
The Genoese and the Lower Danube in the XIIIth and XIVth centuries

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Italian merchants, and in particular the Venetians and Genoese, had visited the northern shores of the Black Sea from the first half of the XIIIth century. We find that there were Italian merchants in the city of Kiev in 1247, as well as in the area between the city and the Black Sea.¹ Their trade on the northern shores only really began to expand, however, after they had obtained permission from the Tartar khans to establish colonies at different places along the littoral and the mouth of the Danube. This was the origin of the colony in the ancient city of Theodosia in Crimea, which for cen-

¹ BERTOLD SPULER, *Die Goldene Horde. Die Mongolen in Russland 1223-1502*, Leipzig 1943, p. 389; B. D. GRECOV, A. I. IACUBOVSKI, *Hoarda de Aur si decaderea ei* (The Golden Horde and its Decline), Bucarest 1953, pp. 110-114.

In 1246 the Pope wrote to the priests of Jerusalem and asked them to intervene for the liberation of "the Greeks", Bulgars, Ruthenians and Roumanian Christians, both men and women, who had been sold to the Saracens by Italian merchants from Genoa, Pisa and Venice (STEFAN PASCU, *Contributii documentare la istoria in sec. XIII si XIV* (Documentary contribution to Roumanian history in the 13th and 14th centuries), Sibiu, 1944, p. 15: "Grecos, Bulgaros, Ruthenos, et Blaccos, christianos, tam mares quam feminae"). The Italians had purchased them from the Tartars on the ports on the north of the Black Sea, at Cetatea Alba, which the Italians called Moncastro, or at Caffa in the Crimea. The way in which the slaves are referred to in the Pope's letter, the peoples being listed from south to north, and from the juxtaposition of the "Blagues" (that is the Vlachs) with the Ruthenians, it is clear that the latter were the Moldavian Roumanians.

turies was to be known as Caffa.² The Genoese became established here, as they did at Moncastro (ancient Maurocastro) on the Dniester, as well as at Chilia, in the Danube delta, and at Vicina on the right bank of the Danube in Dobroudja.

So long as Constantinople maintained the latin empire of Orient (1204-61), the Venetians predominated in the Black Sea basin. In 1206, only two years after the founding of the Byzantine Empire, Venetian merchants were trading in the Black Sea « as far as Soldaia », modern Sudat in the Crimea.³ They were equally active in Chilia where they were remembered, in toponymy at least, until the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. In fact on a French map of the late XVIIth century one branch of the Danube near Chilia is named « le Danube Venedikoul »⁴ using the Roumanian form of the name. Similarly, a Russian statistical chart of 1835 names an island in the delta near Chilia as "Vinitic".⁵ In Roumanian, the word "venetic" has even, by extension, come to mean "foreigner", and in the countryside in particular is often used to describe people from other parts, even nationals from other regions or villages.

After the Byzantine Empire had been restored by Michael Palaeologus, "the emperor" of Nicea, with the assistance of the Genoese, the consequence of the Treaty of Nimphaion (13 March 1261) was that the Venetians were quickly ousted by the Genoese.⁶ The Genoese were subsequently to maintain this privileged position on the northern shores of the Black Sea throughout the whole of the XIIIth, XIVth and XVth centuries.

Although we do not have very much information on Genoese trade with Moncastro in the XIIIth century, this is amply compensated by the very rich sources which exist for Vicina, which almost certainly was situated on the site of contemporary Isaccea and where

² BERTOLD SPULER, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

³ The relevant document may be found in R. MOROZZO DE LA ROCCA - A. LOMBARDO, *Documenti del commercio veneziano nei secoli XI-XIII*, Vol. II, Torino 1944, pp. 18-19.

⁴ G. VILSAN, *Romanii in Delta Dunării la sfîrşitul secolului al XVIII-lea* (Roumanians in the Danube in the late 18th century), Bucarest 1927, p. 6.

⁵ C. C. GIURESCU, *Principatele Romane la inceputul secolului al XIX-lea* (The Roumanian principalities in the early 19th century), Bucarest 1957, p. 35.

