

***Circulation of People Circulation of Objects  
across South Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire  
17th-19th centuries***

*Introduction*

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In 1718 the first edition of Anton Maria del Chiaro's, *Istoria delle moderne rivoluzioni della Valachia, con la descrizione del paese, natura, costumi, riti e religione degli abitanti* was printed in Venice.<sup>1</sup> Born in Florence in the 1660s, Del Chiaro moved to Venice where he was part of a small community of literary scholars gathered around Apostolo Zeno that encouraged him to leave for Walachia to collect information about this largely unknown region. Travelling to Sarajevo and Belgrade, he arrived in Wallachia where he became the secretary of three princes: Costantin Brincoveanu, Stefan Cantacuzino and Nicholas Mavrocordatos. Teaching Italian and Latin, translating and writing official letters, Del Chiaro was also employed as private tutor of the sons of Brincoveanu whose tragic fate he witnessed and extensively wrote about in his work. In 1714, accused of betraying the Sublime Porte and of secretly siding with the Habsburgs, the prince and his four sons were summoned to Constantinople where they were beheaded.

In the preface of the *Istoria*, which he completed after returning to Venice, Del Chiaro tells his audience that he wrote from the point of view of a 'foreigner' and this subject position – so he argues- grants readers that he is totally free from any 'passion' despite the honors he received from his three noble patrons. Unburdened of any local interest, the book addresses a scholarly readership in Italy, and fulfills the lack of information on these unknown lands. A rare and little-known book, the *Istoria* is, in the opinion of Nicolae Iorga, 'one of the most precious sources for the history of the Romanians'.<sup>2</sup>

Del Chiaro's sharp gaze points to the structural weakness of the land, owing to its geo-political position between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires:

Walachia is situated between two Empires. These form a balance that a Prince must keep in a perfect equilibrium. If the balance bends on the side of the Turks, he runs the risk of losing his state and freedom in the hands of the Germans [...] if, on the other

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<sup>1</sup> Antonmaria Del Chiaro, *Istoria delle moderne rivoluzioni della Valachia, con la descrizione del paese, natura, costumi, riti e religione degli abitanti* (Venezia, 1708). Nicolae Iorga edited a second edition (Bucharest, 1914) and a Romanian partial translation was published by S. Cris-Cristian, *Revolutiile Valaliei* (Jasi, 1929). On Del Chiaro see Gino Benzoni, *ad vocem*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 36 (Rome, 1988)

<sup>2</sup> Del Chiaro, *Istoria* (1914), 222

hand, the balance bends towards the Germans, or other Christian powers, this will suffice for the Turks to deprive him of his principality, wealth and eventually of his life.<sup>3</sup>

The experience of the foreigner; the fragile and changing balance between the Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian Empires; processes of identity construction molded by a condition of in-betweenness are the connecting features between Del Chiaro's interpretive perspective and the following five articles.

Using a wealth of sources in multiple languages, the essays focus on the Danubian principalities and the Ottoman Empire between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries focusing on the different ways in which foreigners moved across imperial boundaries, trying to integrate into the local elites. These complex procedures shed light on the the hybrid cultural and socio-political world in the Ottoman periphery. The contributions analyse multiple processes of identification that individuals could use to traverse and adapt to empires. The distinction between locals and outsiders outlines a network of identities in which the boundaries appear somewhat fluid, constructed and deconstructed according to personal and contextual interests. Foreigners in the Romanian lands were largely merchants and tradesmen, doctors, men of letters and diplomats, monks and mercenaries; for each of them, integration and social recognition followed a converging series of stages. Patronage, marriage, language and gift-giving constitute the main echelons granting status, influence and power. Through some relevant case studies, these practices of integration acquire concrete visibility within narratives of circulation, voyage and migration across Mediterranean Europe, the Ottoman, Habsburg and Russian Empires.

Maria Pakucs studies Balkan-Levantine merchants in Transylvania. By the middle of the sixteenth century they gradually replaced the former main agents of the trade, the local Saxon merchants. In her case study, she reconstructs the commercial and social network of a Transylvanian Greek merchant at the end of the seventeenth century: Kozma/Kosta, Boczi/Buczi/Potsis or Kis. His changing onomastics match the complexity of his social relationships and commercial operations, spanning a large territory, from the core of the Ottoman Empire to Poland, and crossing social boundaries by building a varied clientele, ranging from barons to servants of villages and priests in rural Transylvania. The exceptional archive of Kozma's business letters shows that he had good connections and travelled personally to markets in Central and East-Central Europe: Vienna, Nuremberg, Prešov, Wrocław, Jaroslav. Pakucs' article relies on documents preserved in the archives of Sibiu, such as unpublished political and private correspondence, letters of debt, loan contracts, town protocols and judicial inquests written in Hungarian, Latin and German.

