

**MEDIEVAL STATE AND SOCIETY. COMPARATIVE STUDY:  
ROMANIAN COUNTRIES AND MEDIEVAL STATES  
FROM EASTERN EUROPE (XIV-XVI CENTURIES)**

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**Abstract**

This article examines state's organization and structure of medieval society in the XIV-XVI centuries, period which coincides with the centralization of medieval state, beginning the transformation of European monarchies in modern states and the birth of new relations and social classes. Based on bibliographic sources and using comparative method as methodology, the authors conducted a picture of medieval states in Eastern Europe, the main terms of comparison used being the Romanian Country, Moldavia, Transylvania, Russia and Poland, with references to other medieval states like Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania. The main conclusion that emerges is that the phenomenon of confrontation between the nobility and centralized power is characteristic for all medieval European states, as well as the political cooperation between privileged social classes (clergy, nobility, townspeople). With regard to social classes the observed phenomena, in general, are the oppression of the peasants, even if the relationship to land master and to reign differ from country to country, the slow coagulation of a middle class and, as a consequence of the decay of Eastern European cities in the sixteenth century, the maintaining of boyars' predominant position in all areas of social, economic and political life.

**Key words:** *Peasant, Lord, Nobility, Land, Ownership*

European culture and civilization of the Middle Ages is the synthesis of Celtic, Germanic, Byzantine and Islamic components added to the Latin fund, that assimilated Hellenistic elements, synthesis shaped by ideology and institutions of Christianity. What later became a politico-cultural relative unit called "Europe" has its origins in the decline of the Roman Empire<sup>1</sup>.

As a term, this stage of human development (Middle Ages) differed from country to country, depending on the specific historical conditions, being placed in time between III-VII centuries and XVII-XIX centuries. Migrants' invasions ("barbarians from the Asian steppe, islands and desert") speed up the structural changes of empires, their dissolution into new countries and "new powers". XIV-XVI centuries, however, coincide with the period of medieval state centralization, with the beginning of the transformation of the European monarchies into modern states and the birth of new social relations. Since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, feudal nobility loses its independence, becoming

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<sup>1</sup> Ovidiu Drâmbă, *Istoria culturii și civilizației*, vol. V, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1984, pp. 348-380.

dependent on the king's court, and there is a new social class in the cities – the bourgeoisie.

In the center, south-eastern and Eastern Europe, the unification and centralization of the state was between XIII and XV centuries, under the fight of Hungarian and Romanian States against the Ottoman conquest, of the Czechs and Poles against German expansion and against the domination of Tartar Russia<sup>1</sup>.

Formation of the Romanian centralized independent feudal states represented effect of the political and institutional progress in economic and social basis of the Romanian society put into practice by unification of pre-state formations and creating domestic institutions, from the new territorial conditions, in the period between XIII and XIV centuries. Unification of pre-state formations was favored, externally, by falling domination exercised by the Tartars and Hungarians in the south and east of the Carpathians, as a consequence of the political difficulties Hungary had passed after the extinguishing of the Arpadian dynasty (1301). To the process of forming Moldova and Romanian Country contributed also the Romanians of Transylvania which, led by their rulers, have boosted the output under the suzerainty of the Hungarian crown.

Located in an area of contact between several civilizations and spiritual (religious) beliefs, Romanian countries have been in the way of conflicts of interest of neighboring states: the Ottoman Empire, Hungary, Poland, fact which has guided their foreign policy and influenced to a large extent, their domestic politics.

Internal political and institutional organization of the Romanian Countries was the result of a long tradition, but also of influences came equally from the Byzantine Empire and Western Europe. Grouping pre-state formations in different feudal countries, politically and legally unit, was done around the Prince founder, who became ruler and took the title of “domn” (lord), derived from Latin, which means lord of the country, to the detriment of the title of “prince”, although the latter was strongly crept in Romanian spirituality.