⁶ N. IORGA, *Studii istorice asupra Chiliei si Cetatii Albe* (Historical studies on Chilia and Cetatea Alba), p. 45; M. BENZA, *La Mer Noire à la fin du Moyen Age*, in « Balcanica » IV, p. 417.

from ancient times there had been a ford over the river.⁷ In 1923 a whole series of commercial contracts drawn up in the Pera suburb of Constantinople in the period 1 July to 16 August 1281, which were concerned with activities throughout the Danubian area, were published.⁸ They throw a vivid light on the trading activities of the area, and allow us to draw important conclusions about the economic and social life of the hinterland of Moldavia, Dobroudja and Walachia. In the single six-week period mentioned, the Genoese notary Gabriele di Predono (there were 19 other Genoese notaries in Pera) attested no less than 27 commercial contracts involving goods destined for Vicina.⁹ The total value of the goods destined for this port mentioned in these contracts amounted to 4,100 Byzantine gold *hyperperes* and 10½ carats (the *hyperpere* being of 24 carats,¹⁰ and of this 2038 *hyperperes* and 15½ carats were for unspecified goods, while the remaining 2061 *hyperperes* and 19 carats — slightly over half of the total — were for textiles, in particular Lombard cloth (premier quality fine cloth). The cost of these fine cloths amounted to 1852 *hyperperes*, that is 89.86% — virtually 9/10 of the total textile imports.¹¹

⁷ The different views on the citing of Vicina are described in C. C. GIURESCU, *Intermeierea mitropoliei Ungrovalahiei* (Founding of the metropolis of Hongro-Valachia), in « Biserica Ortodoxa Română » LXXXVII (1959), no 7-10, pp. 680-682. Most recent opinion places Vicina at Pacuiul lui Soare, or on an island east of Siliștra, or at Somova north of Dobroudja between Isaccea and Tulcea. We do not find these arguments convincing, however, and until a map or other source which provides simultaneous reference to both Isaccea and Vicina, making the citing suggested above untenable, (and at present no such source exists) this remains the most plausible.

⁸ G. I. BRATIANU, *Vicina I. Contributions à l'histoire de la domination byzantine et du commerce genois en Dobroudja*, in « Academie Roumaine, Bulletin de la Section Historique », vol. x, Bucarest 1923, pp. 113-189. (Hereafter referred to as *Vicina I*; and the same author's article in « Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen », XIX, 1, pp. 133-182 will be referred to as *Vicina II*).

⁹ *Vicina I*, p. 147.

¹⁰ *Vicina I*, p. 148. The total of 4100 *hyperperes*, 10½ carats is our own calculation. In *Vicina I*, p. 147 the sum is given as 4,073 *hyperperes* 20½ carats.

¹¹ The following examples are taken from two of the twelve contracts in which Lombard cloth was referred to explicitly) Pera, 10th July 1281: Philippe Alario received on account Lombard cloth (*in pannis lombardeschis*) worth 178 *hyperperes* and 22 carats from Antonio Tartaro, for sale in Vicina on which he was to retain a quarter of the profits (*Vicina I*, p. 171), Pera 22nd July 1281: consignment of 8 pieces of Lombard cloth (*in petiis octo pannorum lombardischorum*) worth 80 *hyperperes* to be sold in Vicina — consignee to receive ½ of the profits (*Vicina I*, p. 175).

We have treated a very small quantity of French cloth, no more than a twentieth of the total,¹² on the same footing as the Lombard cloth, because it was one of the finest European qualities and therefore at least an equal of Lombard cloth.¹³ 209 *hyperperes* and 9 carats was paid for the remaining textiles, which included silks from Nicea,¹⁴ fine linens known as "bokharames"¹⁵ from Bokhara, a town in Turkestan renowned for its carpets and fabrics, as well as cottons¹⁶ and two more bales of linen.¹⁷

As far as the unspecified goods are concerned, it is clear in the case of one contract that these were spices or colonial goods, since the buyer's name was "*Ansaldo Speciaro*", or Ansaldo the merchant in spices (that is pepper, cannelle, cloves).¹⁸ The rest of the unspecified portion was probably made up of similar items, that is first of all by fabrics and cloths, such as the Lombard cloth which as we have seen was very highly prized, French cloth, fine silk cloths, velvets (*viloreta*) — referred to in a contract dated 28 August 1281, and destined for sale in Caffa or another Black Sea port¹⁹ — "camelot" or camel hair (which appears in Rumanian commercial documents from the early XVth century),²⁰ or cotton, as well as spices, southern wines destined for Tana²¹ (according to a contract dated 11 May 1279) and such things as ornaments (looking glasses, jewels etc.). In short, then, the main characteristics

¹² Contract drawn up in Pera 4th August 1281 by which Thomas, son of Ansaldo of Domoculta, received in partnership from Gabriele Rosso de Domoculta French and Lombard cloths (*in pannis lombardeschis et franceschis*) worth 152 *hyperperes* (*Vicina I*, p. 180).