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<sup>3</sup> Del Chiaro, *Istoria, parte seconda*, 155.

The enduring circulation of European physicians mostly trained at the University of Padua between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries, as well as the transfer of knowledge, drugs and technology they promoted shaped the making of a professional elite that reinforced the long-lasting connections between Italy and the Ottoman Empire. Based in the Venetian ambassador's residence in Constantinople, Alexandria and Damascus, this polyglot European professional elite settled in the Ottoman Empire, married into families of dragomans, physicians, and the local elite, moving across ethnic, religious and linguistic borders and often building successful careers.

Giulia Calvi's article focuses on a physician travelling from the Granduchy of Tuscany. Michelangelo Tilli (1655-1750) a twenty-seven-year-old physician graduated from the university of Pisa, between 1683 and 1685 travelled to the Ottoman Empire with the official charge of treating Mustafa pasha "Mussaip", son in law of Sultan Mehmed IV, having married his daughter Hatice Sultan. It was a relevant diplomatic and political move to send a promising young physician to treat the Pasha during the crucial military campaign of the Turks in Central Europe against the Holy League while Christian armies were confronting the last Ottoman attack to Vienna and Eastern Europe. When Tilli arrived in Istanbul, the Ottomans were at war with the Hapsburg Empire and the catastrophic consequences of the siege of Vienna in September 1683 resonate in his letters and reports, to date unpublished among the abundant literature on these events. Indeed, the doctor's letters intersect political and diplomatic information with medical therapy, botanical observation and the search for antiquities and show the plurality of functions performed by early modern medical practitioners. Tilli traveled from Constantinople to reach the Pasha's court in Belgrade, and then, once the news of the military defeat in Vienna reached the Ottomans, back across the Balkans following the Pasha and his retinue from Belgrade to Adrianople (today Edirne) Filippopolis (today Plovdiv) and Constantinople. Reports on health and medical therapies followed by the regular attempts at sending medicaments directly from Florence, overlap highly emotional descriptions of the collapse of the Ottoman armies in Vienna and around Buda in Hungary.

Michal Wasiucionek investigates the spreading of the Greek language, which came to be regarded as the language of culture among Moldavian–Wallachian elites and a conduit of cultural models at the interface between the Ottoman center and the Christian periphery of the empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While previous historiography dismissed the ascendancy of Greek as a reactionary shift among the boyar class anxious to retain cultural hegemony, the article analyses the winding evolution of language and literacy in Moldavia and Wallachia from a different perspective. Starting from the early seventeenth century, the Danubian principalities had witnessed a massive influx of 'Greco-Levantines' from core Ottoman provinces, who found their way into the local elite and formed alliances with local lineages. This shift was not only crucial for promoting literacy in Greek, but also served as a conduit

by which Moldavian-Wallachian boyars negotiated their new relationship with the Ottoman imperial center. Thus, rather than a boyar reaction against the spread of vernacular literacy, the popularity of Greek-Ottoman models was an exercise in connectivity, although one transcending the limits of the Danubian principalities. Thus, the proliferation of Greek can be read as a reflection of the growing integration of Moldavian and Wallachian elites into the fabric of the Ottoman Empire and not as a reflection of western culture as the natural point of reference for the Christian Orthodox elites, opposing the idiom of the Ottoman space. The adoption of the Greek language therefore formed an integral part of the dynamic cultural environment of Ottoman early modernity, with parallels to the cultural developments among Muslim population of the empire.

In her contribution, Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu analyses the criteria of definition and identification applied to a *foreigner* in the Danubian Principalities. Who were the foreigners who arrived in the Danubian Principalities at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? How were they qualified and classified in the social hierarchy? How were they received and how did they manage to integrate? The first essential criterion in the definition of the ‘foreigner’ concerns geographical belonging to a given territory. But the documents operate with great ambiguity when they speak of the others, the *foreigners*, who may originate from beyond the imaginary frontiers of various sorts of communities, whether delimited in confessional, social, or geographical terms. The article investigates the identity and status of foreigners within the political elite and the princely court and concentrates on the case study of François-Thomas Linchou, the first member of the Linchou family that went through a series of metamorphoses in the course of a little over a century (between 1740 and 1850): from Linchou to Lenș and Linche de Moissac, between Marseilles, Istanbul, Bucharest, and Paris, from Moorish converts to *true* Frenchmen, from Levantine merchants to Wallachian office-holders, ending up as the French comtes de Moissac.

