crusader funds were to be sent: [...] *ó al Hungaro ó al Valacho*

⁸⁸ Ioan Aurel Pop, Alexandru Simon, *Re de Dacia: un proiect de la sfârșitul Evului Mediu* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Școala Ardeleană, 2018), 154-155, 160.

⁸⁹ Al. Simon, "How to Finance a Greek Rite Athlete: Rome, Venice and Stephen III of Moldavia (1470s-1490s)," in *Partir en croisade à la fin du Moyen Âge. Financement et logistique*, ed. Daniel Baloup, Bernard Doumerc, (Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Midi, 2015), 307-329.

⁹⁰ E.g. MDE, 2, no. 234, 339-340 (report sent by Leonardo Botta from Venice to Milan on February 1, 1477).

⁹¹ *Politische Korrespondenz Breslaus im Zeitalter des Königs Matthias Corvinus (=Scriptores Rerum Silesicarum, XIII-XIV)*, ed. Berthold Kronthal, Heinrich Wendt, I (Breslau: Josef Max & Comp, 1893), no. 274, 218 (July 31, 1477). Matthias then allowed the Ottomans to raid the Italian lands of Venice in October 1477 (Fabio Cusin, *Il Confine orientale d'Italia nella politica europea del XIV e XV secolo*, vol. 2 (Milan: Giuffrè, 1937), 201-202). At that time, Stephen was gathering his troops for the Wallachian campaign Venice had called for in spring, in order to diminish the Ottoman pressure, focused once again on the republic's besieged Albanian city of Scutari.

⁹² See also L. Pilat, "Respublica Christiana și Moldova (1471-1474)," *Analele Putnei*, 3, no. 2 (2007), 91-104.

⁹³ E.g. Aleksander Jabłonowski, *Sprawy wołoskie za Jagiellonów. Akta i listy (=Źródła Dziejowe, X)* (Warsaw: skł. gł. w Księgarni Gebethnera i Wolffa, 1878), Appendix, nr. 8, p. 30; *Długosz*, IV, p. 621; Șerban Papacostea, "Politica externă a lui Ștefan cel Mare: opțiunea polonă (1459-1472)," *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie*, 15 (2007): 13-28.

⁹⁴ Paul W. Knoll, "Jan Długosz," *Polish Review*, 27 (1982): 3-28.

⁹⁵ *Długosz*, 4, 645-647. Casimir had earlier urged Mehmed to avoid harming (as much as possible) Polish interests in Moldavia (*Codex epistolaris saeculi decimi quinti (=Monumenta Medii aevi res gestas Poloniae illustrantia, II, XI-XII, XIV)*, 3 1392-1501, ed. Anatol Lewicki (Krakow: Akademii Umiejętności Krakowskiej, 1894), no. 201, 224; no. 215, 243).

⁹⁶ Usun Hassan's power had been largely shattered by Mehmed in 1473 (Ovidiu Cristea, Nagy Pienaru, "Țara Românească, Moldova și Bătălia de la Bașkent," *Analele Putnei*, 8, no. 1 (2012), 17-36). Similarly in 1473 (and in 1474), the Muscovite and Tartar anti-Ottoman plans, devised chiefly by Venice, had failed (for these designs, see also Nagy Pienaru, "Proiectul scitic. Relațiile lui Ștefan cel Mare cu Hoarda cea Mare," *Revista Istorică*, NS, 14, no. 5-6 (2003), 121-135). The only real anti-Ottoman options at Mehmed II's borders were Matthias and Stephen III, but also Casimir IV.

aut alibj á chi li parira piu expediente [...] ([...] “either to the Hungarian or to the Romanian, or to whomever seems more suited” [...]). The Italian mission (winter 1476-1477)⁹⁷ of Casimir’s royal advisor, Filippo Buonaccorsi Callimachus (who had fled from Rome to Krakow, via Istanbul, less than a decade earlier)⁹⁸ did not deliver the desired sums, but in return augmented the mounting Christian tensions at the border with the Ottoman Empire, as well as in Italy.⁹⁹

The tensions between Buda and Suceava echoed the tensions between Naples and Venice.¹⁰⁰ The crusader balance between Matthias and Stephen was the balance of the Italian Peninsula.¹⁰¹ The Duchy of Milan, friend and enemy to all, also joined the crusader/ Italian financial feud.¹⁰² Apparently more concerned by the “purity of the air” than preoccupied by anti-Ottoman war efforts (Arrivabene’s words are quite telling),¹⁰³ Sixtus IV distanced himself from the indeed most delicate matter. He entrusted (delegated) the volatile issue to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, the son of Ludovico III, margrave of Mantua.¹⁰⁴ Growingly independent,¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷ E.g. August Cieszkowski, *Fontes rerum polonicarum e tabulario reipublicae venetae*, I-2. *Acta Vladislao Jagellonide Regnante* (Poznań: Typis Officinae Dziennik Poznański, 1890), nos. 69-76, 157-178.