¹³ H. PIRENNE, *Histoire de Belgique*, Vol. I, Brussels 1900, pp. 164-5.

¹⁴ Pera contract 23rd July 1281 (*Vicina I*, p. 177-8).

¹⁵ Pera contract 7th August 1281 (*Vicina I*, p. 182-3).

¹⁶ Pera contract 27th July 1281 (*Vicina I*, p. 174-5).

¹⁷ Pera contract for two sacks of linen (*sachorum duorum lini*) to be taken from Caffa to Vicina, valued at 48 *hyperperes* and 21 carats (*Vicina I*, p. 186).

¹⁸ Pera contract 18th July 1281, total value 16 *hyperperes* (*Vicina I*, p. 172).

¹⁹ G. I. BRATIANU, *Actes des notaires génois de Péra et de Caffa de la fin du treizieme siecle (1281-1290)*, Bucarest 1927, p. 143 (henceforth *Actes*).

²⁰ See for example the commercial treaty with the inhabitants of Brasov, 6th August 1403, in I. BOGDAN, *Documente privitoare la relatiile Tarii Romanesti cu Brasovoul* (Documents concerning relations between Walachia and the town of Brasov), Bucarest 1905, pp. 3-5.

²¹ Pera contract of same date (*Actes*, p. 189).

of the items imported into the Lower Danube region in these centuries were that they were of high value but small volume.

The contracts of Gabriele di Predono only represent a very small proportion, however, of those enacted in Pera. Taking account of the total number of notaries in Pera, one can estimate that the total value of exchanges between the city and Vicina must have reached a monthly figure of around 33,000 gold *hyperperes* — the equivalent of 25,000 florins.²² These figures are necessarily hypothetical since we have no statistics of the transactions effected by other notaries to compare with those of Gabriele di Predono. But if we accept the figure of 33,000 gold *hyperperes*, this represented about 20% of the total business effected in Pera by the Genoese, and this is important because it exceeds the volume of business conducted between Genoa and Pera itself (18%).²³ The figures confirm the commercial importance of the Danubian colonies, which served the vast hinterland comprising not only the neighbouring regions where the states of Moldavia and Walachia were later to be established, but also Dobrotitch and the *cneziat* of Halicz. It should also be remembered that near to Vicina lay the trading centres of Moncastro and Chilia, where similar goods were traded. The Moncastro merchants could go north and cover the region between the Dniestr and the Prut as far as Kamenetz and Lwow, while those of Chilia could follow the same direction or else go west as well towards Walachia and Transylvania. The movement of merchandise between the Danube estuary and the Black Sea ports, on one hand, and the Galician centre of Lwow, on the other, was sufficiently voluminous to merit mention in A. Dulcert's portulan of 1339 and which described the Black Sea and its hinterland. The portulan contained a reference to Lwow which might be translated as follows: « Merchants travel towards this town, and then they travel onwards by the Gothland Sea to Flanders, and

²² BARBU T. CÎMPINA, *Despre rolul genovezilor la gurile Dunării în secolele XIII-XV* (On the role of the Genoese in the mouth of the Danube from the XIIIth to the XVth centuries), in « Studii » VI (1953), I, p. 202.

²³ *Ibid.*

in particular to Bruges ».²⁴ The reference succeeds in capturing the essential axis of international trade: Constantinople: Danube estuary: Kamenetz: Lwow: Danzig: Flanders. In one direction it linked up with the Mediterranean, the Aegean and the Black Sea, and in the other with the Baltic and the North Sea, while goods also reached Constantinople and the Black Sea ports from the great traditional oriental trade route which started in China and traversed Turkestan (Samarkand and Boukhara), Persia, and Anatolia, along which were born the riches of Asia.²⁵