Reign (lord institution) is a local institution, central for the Romanian customary law, its attributes being derived from the natural and unique process of forming the Romanian feudal states. The institutionalization of political power in the Romanian Countries, i.e. the formation of Romanian feudal states, was first linked to circumstance personalities which had at first only civic legitimate and not an administrative apparatus to survive. Institutionalized political power which constituted state's political core was not dissociated of the governor's person. The state itself was confused at first with the person of the ruler. At the enthronement, the Lord was crowned. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, the crown was replaced by “cuca” (term in Turkish – high hat adorned with ostrich feathers).

Even if the Romanian Countries became vassal through homage and fidelity to the higher powers, they have not become vassal countries of law; therefore vassalage was only a nominal title. Vassalage stretched only on the person of the lord and not on the reign in general. Some historians believe the date of the vassal regime establishment was 1462 for Wallachia, when Vlad Țepeș was replaced by Radu cel Frumos (Radu the Handsome), and

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<sup>1</sup> R. Manolescu, V. Costăchel, F. Cazan, S. Brezeanu, M. Maxim, *Istoria Medie Universală*, București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1980, p. 169.

1456 for Moldova, when Petru Aron and Country's Assembly accepted the conditions of Mehmed the second the Conqueror.

In reality and in strictly legal terms, negotiated peace have resulted in unequal alliances, the Romanian Countries receiving, according to Muslim law, the legal regime "ahd" (this term was referring to enemy territories that were to be attacked with the view of establishing a Muslim regime, i.e. were to be led by Emiri Muslims). So legal regime "ahd" was an intermediate regime, the Turks being content with tribute payment as a sign of residents' allegiance. The institution of local princes from the royal family was maintained; they ran the local armed forces, but were forced to military cooperate with the Turkish. But they remained subjects of international law in the most exact phrase. This scheme was valid until the establishment of the Phanariot regime (1711 in Moldavia and 1716 in the Romanian Country).

Lord represented the tip of the entire feudal hierarchy<sup>1</sup>. Lord was the holder of power, bringing the quality of prince (supreme ruler of the army) with the one of single master head of an independent and sovereign state). Lord was head of state as to exert a variety of responsibilities in domestic and foreign policy. Internally, lord exercised administrative functions (directing state administration, investing governors in office, granting privileges and ranks of nobility, issuing coin, establishing the system of taxes, executing judicial decisions), military functions (was commander in chief), legislative function (issuing general decisions and legal rules that were adopted by the royal council and the general assembly of social conditions), judicial functions (lord was the supreme court in the state, but its decisions had legal force only during his life). Externally, lord initiated state's foreign policy, maintained cooperative relations with neighboring countries, signed treaties.

In Transylvania, during the period when it was under the rule of Hungary, central political leadership belonged to the Prince named "voievod". Appointed by the Hungarian king, prince exercised only a part of the royal suzerainty's prerogative. Its main tasks were administrative, judicial and military: convening general congregations, leading Transylvanian army, enjoying extensive legal privileges, managing royal revenues which stopped a third<sup>2</sup>.

With the abolition of the Hungarian Kingdom and Transylvania's organization as an autonomous principality under Turkish suzerainty, it will be headed by a prince elected by the Diet or sometimes directly by the Porte. Prince had broad powers as agreed in matters of foreign policy, declaring war and concluding peace, approving the appointment of diplomatic envoys in missions, receiving diplomatic envoys arrived in the country. Concerning the internal politics of the country, Prince was the supreme commander of the army, was the country's supreme court of justice, and convened diets, investing in political offices, conferred titles of nobility, decided in religious matters.

Played for over a century between the Ottoman and the Habsburg Empire, the principality of Transylvania will eventually come under the domination of the latter. Habsburg King becomes great prince of the province. For administration of the province,

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<sup>1</sup> Gheorghe I. Brătianu, *Sfatul domnesc și Adunarea stărilor în Principatele Române*, București, Editura Enciclopedică, 1995, pp. 13-27.

