

## NEAGOE BASARAB – THE RULER WHO WAS SEEKING ETERNITY

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*Învățăturilor lui Neagoe Basarab către fiul său Theodosie*  
[The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab to his son Theodosius]

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Suppose the texts were to speak for themselves. In that case, *the Teachings of Neagoe Basarab* should be called, in the intertextual tension it establishes with Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Erasmus of Rotterdam's *The Education of the Christian Prince*, *The Levantine Prince*, so much so that the work written in Târgoviște at the beginning of the 16th century seems to be a replica from the same times, but in a different place under a different sky, of the first modern treatises on politics. Modern, anti-traditional, broken from the authority of the sacred, centred on worldly ends to the point of disregarding any demands of means. *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab*, the Wallachian ruler, is the late fruit of a world in which Byzantine echoes have not yet died away, over which is superimposed the breath of a Romanian society on the fringes of Christianity, in contact with Islam rather than with the Renaissance ideals of the West.

But the texts speak through the minds of *model readers*, called to enter *in fabula*, as Umberto Eco said. The ideal reader of this Wallachian Renaissance text is relentless, driven by the mad desire to update its potential content by confronting it with other works at different levels of intertextuality. It is easy for the reader to notice the correspondences between the *Teachings of Basil the Macedonian to his son Leo*, or *the Administration of the Empire of Constantine Porphyrogenitus*, to cite just two of the best-known political works of the time. Concentric circles around the parenetic work of Neagoe Basarab organize resonance with works of a spiritual nature, such as the *Humility* of St Simeon the New, the *Ladder* of St John the Climacus, the *Dioptra* of Philip the Solitary, the *Homilies* of John Zlatoust, the *Words* of St Ephrem the Syrian and the *Words* of St Athanasius of Alexandria. But above all *the Chronicles* of Holy Scripture, with their stringing together, intertwining and entangling of royal destinies, the dust and dust of times saved by a few sentences of wit.

The son of Basarab the Younger, ascended to the throne at the age of 30 for a reign of 10 years, “this Marc Aureliu of the Romanian Country” (B.-P. Hasdeu) began his apprenticeship as secretary to Metropolitan Niphon, exiled to our lands after having been Patriarch of Constantinople, thus from the heart of the Ottoman Empire in one of its most troubled edges. The bond between the two would prove indestructible over time, the representative of temporal power remaining the faithful spiritual son of the representative of spiritual authority. That is why the inclusion in the addendum of the edition published in 2020 by the National Foundation for Science and Art, under the auspices of the Romanian Academy, of the biography with the title *Nifon, patriarhul Țarigradului, care au strălucit prin multe patimi și ispite în Țarigrad și în Țara Muntenească, scrisă de Chir Gavriil Protul adică mai marele Sfetăgoriei*, follows the line of intertextualities intended to highlight for the informed reader the “dimension of eternity” (Constantin Noica) present both in the work of the disciple and that of the spiritual master.

A wind of aristocratic melancholy comes to this day from this prince of refined tastes (dressed in red brocade embroidered with the Byzantine double-headed eagle, a symbol of temporal power and spiritual authority in tandem, his head covered with the crown of a bazillion), who left us the architectural jewel of the Episcopal cathedral of Curtea de Argeș Monastery, the work of the mysterious Master Manole. Married to Despina, a descendant of the Serbian Brancovici family, with whom he had sons and daughters, he mourns in the pages of his spiritual testament for Petru, who died in infancy, and for Ion and Anghelina, who died in their youth. He does not know, the homely author and father, that Theodosius, the one destined to succeed him to the throne, will not reign, nor will he live much more than three months after his death. Man is under the times, and trouble is on men, and does not even bypass the reigning bone, scarcely does the fleeting gesture of writing escape, at times, from the burden of eternity into eternity.

We know something about the man Neagoe Basarab, we have a broad picture of his scholarly culture, his unflinching taste for beauty and his attraction for the good that is honoured to a worldly ruler. But who was Neagoe Basarab? Perhaps the best-kept secret about this character is the one in plain sight: Negru-Vodă, the name by which *the Ballad of Master Manole* makes him known to us. It is a constant in Romanian historiography, this Negru Vodă appears so often that a historian, D. Onciul, rightly concludes that “it is the poetic personification of the beginnings”, the nickname of the dismounts,

an “initiatory-priestly-royal function” (Vasile Lovinescu). Incidentally, Neagoe’s son-in-law, Radu of Afumați, will be nicknamed Radu-Negru, so he bears the same title. The colour of the planet Saturn, the priestly star...

In the light of these fleeting notes, we can only regret the fact that in the 1180 pages of *The Teachings of Neagoe Basarab...*, offered by the new Edition of the Academy, there is no room for the clarifications of a hermeneut dedicated to the *Philokalia*, able to capture the balance between the warlike breath and the priestly charge of the text, whose temporary and superb human expression must have been Neagoe, the Ruler of Wallachia. Treating such a work, however brilliant, exclusively as literature is a condemnation to remain on the threshold, in uncomfortable exteriority about the living and operational meanings of the text. Because isn’t it, the most comfortable way to miss the encounter with a text is to reduce it to its literary dimension.