What was the destination of the goods brought to Vicina, Chilia and Moncastro? Who purchased the Lombard and French cloths, the silk and linen fabrics, the spices and luxury goods? It was certainly not the peasants of the Carpathian and Danubian provinces, nor those of the Halicz *cneziat*, for they lacked the wherewithal. The purchasers were the feudal lords, the *voivodes* and the *cnez*, and the wealthy townsmen. The market in fact was constituted from what the diploma of the Knights Hospitallers in 1247 referred to in Walachia and Oltenia as the "*majores terrae*", the great of the land,²⁶ or from the "*potentes illarum partium*" — the men of power in those regions — who were described in a papal letter of 1332 as having occupied the "goods and property" of the former bishopric of Coumans in south-western Moldavia.²⁷ The feudal nobility purchased Lombard and French cloths to make luxury garments, just as in the later XIVth and early XVth century they would buy cloths from Ypres, Louvain and Cologne.²⁸ It was

²⁴ M. POPESCU SPINESI, *Romania in istoria cartografiei* (Roumania in the history of cartography) II, Bucarest 1938, p. 27; G. BRATIANU, *Recherches sur Vicina et Cetatea Alba*, Bucarest 1935, p. 1.

²⁵ W. HEYD, *Histoire du commerce de Levant au Moyen Age*, Vol. II, Leipzig 1886, p. 72-107 & passim; B. D. GRECOV, A. I. IACUBOVSKI, *op. cit.*, pp. 143-148. For the antiquity and importance of the oriental route see F. GANSHOF, *Histoire des relations internationales. I. Le Moyen Age*, Paris 1953, pp. 198-201, 202, 208; G. OSTROGORSKY, *Histoire de l'Etat byzantin*, Paris 1956, p. 103-105.

²⁶ HURMUZADI-DENSUSIANU, *Documente* (Documents), I, p. 251.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ See the Walachian commercial privilege (6th Aug. 1413) and the Moldavian privilege (6th Oct. 1403), respectively in I. BOGDAN, *Documente privitoare... op. cit.*, pp. 3-5 and M. COSTACHESCU, *Documentele moldovenesti inainte de Stefan cel Mare* (Moldavian documents before Stephen the Great), II, pp. 603-36.

the same group who purchased the fine oriental fabrics, the wines from the south and the spices needed to season their feasts.

It was they who had the means to pay. Gabriele di Predono's contracts of 1281, together with other sources, reveal the sort of goods which were exported from Vicina and Chilia, or in other words what the merchants took in exchange for the quality goods and for the silver and the gold which they sold there. Their main demand was for cereals. One of the clauses of the Treaty of Nymphaion of 1261 accorded the Genoese the exclusive right to export cereals freely throughout the Byzantine empire.²⁹ The Pegolotti trade manual, written between 1335 and 1340, makes reference to the corn of "Vezina" (that is, Vicina) as comparable in quality with that of Varna and Sozopolis.³⁰ The same was the case for the corn of Moncastro (Cetatea Alba). In a source of 1339, Chilia along with a number of other ports was described as a place for loading corn ("caricatoria frumenti") and the Venetians complained that they were unable to buy cereals there because of the Genoese.³¹ It has been claimed that the producers of the cereals exported from Chilia by the Italian merchants « were only very rarely the owners of the fruit of their labours », because the cereals came « from land which belonged to the colony ». ³² This was not the case, however. Like that of Vicina and the other Italian colonies, the Genoese colony of Chilia did not cover a very wide area. The colonies were generally limited to a restricted area which would provide sufficient space to set up commercial houses, ware-

²⁹ Z. V. UDALTOVA, A. P. KAJDAN, *Unele probleme nerezolvate din istoria social-economica a Bizantului* (Some unsolved problems in the socio-economic history of Byzantium), in « Anelele Romano-Svietice » 1959, I, p. 119.

³⁰ *Vicina I*, p. 149; *Vicina II*, p. 157.

³¹ N. IORGA, *Studii istorice asupra Chileliei si Cetatea Alba*, cit., p. 49. A whole series of contracts effected in Chilia between 27th Nov. 1360 and 12th May 1361 stipulated delivery of quantities of grain in this port by indigenous merchants — Greeks and Genoese — for transportation to Pera and elsewhere. (See OCTAV ILIESCU, *Note sur l'apport roumain au ravitaillement de Byzance d'après une source inédite du XIVe siècle*, in « Nouvelles études d'histoire », III, 1956, p. 105-7). For the wheat bought by the Venetians in the lands bordering the Black Sea, see F. THIRIET, *Regestes des délibérations du Sénat de Venise concernant la Roumanie*, I, Paris - The Hague 1958, p. 47, no. 128 (document dated 5th June 1341) & p. 60, no. 196.