<sup>2</sup> Gheorghe Bonciu, *Istoria dreptului românesc*, București, Editura Fundației România de Măine, 2000, p. 94.

the king had a deputy governor, appointed indefinitely, from the country's nobles. The governor administered the province using Gubernium, under the guidance and supervision of the Court of Vienna. Gradually, however prince will become more autonomous from the Hungarian crown, examples being Roland Borșa and Ladislau Kan.

As regards the scope of its powers, only Prince could compare to Lord institution in the Romanian Countries. Lord's power was personal, indivisible and non-transferable in its fullness but was limited by the boyars although he has joined them in leading, receiving their consent to the crowning. This phenomenon of confrontation between local authority exercised by the nobility and centralized power is characteristic for early European Middle Ages (placed in a conventional manner, between 500 and 1500) when the central government was almost nonexistent. If at first, the concepts of state sovereignty and nation did not exist<sup>1</sup> and there were some countries that did not even have clearly defined boundaries (end of IX – XI centuries), gradually kings, emperors, princes and lords acquired authority over territories they ruled and the feudal nobility; rivalry between them has not ceased. In the Romanian Countries reign had an absolutist character. Lord was ruler, lacking a control body; however, as stated A.D. Xenopol, he was not despotic, customary land putting limits to its attributes and bordering its power by the royal council and the assembly of social conditions (status).

A unique case in the European Middle Ages is the tsarist state. Unlike other absolutist monarchs of the time, Russian tsars exercised arbitrary, despotic and theoretically unlimited power. Tsar was the largest land owner and ruled in autocratic manner, helped by boyar "Duma", the "priczuri" (special institutions solving administrative issues) and the princes who had local governmental attributions. Tsar authority extended over all Russia (regarded entirely as his property – "votcina") and on all his subjects, regardless of rank and social class they came from, even Russian boyars being considered "his slaves". Theoretically, there were representative bodies that Tsar could convene and consult (nobility's "Duma" and the "Assembly of the earth"), but they never had control over state finances nor have they managed to limit or control the autocratic power of the sovereign<sup>2</sup>.

The only federal institution that account and that have a binding influence on the Tsar's power was the church because of its highly developed rituals that had governed the daily life of Tsar and loans to which they were forced to use frequently and that they have never returned to the church<sup>3</sup>. As in the Romanian Principalities, church property was exempt from taxes (fully or partially) in the account of church aid through loans and direct contributions in the event of financial crisis or war.

The church was a fundamental institution of the medieval state, representing at the same time, a hotbed of culture. In the history of many countries in Eastern Europe, orthodoxy represented the basic religion, a fundamental element in the national consciousness, in the crystallization of local and regional culture and identity<sup>4</sup>. In the

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<sup>1</sup> See P. Riché, B. Guillemain, J. Favier, M. Morineau, S. Pillorget, *Istoria universală*, vol. II, *De la Evul Mediu la Secolul Luminilor*, București, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2006, p. 380; John R. Barber, *Istoria Europei Moderne*, București, Editura Lider, 1993, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> John Swift, *Petru cel Mare*, București, Editura All, 2003, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Claudiu Cotan, *The Role of the Orthodox Hierarchs in the Foreign Political Life of the Romanians Principalities. The Political Relations with Poland from 1450 to 1750*, in Antoni Mironowicz, Urszula

Romanian history, the church played an important role in Romanians fight against neighboring kingdoms, especially the Ottoman Empire.

Between 1359 and 1401, during Mircea cel Bătrân (Mircea the Elder) and Alexandru cel Bun (Alexander the Good), were grounded the Ungro-Wallachian Metropolitan Church, which stretched its ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Transylvanian Orthodox, and the Metropolitan Church of Moldova, both dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. These events were followed by hierarchical organization of church settlements in metropolitan churches, bishops, monasteries and churches, which were led by metropolitans, bishops, deans, abbots and priests. The church was under Lord's authority, which confirmed the metropolitans and bishops. As landowners on their estates, bishops and metropolitans had the right of judgment upon the inhabitants of enslaved villages and dependent towns inside boundary areas. Metropolitan have extensive powers: he was deputy lord in case of vacancy of the throne and his first counselor, leading external messages, taking part in the promulgation of legislative acts of the state, having judicial powers. In Russia, because of the great financial powers he held, the status of the patriarch was almost equal to that of the Tsar<sup>1</sup>.