⁹⁸ Heinrich von Zeissberg, *Kleinere Geschichtsquellen Polens im Mittelalter* (offprint *Archiv für Österreichische Geschichte*, LV) (Wien: In Commission Bei Karl Gerold’s Sohn, 1877), 46-47. Whether or not, Callimachus also passed through Moldavia in winter 1469-1470, on his journey to Krakow (he had sailed from Istanbul to Caffa), remains open to debate.

⁹⁹ Șerban Papacostea, “La guerre ajournée: les relations polono-moldave en 1478. Réflexions en marge d’un text de Filippo Buonaccorsi-Callimachus,” *Revue Roumaine d’Histoire*, 11, no. 1 (1972): 3-21.

¹⁰⁰ The situation had been predictable since the early 1470s, since 1473-1474 the latest (e.g., Borislav Grgin, *Počeci rasapa. Kralj a Matijaš Korvin i srednjovjekovna Hrvatska* (Zagreb: Ibis grafika, 2002), 171-175; Alexandru Simon, “Between the Adriatic and the Black Sea: Matthias Corvinus and the Ottoman Empire after the Fall of Negroponte,” *Radovi Zavoda za Hrvatsku Povijest* (Zagreb), 42, no. 2 (2010): 195-230; Luka Spoljarić, “Nicholas of Modruš and his *De Bellis Gothorum*: Politics and National History in the Fifteenth-Century Adriatic,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 92 (2019): 457-491, at pp. 481-485).

¹⁰¹ The Italian *condotta* of Albanian *athlete* Skanderbeg (June 1461-January 1462), Ferdinand of Aragon’s vassal (Oliver-Jens Schmitt, *Skanderbeg: Noul Alexandru din Balcani* (Cluj-Napoca, 2014), pp. 206-219) and the subsequent anti-Ottoman campaign of Vlad III’s (January-February 1462), Matthias’ relative by marriage, a campaign covered extensively also by the Mantuan network (e.g. Ioan-Aurel Pop, “Matthias Corvinus, *Re de Ungaria, de Dacia etc.*, in 1462,” *Transylvanian Review*, 20 (2020): suppl. 1, 41-52), are worth a closer inspection, because they seemingly served as prequels for the above discussed political manoeuvres in the mid-1470s.

¹⁰² See also Emilio Motta, “Un ambasciatore tartaro a Venezia, 1476,” *Ateneo Veneto*, 19 (1889), 145-153.

¹⁰³ [...] *El papa ugni di attende á far la terra piu ariosa. È manda/ á terra tuti li porticali* [...] (Appendix, no. III).

¹⁰⁴ D.S. Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and His Worldly Goods: The Will and Inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444-1483)* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1992).

¹⁰⁵ Under Ludovico III (more a *condottiere* than a statesman, unlike his wife, Barbara of Hohenzollern), Mantua’s main ally had been Milan, but the relation had lost strength after the death in 1467 of Dorothea (Ludovico’s and Barbara’s daughter), Galeazzo Maria Sforza’s first wife. Ludovico III

Mantua had the great opportunity of promoting her own interests and deals, not only Italian, but also Ottoman ones.¹⁰⁶

Proud Matthias and proud Stephen were in reality – in the reality of the Italian Peninsula at least – the “pawns” of crusading in the hands of the “pillars” of crusading, towered by the “Papal referee” and the Neapolitan and Venetian “patrons” of *the Hungarian* and of *the Romanian*.¹⁰⁷ This twisted chain, marred by various rivalries, led to the attempted removal of Stephen from his office of *athlete* (November 1476). The deposal was narrowly avoided through the intervention of Venice.¹⁰⁸ It is impossible to tell at present whether or not Francesco Gonzaga’s “ruling” furthered Stephen’s eventually failed deposal (Pope Sixtus IV had personally asked Francesco’s father to aid Stephen in the summer of 1475),¹⁰⁹ for we do not know the arbitrage’s outcome. The

also served Naples (in particular), but also Venice, and joined Florence in the various leagues repeatedly concluded and dissolved, especially after the death in 1466 of Francesco Sforza, Galeazzo Maria’s father (for an overview, see also I. Lazzarini, “L’informazione politico-diplomatica nell’età della pace di Lodi: raccolta, selezione, trasmissione. Spunti di ricerca dal carteggio Milano-Mantova nella prima età sforzesca (1450-1466),” *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 83 (1999): 273-279).