³² BARBU CIMPINA, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

houses, residences and administrative head-quarters. The Italians were merchants, not producers of goods, and their activities were purely mercantile. This is clearly shown by the fact that when, for one reason or another, cereals were prevented from entering the colony by those who dominated the hinterland politically, it was itself immediately threatened with famine. This often occurred at Caffa in the period 1350-1375,³³ and could not have happened had the colony also possessed extensive lands on which cereals were produced. It was, in fact, the case that the cereals came from the lands of the ruling class, from the lands of the "*majores terrae*" and the "*potentes illarum partium*" whom we have already mentioned. The wheat and the millet produced on their lands with the labour of their serfs was then transported by cart over often considerable distances to the ports of the Danube estuary and the sea, just as later landowners would transport them to Braila and Galatz.

The Italian merchants also bought wax from the natives which they exported. By a contract drawn up in Pera and dated 6 October 1281, Francesco de Multedo acknowledged receipt of 3 cakes of wax weighing 5 Genoese quintals and one "rotule" from Bergoginno Bave in Vicina, which were despatched to Genoa on the ship *Squarziafica*.³⁴ Another contract of 6 July 1281 promised delivery of a quantity of wax at the price of 8 Genoese lire per hundred pounds, without specifying the place of origin³⁵ but this must have been the lower Danube for the region was famous for its abundance of honey and wax. This is supported by the evidence of many contracts effected in Chilia between 17 February and 4 May 1361, in which there are frequent references to the delivery of often large quantities of both these products. The name of an Armenian wholesale merchant, Sarchiz,³⁶ also appears often in

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

³⁴ *Vicina I*, p. 188.

³⁵ *Actes*, p. 86. Wax from "Gazaria", that is the northern shore of the Black Sea under Tartar control, was also bought. A contract of 21 July 1281 refers to 53 pounds of "mercantile wax of Gazaria" (*cera mercantis de Gazaria*) (*Actes*, p. 108), and another contract of 25th Aug., 1281 mentions ("dried wax") and sable ("*cera seca et ermelinis*") (*Idem*, p. 138).

³⁶ OCTAV ILIESCU, *Note*, p. 107.

these documents. Honey and wax also constituted important export items from Waldachia and Moldavia for many centuries.³⁷ Another important export commodity was cattle hide. This crops up frequently in a set of contracts drawn up, in Pera in 1281. In one dated 21 July there is reference to 335 cow hides weighing 114 quintals, 88 "rotules" and 28 "centenaria";³⁸ in another, dated 1 August, to 200 similar hides,³⁹ and on the 25 August to 13 hides priced at 10 *hyperperes*.⁴⁰ Place of origin is not indicated, but one can guess that they came either from the Lower Danube (Chilia or Vicina) or from the northern shores of the Black Sea (Moncastro, Caffa, or Tana).⁴¹ The hardy Moldavian cattle with their wide-spaced horns had been in great demand for export for centuries, and herds of cattle were abundant on the land to the west and east of the river Prut, on the prairies of Bohotin (to the south-west of Jassy) and in the mountains. As well as hides, the Italian merchants also bought salted meat, pork, beef and smoked meats. There are reference to this in two contracts in 1281; one, dated 7 October, refers to no less than 449 pieces of salted meat.⁴² Finally there was also salted fish, and especially the sturgeons, the cat-fish and the carp which have constituted one of the principal riches of the Danubian seaboard and its marshes from antiquity right through to the XXth century. The privilege of the inhabitants of Istria to exploit this source of wealth and to export fish free of duty was confirmed in the year 100 during the reign of the emperor Trajan⁴³ and nearly a thousand years later during the reign of Vasile Lupu in Moldavia there was still a colony of

³⁷ See C. C. GIURESCU, *Istoria Romanilor* (History of the Roumanians), II, 4th edn, p. 550 & III, 2, p. 610.

³⁸ *Actes*, p. 108.

³⁹ *Actes*, p. 115.

⁴⁰ *Actes*, p. 135.

⁴¹ Cattle hides probably brought from Caffa, 8 May 1289 (*Actes*, p. 187); cattle hides from Caffa, 14th June 1289 (*Actes*, p. 220).

⁴² *Actes*, p. 165-6.

⁴³ See V. PARVAN, *Historia IV Inscriptii găsite în 1914 și 1915* (Inscriptions found in 1914 and 1915), in «Anelele Academiei Rom. Mem. Sect. Ist.», s. 2., XXXVIII (1915-16), pp. 572-9; C. C. GIURESCU, *Istoria pescuitului și a pisciculturii în România*, Bucarest 1964, pp. 47-8, & 245-6.