In exercising its authority, lords of Romanian Countries were helped by a royal council, consisting only of boyars who become landowners with government offices (governor, steward, treasurer, chancellor, butler, back, ban of Severin, later ban of Oltenia, keeper of Suceava). Among the most important tasks performed by the Royal Council include: development, alongside with Lord, of foreign policy; participation in civil and criminal trial; advising Lord on matters of state, tax issues, military and religious issues; validating acts of ownership transfer, royal donations and granting immunities.

Royal council had a duty to inform the Lord on the mood of the people. In turn, Lord royal was obliged to consult Royal Council in legal issues, in military matters, in problems related to church (choice of church hierarchy, the establishment of a diocese, or moving a metropolitan or bishop from one residence to another), as in the fiscal issues (establishment of new taxes). By the seventeenth century, Lords, together with great boyars who formed the Royal Council, have visited fairs and princely courts with the aim of resolving administrative and judicial matters.

Over the XIII-XV centuries, under a central authority insufficiently strengthened, political cooperation of privileged social status (clergy, nobility, townspeople) was an important support for the monarchy. For this reason in Europe have operated assemblies composed of representatives of social conditions (Diets in Hungary, Czech state and Poland, the Parliament in England, the general states in France) who gave the monarchy the name of "monarchy of social conditions"<sup>2</sup>. In the Romanian Countries the Assembly of privileged status<sup>3</sup> (also called synod, great synod, community advice, civic assembly) was composed of representatives of the privileged social strata – nobility, clergy, townspeople, rarely free peasants, being convened by the Royal Council for solving very important problems: election of the Lord, solving grievances of the peasantry, dealing with foreign policy issues or problems relating to the administration of the church. This

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Pawluczuk, Wojciech Walczak (editors), *The Orthodox Church in the Balkans and Poland. Connections and Common Tradition*, Białystok, 2007, p. 15.

<sup>1</sup> John Swift, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> R. Manolescu, V. Costăchel, F. Cazan, S. Brezeanu, M. Maxim, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> George Fotino, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-124.

institution had a mainly political role, its main task consisting in the election of Lord by the privileged social conditions, excluding servile and even free peasantry<sup>1</sup>. A similar institution will appear in Transylvania in the XIII-XV centuries as General Congregations composed of representatives of the nobility, clergy, townspeople and sometimes small free owners. From the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Country's Assembly, in whose composition entered representatives of the nobility, clergy, and of free peasants, was convened regularly; among his powers there were those to elect Lord, to approve fiscal policy and to approve treaties.

In Russia, following the formation of the centralized Russian state, Ivan the III<sup>rd</sup> introduced a new system of centralized government, consisting of boyar "Duma" and the "priczuri". The boyar "Duma" was a consultative permanent body, composed of landowners. The "priczuri" were bodies set up to solve various domestic and foreign policy issues, having at their head a boyar helped by several clerks and copyists<sup>2</sup>.

In Poland, during XV<sup>th</sup> century were established local representative bodies of state power, composed of representatives of the clergy and small and medium nobility ("szlachta"). Thus, the completion of Polish feudal monarchy presented a particular feature: the representatives of cities (merchants and craftsmen) were not part of the local representative bodies of the feudal state. Also, during the reign of Casimir the IV<sup>th</sup> (1447-1492), was born a representative body called the General Sejm, consisting of King, Senate and representatives of provincial nobility ("szlachta") and having legislative power<sup>3</sup>. In the Polish Sejm, great and small nobility held an important position, stating their interests and influencing domestic and foreign policy of the state.

Blossoming feudalism gave a new impetus to economic development, expansion of agricultural areas, improvement of agricultural technology and craft, putting his mark on social relations. The feudal land ownership's consolidation and completion of feudal domain's organization had the effect of extending the serfdom as dominant form of peasants' addiction and worsening peasantry's exploitation<sup>4</sup>.

