

A Game of Rhetoric. Transylvanian Regional Identities in Medieval Wallachian Sources

Abstract:

This article aims to analyse the Wallachian perception of Transylvanian identity in the late medieval period, roughly from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century. The analysis focuses on the rhetoric of identity as it has been shaped throughout the Wallachian-Transylvanian dialogue engaged in by the two socio-political elites. The main contention is that up to the mid-sixteenth century, Transylvania did not make its way into the Wallachian geographical world-view. The first section of this article seeks for an explanation of Wallachian lack of awareness of Transylvanian identity. I contend that Wallachians preferred to operate either with wider geographical frames, such as the kingdom of Hungary, or with narrower subregional ones, such as Hațeg, Făgăraș or Burzenland. My suggestion is that this preference was closely connected to Wallachians' endeavours to define their own regional identity. In the second section of the article I scrutinize the different views on Transylvanian identity brought into play in Wallachian correspondence with the different Transylvanian elites. During a first phase that lasted for almost two centuries, the name of the region remained closely connected to the titles of the Transylvanian authorities, both lay and ecclesiastical. Gradually, Transylvania also gained an autonomous geographical meaning, but the major shift took place only in the mid-sixteenth century, when Wallachians actually began to consider Transylvania a political community of its own. I contend that this change of view was only indirectly triggered by the new political status of Transylvania from the 1540 onwards. Instead, I claim that the interest taken by the Ottomans in the new principality played a major role in modifying Wallachian views on Transylvania. As a result, the Transylvanian elites' endeavours to convey a sense of a regional identity to Wallachians were successfully accomplished only in the mid-sixteenth century.

Keywords: *Transylvania, Wallachia, late medieval, regional identity, rhetoric.*