Ragusans at Chilia salting sturgeons.⁴⁴ This continued throughout the middle ages, and the fish was either exported overland to the north (by the fishermen of Halicz in the XIIIth century)⁴⁵ or towards Transylvania,⁴⁶ or else southwards by boat. A freight contract drawn up in Pera on 13 May 1289 gives details of the cost of transport — 10 *hyperperes* per thousand fish. The place of embarkation is not recorded, but as wheat and millet were to be loaded at the same time it was probably somewhere on the Danube seaboard.⁴⁷ Italian merchants also bought fish in the Kouban region.⁴⁸

It would appear then that in exchange for the costly goods which they brought to Vicina, Chilia, and Moncastro for the feudal nobility of the region, for the landowners, the *voivodes*, the *cnez*, and the wealthy townsmen, the Italian merchants took away cereals, especially wheat and millet, wax, honey, cattle hides, salted meats and fish. To this list we can also add salt and wine, as witness various contracts effected in Chilia in 1361, when amongst the purchasers of salt there figured a certain Lamberto Buscarini « a banker established in Chilia ».⁴⁹ He was not the only Italian banker in Chilia however, and the deeds of the notary Antonio di Ponzò from 27 November 1360 to 12 May 1361 show that in the city and port of Chilia there were three banks owned by the bankers Lorenzo Bustarini (40 documents), Francesco Bustarini (2 documents) and Giorgio di Chavegia di Volti (4 documents). There were two other notaries there as well — Bernabo di Carpena and Micheli de Aymelina — whose papers contain references to warehouses or entrepôt facilities (in 2 documents), to an orthodox church, to an animal driven mill and a bakery (2 documents).⁵⁰ Our

⁴⁴ C. C. GIURESCU, *Le Voyage de Niccolo Barsi en Moldavie (1663)*, Paris/Bucarest, 1925, pp. 40-1.

⁴⁵ C. C. GIURESCU, *Istoria pescuitului ...*, cit., p. 57-8.

⁴⁶ See the trade agreement with the inhabitants of Brasov (6 Aug. 1413) which refers to customs duties on fish exported to Transylvania.

⁴⁷ *Actes*, p. 191.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁴⁹ O. ILLIESCU, *Note*, pp. 107-8.

⁵⁰ O. ILLIESCU, *Chilia in veacul al XIV-lea* (Chilia in the XIVth century), in « Sub semnul lui Clio. Omagiu Acad. prof. Stefan Pascu » (Under Clio's sign: essays in honour of Prof. Stefan Pascu of the Hungarian Academy), Cluj, 1974, pp. 284-291 — this uses the documents published in G. PISTARINO, *Notai genovesi in Oltremare. Atti rogati a*

information on Chilia for the years 1360-1361 would be much greater were it not for the fact that the 200 deeds registered by the notary Antonio di Ponzò have unfortunately not survived,⁵¹ along with those of the two other notaries.⁵²

Exactly how far up the Danube did the Genoese go in the XIIIth and XIVth centuries? How far west did they reach? The French general Langeron who was seconded for service with the Russian army during the 1806-12 wars, as well as the Roumanian scholar August Treboniu Laurian later in 1845, both asked whether the fortress of Giurgiu was of Genoese origin or not, without finally settling the problem.⁵³ However, the historian and leader of the 1848 revolution, Nicolae Balcescu, firmly asserted that it had been built by the Genoese: « this castle / the fortress of Giurgiu / was without any doubt built by the Genoese, from whence it took the name of Sîn-Giurgiu ».⁵⁴ Balcescu claimed that the Genoese had laid « . . . the foundations of a "castle" which can still be seen today ».⁵⁵ But the most categorical claims for Genoese origin came from the historian and philologist Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu who claimed a little over a century ago that the Genoese had navigated « as far as Severin, and possessed on Roumanian territory two well known stations: San Giorgio and Calafato »,⁵⁶ or in their modern names, Giurgiu and Calafat. Hasdeu supported his claim first from the names of the two places, secondly from a reference to Giurgiu dating from 1399 (in fact 1409), and finally from « the commercial position of the Lower Danube in the XIVth century ».⁵⁷ He did not however provide any documentation

Chilia da Antonio di Ponzò (1360-1361), in the « Collana Storica di fonti e studi diretta da G. PISTARINO », 12, Genoa 1971, 223 p. + 4 tables.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁵² On the Genoese on the Danube see also: G. AIRALDI, *I Genovesi a Licostomo nel sec. XIV*, Spoleto 1972.