In the Romanian Countries, given the economic, social and political particularities, feudal social organization had specific forms. One of the original characters of the Romanian feudal relations is the intertwining of feudal relations of exploitation with relations of individual peasant property and community ownership and also the existence of categories of free peasants ("răzeș" – free peasant, owner of land; "moșnean" – free peasant, owner in joint property of land inherited from a common ancestor) who owned certain plots of land and enjoyed certain economic and social rights (exemption from taxes, land endowments, right to freely dispose of their land).

The primary criteria of social stratification have always been the assets (wealth) and the legal status of ownership. In feudalism, property right was characterized by limitations, complexity and overlapping, essentially differing from the property of common Romanian law. In the Romanian Countries, Lord property included lands overlooked by the individual property, desolate areas, lands part of vacant heritages, lands confiscated as punishment for treason, fortresses and miles, was exempt from taxes and estates were

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<sup>1</sup> Gheorghe Bonciu, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> R. Manolescu, V. Costăchel, F. Cazan, S. Brezeanu, M. Maxim, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 124.

worked by dependent peasants. Property of secular feudals could be acquired only by originating ways (by taking possession of nobody's land, deforestation, occupation) or derived ways (by inheritance, Lord's donation, acquisitive prescription, "inter vivos" and "mortis causa" acts<sup>1</sup>), consisting of movable and immovable property. Church property belonging to bishops, monasteries, parishes, came especially from royal or princely donations, but also from private donations. Land in the hearth of the towns and the nearby territory made up the urban land ownership shared by all members of the community for agriculture and cattle breeding.

With regard to peasantry ownership, both free peasants and dependent producers had the right to property in Romanian Country and Moldova. In the free community, immovable property of free peasants had a mixed character: condominium or individual. Old village community exercise a superior right of possession ("dominium eminens") over the entire territory of the contents of its borders, which concerned the right of grazing on pasture, mountains, stubble, the right to fish in rivers and ponds, the right to use common forest. The right to have personal possession was aimed at land separated from the condominium by grubbing and clearing to acquire the area necessary for home, field, meadow, garden, vineyard, apiary, mild, but especially the land for plowing (estate or "delnița" or "ocina"), which was heritable transmitted. Along with the intensification of enslavement of peasants villages of Moldova and Romanian Country (XVII-XVIII centuries), ownership of the dependent community returned to feudal nobility. Enslaved peasants ("rumâni" and "vecini") have a more consolidated ownership of the house and property created by them (fallow land, forest removed from the condominium, beehives and vineyards, gardens and orchards) and the full ownership of their livestock and tools. Transylvanian serfs and peasants with little land ("iobagi" and "jeleri") had unlimited right to use the "sessile" (land of culture) and full possession of the house, the immovable property and the forest removed from the condominium ("curătură") obtained through their own work.

Unlike the Romanian peasants, the situation of Russian serfs was much worse. In addition to binding relation to the landowner, not having the right to move their house without the master's approval<sup>2</sup> (compared to land binding), Russian peasants were also bound to redistribution community ("mir") in the sense that land was distributed periodically to community members according to the size of each family. While the Romanian peasants had a property right on the house, on the land they created through clearing and grubbing and on cattle and their gear, the ownership of Russian peasants was very limited, the land belonging to the community ("mir") and being reunited periodically to be redistributed<sup>3</sup>.

In the second half of the XV<sup>th</sup> century, the unification of Russian principalities ended with the formation of the centralized Russian state. This process could not remain without consequences on the structure of Russian society. Thus, removal of feudal fragmentation led to the crystallization of two categories of land owners: owners of "ocina" who had the right to alienate their land, and "dvorenii" whose right to land ownership was conditioned

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Hanga (responsible editor), *Istoria dreptului românesc*, vol. I, București, Editura Academiei, 1980, pp. 527-528.

<sup>2</sup> N.A. Sidorova (responsible editor), N.I. Konrad, I.P. Petrușevski, L.V. Cerepnin, *Istoria Universală*, vol. III, București, Editura Științifică, 1960, pp. 773-774.