¹⁰⁶ For Mantuan interests, see also Ingeborg Walter, “Barbara di Hohenzollern,” *Dizionario Bibliografico degli Italiani*, 6 (1964): *sub voce*; Hans Joachim Kissling, “Francesco II Gonzaga ed il sultano Bâyezîd II,” *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 125, no. 1 (1967): 34-68; Egmont Lee, *Sixtus IV and Men of Letters* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1978.), 60-61.

¹⁰⁷ An often neglected report sent from Venice by Leonardo Botta to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, on September 18, 1476, offers some most valuable insights: [...] *Novamente el Re de Ungaria ha facto per lo ambasciatore de questa Signoria [Venice] scrivere qua como sua Maesta ha mandato per la via de la Transilvania grande quantita de gienti in favore del Valacho. Et circha questa parte manda alla prefata Signoria alcune copie de littere, quali pare che domino/ capitaneo del dicto Re [Stephen Báthory] scriva ad sua Maesta como esso capitaneo è gionto alle confine della Valachia et ha posto in fuga uno chiamato Sanbecho, capitaneo del Turcho. Et scrive molte altre cose per le quale vole inferire che forze et nome del dicto Re de Ungaria sia molto temudo dalli Turchi. Ache la Signoria prefata non crede sia vera alcuna delle predicte cose, ma che tute siano arte fa el prefato Re per cavare et extorquere dinare de Italia, s’el potra. Et per quello posso comprendere dicta Signoria non vive ponto ben sincera de sua Maesta.// Mando alla Sublimita vostra ad questa alligate alcune littere de meser Iustiniano Cavitello, et de meser Luca Lupo de Ungaria, il quale me scrive/ havere receuto tute le littere della V<ostra> Excellentia, mandate per mie mano. Siche circha cio non me extendiro piu ultra, perche son certo che per le dicte littere loro scriverano diffusamente il tuto [...] (Pop, “La Santa Sede, Venezia e la Valacchia,” pp. 19-20).*

¹⁰⁸ Alexandru Simon, “Să nu ucizi o pasăre cântătoare: soarta unui *fortissimus rei Christiane athleta* în ochii Veneției,” in *Pe urmele trecutului. Profesorului Nicolae Edroiu la 70 de ani*, ed. Ioan-Aurel Pop, Susana Andea, Alexandru Simon (Cluj-Napoca: Academia Română, Centrul de Studii Transilvane, 2009), 159-169.

¹⁰⁹ ASMa, A.G., E. Affari Esteri, XXV. Roma, busta 834, nn (July 1, 1475). Setton (*The Papacy and the Levant*, II, 320, note 23) noticed the Papal letter to Ludovico, but not Arrivabene’s report from September 1476. Both documents (the Papal brief and Arrivabene’s report) eluded the learned attention of Ludwig von Pastor, Vikentij Makušev (*Monumenta historica Slavorum meridionalium vicinorumque populorum e tabulariis et bibliothecis Italicis deprompta, collecta atque illustrata*, I-2. Genua, Mantua, Mediolanum, Panormus et Taurinum

arbitrage may have never been sealed, given that the 200,000 ducats were most likely never collected and that both Matthias and Stephen quite obviously came out empty-handed from the entire affair.

In the end, Stephen's main crusader anti-Ottoman gain was of symbolical, yet not negligible, nature. Deemed a match for Mehmed II as well by the initially pro-Ottoman Giovanni Mario Filelfo, a close associate of the House of Gonzaga,¹¹⁰ Stephen III was certainly a match for King Matthias Corvinus during the Italian negotiations conducted under the rather absent eyes of Pope Sixtus IV in September 1476. The fact that some two months later Venice managed to salvage Stephen III's rank and station of *athlete* against major Italian opposition (probably led by Naples) stands testimony that *the Romanian*, the ruler of Moldavia, had won his place among the major figures of crusading, not only because of Italian interests, but also because of his own merits.¹¹¹

Appendix

I. The Romanians of the Black Sea

Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milan, Ms. 873, f. 510^v (Rome, February 18, 1476).