Arriving in Istanbul around 1739, François-Thomas was involved there in trade and later in diplomacy on behalf of the French embassy. From this position, he managed to become integrated in the Phanariot network. As diplomatic agent of the Greek Constantine Racovitza (1699–1764), who ruled as Prince several times in Moldavia (1749–1753, 1756–1757) and Wallachia (1753–1756, 1763–1764), François-Thomas Linchou carried out intense diplomatic and commercial activity, which is recorded in a rich correspondence. According to his interests, he fashioned his identity on ‘the honour of the French nation’, or on that of a Moldavin boyar in pursuit of Moldavian offices, wishing to come closer to the local elite through a marriage of convenience. During a century, the Linchou family, who managed to integrate by way of commerce, would never manage to penetrate the social fabric of the community because, as Catholics, they bore the marks of a different confessional identity.

Nicoleta Roman investigates the Danubian Principalities after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), under Russian protectorate, when the Moldavian and Wallachian elites adopted French language and culture and the first Romanian Constitution (1831) as vehicles of Westernisation. In this framework, the article focuses on the Filipescu family whose members gained power, privileges and high ranks, aiming for the highest position, that of the prince.

The transition from the old to the new raises the question of whether elites could suddenly give up being Oriental (Turkish) to become Western and highlights the notion of *loyalty* which was for these political actors multi-layered and in continuous change, depending on political events and their regional and local implications. Roman's study uses diplomatic objects, more precisely decorations, to examine the practices and significations associated with them in the display of one's political loyalty and aspiration to Wallachia's throne. In the 1830s and 1840s, such objects were the interface of the political loyalties of the Wallachian elite, and at the same time symbolic of the conflictual relations between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The new custom that the tsar and the sultan should offer symbolic gifts to each other's envoys in the territory to mark a political understanding, opened a field of symbolic negotiation in this ever-changing diplomatic world. Iordache Filipescu was good at this game and played along with both the Russians and the Turks because the experience of living at the Ottoman border had taught him about the uncertain, volatile nature of political alliances and the continuous shifts in terms of loyalties and aspirations. Always in Oriental clothes, he appeared in public and in portraits wearing the insignia of both powers. However, these objects took on a double significance, different for the those awarding them and those receiving them, making the political message variously interpretable at the public level. The confusion was perpetuated because it served the interests of the two empires, which acted through individuals and families with contrary political sympathies. Pride in exhibiting decorations took hold of the entire elite, who had themselves painted wearing them with either Oriental or Western clothes. But times had changed and so had the role of such gifts. The decoration no longer symbolized the legitimation of local power, but merely the recognition of some current merit or the attenuation of a conflict. It was the end of a process, not the beginning of another, and this is what the great boyars had to learn.

The five essays uncover a wealth of little known sources in different languages: correspondences, judicial records, inventories, travelogues, marriage contracts and wills, legislation, press reports, local chronicles, histories, medical dictionaries and tracts in Latin, Ottoman Turkish, Greek, French, Italian, German, Romanian and Hungarian. Material culture such as jewelry, furniture, decorations, portraits and clothing preserved in private and public collections add to the abundance of the archive that each author has brought to light.

The circulation of people and objects is the *fil rouge* that binds all articles together. It outlines the importance of trans-imperial practices of knowledge,

translation, self-fashioning and hybridism that become visible adopting connectedness as an analytical perspective. Diplomats, doctors, merchants, mercenaries, men of letters, renegades, slaves and missionaries were crucial components in the construction of translocal elites in the early modern globalized world. As many of the case studies show through a micro historical approach, in-betweenness was a crucial dimension of historical experience within the geopolitical areas we have focused upon. As Del Chiaro acknowledged in his *Istoria*, a fragile and ever-changing balance between two or more contending imperial powers shaped loyalties, appearances and languages. The micro scale adopted in the contributions insists on the importance of primary sources that disclose networks and institutions shaping the wider circulation of people and objects, avoiding the risk of easy generalizations that sometimes narratives of mobility imply.