<sup>3</sup> Werner Rösener, *Țăranii în istoria Europei*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2003, p. 34.

by job provision to the land donor (“pomestie”) and were deprived of the right to dispose of the donation’s object<sup>1</sup>. Being the military basic force, “dvoreni” benefited of many donations (“pomestii”) becoming urban small landlords, along with merchants, basic urban population.

The reign of Ivan the IV<sup>th</sup> was marked by conflict between the great nobility and the “dvoreni”, which conflict the Tsar wanted to put an end to it through the reform called the “oprichnina”. As a result of this reform, the State was divided into two sectors: the “oprichnina”, that is territory that has been the new court of Tsar and which comprised the richest regions, and “zemshchina” or common territory, consisting of the outermost regions of the country, the less thriving<sup>2</sup>. The novelty brought by this reform was that great vassals, whose fields were located on the territory of “oprichnina”, have been forcibly displaced in the second sector, and their place was taken by the “dvoreni” who received donations in return for military service provision. “Oprichnina” was abolished in the year 1572, the reform touching its purpose, namely to replace the old nobility with the “dvoreni” which became the main political force of Russia.

Due to external and internal consolidation begun in the sixteenth century, the struggle for power manifested between the central authority of the Tsar and the local nobility resulted in a drastic deterioration of the situation of the peasantry, Russian nobility claiming more and more services of corvee (“clacă”) and imposing increasingly burdensome obligations to the peasants. Since the reign of Ivan the IV<sup>th</sup>, Russia’s expansion to Siberia inspired the peasants to migrate to the new territories, a phenomenon that threaten both the safety of the boyars and the economic and political stability of the State<sup>3</sup>. This was the reason why, according to a legal act of the year 1497, peasants could no longer freely leave their households; this was allowed only under certain conditions and after the settlement of all judicial matters that they would have had with the boyar. In Tsarist Russia was established a form of dependency much harsher than the peasantry’s dependence on the nobility in Central and Western Europe<sup>4</sup>. This form of serfdom was characterized by the right of the owner to tie by land the farmers who belonged to him, to use them at any job, to sell them together with the whole family or to deport entire villages of serfs. During the reign of Ivan the Terrible (1544-1584), the situation of peasants has been hardened; the Tsar abolished by decree the right of serfs to free choice of domicile and declared adverse to the law any change of home made by them without the approval of the master<sup>5</sup>.

Unlike the situation of enslaved peasantry in Russia and other Eastern countries, the situation of the Romanian peasantry differ in relation to the land owner and by obligations to the Lord. Dependent peasants included two categories: the serfs, who had their own household, the right to use land, and whose right of removal from a domain to another was conditional on the fulfillment of rent, and the “jeleri”, who did not have the right to use lots, were not bound by rent obligations and could move more easily. The most important obligation of the peasants against the royal power was to serve the Lord with

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<sup>1</sup> R. Manolescu, V. Costăchel, F. Cazan, S. Brezeanu, M. Maxim, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 475.

<sup>3</sup> John Swift, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> Werner Rösener, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

weapons, for which the peasantry played an important military role, becoming an important social force in the economy.

The main class – the boyars (in Romanian Country and Moldova) and nobility (in Transylvania) – was characterized, as in the Middle Ages throughout Europe, by suzerain-vassal relationship set against the ruler or prince. Boyars acquire land property from him in exchange for the provision of the service of “faith”, of military and political support for the Lord. This vassalage relationship was harder for Russian boyars on which the Tsar exerted a powerful authority, considering them “his slaves”. Quite different was the situation in Poland in the XVI<sup>th</sup> century where the fragility of the Polish kingdom on internal and external level led to strengthening the position of the nobility and its political and legal privileges in relation to peasants and townspeople. Needing the support of nobility to strengthen their position internally and externally, Polish kings made many concessions to noble class representatives. They had a significant position in the Polish Sejm influencing all important political decisions and defending their privileges. In 1518, King Sigismund, constrained by the context of domestic and international political life, will undertake not to take into consideration any complaint or dissatisfaction of the peasants against feudal lords. Thus, the Kingdom of Poland was transformed into a true “nobility’s republic”<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to the two main social classes, the Middle Ages has known an intermediate class – townspeople, which was reinforced during feudal social development, in different ways, depending on the wealth and the role performed in the medieval city, but also on economic and social conditions of each country individually. In the Romanian Country and Moldavia, cities not exceeded the fair state, being owned by the Lord and townspeople were less numerous; instead, in Transylvania, urban settlements have known a more prosperous development, like many Western European cities, prompting the existence of a complex social structure among the population of cities (urban patriciate, craftsmen, merchants, journeymen, apprentices, the poor or without fortune man, and other social categories: public officers, servants, doctors, teachers, lawyers, priests, scribes and clerks, self-employed).