Frater Philelfus Ciccho Simonetae, equiti aurato, ducalique secretario salutem!

Etsi brevi Mediolanum sum rediturus nolim tamen praetermittere quin, ad te scribam quae/ hic geruntur memoratu digna Sanctissimus D[ominus] noster Sistus, Pontifex Maximus,/ omni studio diligentiamque incumbit ad exigendas pecunias, quas mittat ad Matthian./ Hungariae regem, quo se tueatur ab impetu ferociamque Turcorum. Ii enim nullum tempus reliquum/ faciunt, quomodo Balacchos primo, dein Hungaros, opprimant, quippe qui recenter superato/ Danubio in Balacchiam, magnis cum viribus irruerunt, quibus magna ex parte Caesis, eorum/ subassis, vir bellicosus et audax, quoddam Balacchiae oppidum se recepit, ad quod/ expugnandum, Matthias rex litteras

(Belgrade, 1882)), or Florio Bánfi ("Romei Ungheresi del Jubileo del 1475. Niccolo Ujlaki re di Bosnia in un affresco nell' Ospedale di Santo Spirito dell' urbe," *Archivio di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti della Società Italo-Ungherese* Mattia Corvino, 3 no. 2 (1941): 499-512), who all relied on various Mantuan sources in their books, studies or editions.

¹¹⁰ Pippidi, "1475: atacul otoman asupra Cetății Albe," 31-34 (Filelfo Jr. authored one of Stephen III's most favourable contemporary portraits).

¹¹¹ Ioan-Aurel Pop, "Atletul Ștefan și românii ca protagoniști la Marea Neagră în epistole semnate de Papa Sixt al IV-lea și de umanistul Francesco Filelfo (1475-1476)," in *Șpre pământul făgăduinței, între Balcani și Bugeac. Omagiu Doamnei Profesoare Elena Siupiur la împlinirea vârstei de 80 de ani*, ed. Daniel Cain, Aneta Mihaylova, Roumiana L. Stantcheva, Andrei Timotin (Brăila: Editura Istros, 2020), 17-34 (in particular the Appendix, no. 1, pp. 28-30; edition and translation of the message sent on July 1, 1475, by Sixtus IV to Ludovico III in favour of Stephen III).

as pontificem dedit, se cum viribus suis continuo profectum. His autem significat se cum exercitu equitum quem conflarat, ad viginti millia sub id oppidum/ constituisse. Praeterea Stephanum Vaivodam, qui Moldaviae dominatur, habere paratus copias/ militum octoginta millium eumque brevi adfuturum cum opus fuerit. Moldaviam appellant/ vulgo Balacchiam Superiore, quae et ipsa in Scythia est, et alias atque alias gentes/ complectitur in primisquam et Alanos et Gotthos, populos sane ferocissimos. Gotthos vero et Ge/tas eosdem esse. Eas ego regiones omnis quia tempestate admodum iuvenis vel potius adhuc/ adolescens quippe quod agerem quintum ac vigesimum aetatis annum á Iohanne Palaeologo, Ma/nuelis filio, qui Constantinopolin tenebat imperio, sum orator missus ad Sigismundum/ regem et vidi et peragravi, nam quam rectum in Hungariam iter intercludebatur á Turcis/ trajiciendum mihi fuit per Mare Euxinum ad Asprocastrum, quod oppidum aestate proxima Turci, qui Theodosia hoc est Capha potiti sunt, frustra oppugnare. Praeterea/ idem Matthias ijsdem litteris scribit venisse ad se nuncium á Bassiade Romaniae, is/ est dux, qui pro impio tyranno Mahometo universis Graeciae exercitibus praeest./ qui quidem nuncius verbis illius Bassiadę petebat publicae fidei litteras, quibus/ tuto liceret legatum mittere de solvendo bello rebusquam componendis inter Dominum/ suum, regemquam Matthian, ad quem ipsum Bassiaden ait respondisse se nominem omnino/ auditorum bellumque malle quam pacem, nec illud aliter quam sola pugna solvi oportere./ Addebat autem in ijsdem litteris sibi grandi pecunia opus esse ad continendum exercitum. Itaque summus pontifex, ut est unus omnium religiosissimus et optimus, nulli rei magis studet, quam cogendis exigentisque pecunijs, quas ad Matthian mittat./ quas brevi et exactas et collectas fore puto, modo novus Galliae Transalpinae motus ac tumultuatio rem ipsam non impediatur, id quod et Christianis detrimento foret et Turcis non mediocriter conduceret. Vale!