In Russia, political and social backwardness, coupled with economic and technological backwardness, the result of the Tatar domination (which lasted from the XIII<sup>th</sup> century until 1480 when Tsar Ivan the Third ceased to pay tribute to the Golden Horde) have aggravated much the clotting of a middle class. Trade development and affirmation of merchant class was prevented by Tsars that put royal monopoly on any profitable activity. The merchants who managed to establish themselves and gain considerable wealth automatically became subjects of the crown (“gosti”), depending on the crown’s favors<sup>2</sup>. No manufacturing activity could develop much in Russia; the largest productions – from the processing of iron, salt and lower quality fabrics – were also controlled by Tsar<sup>3</sup>. Only during the eighteenth century urban population increased, depending on the economic situation, being divided into “good”, “medium” and “low” people and by occupation into merchants, artisans and workers<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup> John Swift, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> R. Manolescu, V. Costăchel, F. Cazan, S. Brezeanu, M. Maxim, *op. cit.*, p. 473.

Analyzing the social structure of the sixteenth century in the various countries of Eastern Europe can be seen that more closely linking farmers to the land is in direct relationship with the considerable expansion of boyars' estates and with increasing of corvee services ("clacă") that had to be provided by peasants and with compulsory service as a servant in the royal court. Thus, in comparison to the XV<sup>th</sup> century when the noble courts had exceeded, on average only three times the size of peasant households, this will double during the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, reaching two-fifths of the arable area of the village. This phenomenon of oppression of feudal domination manifested both in the Romanian Countries, as well as in Poland, Hungary, Bohemia, Moravia, and Eastern Germany leading to a true "re-feudalization process, accompanied in part by peasant resistance actions"<sup>1</sup>. In some cases, serfdom was enacted, even as it happened in 1595, when Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave) through a severe law, tied the peasants on their land (or in 1497 in Russia). The same phenomenon will be met in the sixteenth century in Belarus and Ukraine which, placed under the rule of Poland and Lithuania, will experience an agrarian boyar regime.

Another phenomenon which has characterized the social and economic life of the European States in the period studied was the structural gap between urban areas in Western Europe, characterized by an intense commercial and craft activities<sup>2</sup>, and the one in Eastern Europe where economic development was much slower. If in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Eastern European cities passed through a relative period of flowering, in the sixteenth century had begun their regress, determined by the population decrease, wars and internal power struggles and fierce competition between England and the Dutch in the East-West trade. The decay of cities offered to the boyars the occasion to penetrate the interior and external trade which until then had been the monopoly of the cities and towns, to prohibit the receipt of their serfs ran off the estates and to set affordable prices through customs privileges<sup>3</sup>. This explains the fact that, while in Western Europe formed a bourgeoisie increasingly stronger, in Eastern Europe the nobility remained in the predominant position in all areas of social, economic and political life, which imposed to Eastern European countries for a long time, "an agrarian and backward character"<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Werner Rosener, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> In the eighteenth century, the number of crafts increased twice, contributing to social stratification. See Anișoara Băbălău, *The fiscal organization of Wallachia in Brancovan era*, in "Analele Universității din Craiova. Seria Istorie", an XIX, nr. 2(26)/2014, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Werner Rosener, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

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