Ex Urbe, XIII. Kalendas Martias M^o CCCCLXXV^o.

<Keywords written in red, along the left margin, by the same hand, as a sort of summary of the letter> Mediolanum./ Sistus pontifex./ Matthias rex./ Turci./ Balacchi./ Ungari. Balacchia./ Danubium./ Stephanus Vaivoda./ Moldavia./ Scythia./ Alani. Gothi./ Getae./ Iohannes Palaeologus Imperator./ Constantinopolis./ Manuel Imperator./ Sigismundus Imperator./ Mare Euxinum. Asprocastrum/ Theodosia Capha./ Matthias./ Bassias Romaniae./ Mahometus tyrannus./ Gallia transalpina.

II. The Crusade in Moldavia

Archivio di Stato di Milano, Milan, Archivio Ducale Sforzesco, Potenze Estere, Venezia, cart. 363. 1476, fasc. 8. Agosto, nn (Brețcu, August 19, 1476)

[...] humilamente commendamus. Per l'alligata del XVI de questo [16 august] Vestra Celsitudine [Doge Pietro Mocenigo] [...] per timore de non capitare ne le

mano del Turcho [...] et fracassati quelli Turchi II^m et [?]. Ad hora significo <que>sto exercito potentissimo de la Maiesta Regia [Matthias Corvinus] era presso Totros [...] stipendiati da esso Illustrissimo Signore [Ștefan III of Moldavia] fra de paexani suo che trageno [...] in modo che dicono li messi ha mandato questa communita [?] al [...] che uno messo del prefato Illustrissimo Signore Stephano de la Moldavia cha [...] et che cum quelli era partito da Hotino et riduotisi a [...] signor capitaneo Re prefato [Stephen Báthory] se mandasse in Moldavia, et questo perche lo [...] cominciato targetare de le suo gente in Bulgaria [...] et lo Signor Bassaraba [pro-Ottoman Basarab III Laiotă/anti-Ottoman Basarab IV Țepeluș] era andato a li logi suo. Al dicte tal [...] et adviso, con questa celerita, gli estato possibile il suo [...] se havano tempo questi duo Signori de potersi athacar con [...] quello seguira ne daro noticia ad Vestra Serenita quale voglio sia [...] ho se levi, et indi ad la malhora sua [i.e. of Mehmed II], che questo exercito [...] ha veduto, anchora el se digi de quod la Maiesta B<eatrice de Aragon>era andata [...] de qui el se levi; tamen, le levato per la fama de questo potere [...] et fanti de le XL^m come instruti hoi da bene, mi [...] Burzie, advirixando la Vestra Serenita che questo exercito [...] Cama [?], overo a la Maiesta del Re, ma e facto de la borsa [...] piu gente de quelle utile et bone; un Serenissimo Principe [...] solute ad Christiani, et ruina al Turcho regandose [...] del Re de Pollonia cum questo, et questi duo Valachi fra si [...] conditione, che cum lo mezo de la Santita de Nostro Signore et Vestra Serenita [...] <Dom>ino Re, quale de proximo devo compire. Il primo Re po mettere [...] qual se dapeo XL^m, il Re de Ungaria altratanti fra stipendiarii [...] Valachi XV^m per uno a campo, vede ista Signoria la potentia de questi Signori [...] <[?]>cendosi stagimo uniti, et provisione debita poi el Turcho tegera [?] [...] l'ha da stretto qua, quale con tanta [?], et tanta commodita [...] unde, ne le inscere, et core, che e cossa stupendo, essendo da Moldavia [...] <que>ante piccole VI per mia prima da Moldavia in Constantinopoli VIII <die?> [...] et per questa commodita de esser offexo, dicto Turcho se caveria volentiere [...] ghochii, quelle quante se avesse cavato in damnecia ipso facto la Vallachia Maggiore [i.e. Wallachia] [...] volesse poi, con securitade del stato suo [i.e. Moldavia]. Io ho dicto ultra lasser nova et queste pochi [...] elisse et devotissimo servitore de Vestra Signoria, il bene de la quale e de questa inclita pria mia mi [...] recentemente Vestra Signoria faci de hano la cruciata in queste bande, che se semper insito nel coro [...] utile, se havera molte gente, et bone, che haviano ad auxilio, dicta cruciata duci [...] belle, et costoso modo se hava piu gente, et consequenter potrasse pare [?] con molto meno [...] de tuti signori contribuisseno ad la spexa de questa guerra. Gratie amicitie Vestre Signorie me comendo [...] Bressbuis, die XVIII^{no} augusti 1476.¹¹²

¹¹² All [...] markings stand for torn or stained parts in the extremely poorly preserved copy of the report, a report that due of its place of issue can only be ascribed to Emmanuele Gerardo, the known Venetian envoy in Moldavia.

III. The Plagued Crusader Talks at Foligno

Archivio di Stato di Mantova, Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga, E. Affari esteri, XXV.
Roma, busta 834. 1404-1499, nn (Foligno, September 24, 1476)

1476, 24 settembre

Illustrissimo Signor mio, La S[ignoria] V[ostra], per altre mie, hara intieso li rasonamenti havuti de la obligatione del subsidio al Hungaro, per la/ impresa del Turco è la replicatione ne fu fatta à Fiorentini per quello suo mandato etc. Lor de novo hanno rescritto/ che non li pare de venire à questo contracto di 3 anni, per che havendo pur molte suoe mercantie de la, quando el/ Turco sentisse lor essersi convenuti in tal liga à suo preiuditio, li puoria fare gran danno, perho non se extendeno à¹¹³ piu. Et/ in summa, per viam oblationis, senza venire ad altro contracto, offereno pagare liberalmente la rata sua di XV mille ducati/ per uno anno tucto,¹¹⁴ ma intenda la S[ignoria] V[ostra] che questa rata se intende per che di CC mille ducati,/ quali fu ditto se pagariano, lor offereno prima/ li XV mille, non agiongendo mo la parte del Papa, del Re è de Venetiani, à li CC mille, quali ne se offereno anche lor. È forse/ etiam pur de¹¹⁵ lo Duca de Ferrara, el qual ha dicto volere pagare. Lor pagaranno tanto mancho di XV mille, quanto pigliara la/ rata sua per tuto questo che manchasse fin á la summa de tutti CC mille. È stimase che non serrano piu che X o XI mille. È cussi,/ heri, in consistorio, per non perdersi questo puocho, el Papa è li altri ambasciatori presero partito de acceptare questo. Et essi mo/ anche reducta la cosa, che per li altri non se fara piu contracto, ma da ugni canto solum per via oblationis. È restare/ contenti questi ambasciatori che stia in arbitrio de nostro Signore de dispensarli ó al Hungaro ó al Valacho aut alibj á chi li/ parira piu expediente; che è stato impasso de non puocha difficultate, per che'l Re tirava quod darentur Hungaro et Venetiani al Valacho. È per questo, tra li ambasciatori sono state piu volte de male parole. Et papa, el Re è Venetiani fanno vista/ et offereno liberamente la rata sua promessa absolvere¹¹⁶ per li 3 anni. Qui, gratia de Dio, stamo pur bene. Questi/ di li fu un puocho de suspecto, ma se restiolto in niente. È monsegnore cum tuta la famiglia è sano. À Roma, per quanto se/ sente, va pur diminuendo la peste, ma daltre infirmitate ve ne moreno assai. Comprendo quanto se resani, vi tornaremo/ la verso San Martino. Et interim, se stara qui. El papa ugni di attende á far la terra piu ariosa. È

¹¹³ Written above.

¹¹⁴ Words written, starting with *per*, outside the line, at its margin.

¹¹⁵ Written above.

¹¹⁶ Misspelled: *absolvre*.

manda/ á terra tuti li porticali. Me raccomando à la S[ignoria] V[ostra],
Fulginti, XXIIIJ Septembris 1476.

Illustrissime d[ominationis] V[estre]
Arrivabenus.

Servitor Ioannes P[etrus]

<Pe verso> Illustri Principi et Excellentissimo Domino, domino meo/
singularissimo L[udovico], Domino Marchioni Mantue,/ ... ducali Locumtenenti
Generali etc.