⁵³ See: HURMUZAKI, *Documente*, Supplement I, 3, p. 158; and also his *Istoriane*, in « Magazinul istoric pentru Dacia », II, (1846), p. 67.

⁵⁴ N. BĂLESCU, *Romani sub Mubai Viteazul* (The Romanians during the reign of Michael the Brave), Bucarest 1878, p. 125.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ B. P. HASDEU, *San Giorgio si Calafato*, in « Columna lui Trajan », I, (1870), no. 57, p. 3.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

proving the presence of the Genoese at either Giurgiu or Calafat. This is mainly the reason why Hasdeu's claim has not been accepted by his successors, and the Genoese origin is challenged by N. Iorga⁵⁸ and by his pupil N. A. Constantinescu who devoted a special study to the fortress of Giurgiu.⁵⁹ More recently Barbu Cîmpina has suggested that the port of Cernavoda marks the furthest point reached by the Genoese,⁶⁰ and this is situated on the mouth of the Ialomitza and well downstream of Giurgiu.

We can now however provide categorical documentation of the Genoese penetration of the Danube as far west as the Iron Gates, that is the western extremity of Walachia. This is apparent from the document by which Louis the Great of Hungary ordered, on 24 June 1349: « that all the Genoese and any individual considered as a Genoese and who enjoys the rights and privileges accorded the Genoese has full permission, from henceforth to transport or have transported, without let or hindrance either to his person or his property, whatever goods he may chose, of whatever form, substance or nature, *on the river Danube or by land, in the direction from Orsova towards Timisoara, as far as Buda* ».⁶¹

This highly important document requires certain comment. First, in order to obtain such a declaration from the king, the Genoese would have had to make a series of *exploratory voyages* up the Danube in order to see for themselves whether or not navigation was possible as far as Orsova and whether such navigation would benefit their commercial operations — whether, in fact, it was profitable. Were this not the case, it would not have made sense to request such a declaration. Secondly, at what point did the

⁵⁸ N. IORGA, *Geschichte des rumänischen Volkes*, Gotha 1905, p. 194 and the same author's *Istoria armatei romanesti*, I, Valenii de Munte, 1910, p. 17.

⁵⁹ N. A. CONSTANTINESCU, *Cetatea Giurgiu. Originile si trecutul ei* (The fortress of Giurgiu. Its origins and history), « Analele Acad. Rom. Mem. Sect. Ist. », s. 2, XXXVIII. (1915-16), p. 295-6.

⁶⁰ BARBU T. CIMPINA, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

⁶¹ *Documente privind istoria Romaniei* (Documents concerning Roumanian history), Transilvania. Veacul XIV (Transylvania, 14th century), Vol. IV (1341-1350), Bucarest 1955, p. 486. We have already drawn attention to this document in *Tirguri sau orase si cetati moldovenesti* (Towns, villages and fortresses in Moldavia), Bucarest 1967, p. 48, note 6.

river voyage end and the land journey from Orsova to Timisoara and the distant Buda begin? We know that a little way downstream from Orsova are — or rather used to be — the famous *Iron Gates*. These were found on a stretch of river where rocky outcrops jutted out of the water, which made navigation, even for small vessels, very difficult until the late XIXth century. When the water level was low the stretch was impassable, hence the name *Iron Gates*.⁶² It was to these that Neacșu de Cîmpulung referred in his letter of 29-30⁶³ June 1521 addressed to Hanăș Begner of Brasov.⁶⁴ It was due to them that when the waters of the Danube were low in August 1863, during the reign of Cuza, it was impossible to transport the Turkish troops by water from Belgrade towards Vidin.⁶⁵ The difficulties in the Iron Gates stretch of river were only settled towards the end of the XIXth century, in fact, when between 1890 and 1898 about 17 kilometers of navigable canals were built⁶⁶ and part of the outcrops of rock were removed. The problem was only finally resolved more recently when the Roumanian-Yugoslav hydro-electric station was built for with the formation of a lake behind the dam the rock outcrops were completely submerged, so that it has become possible to navigate the "Iron Gates" and the "Sluices" as the water level is now much higher than before.

Another observation arising from the document of 1349 concerns the landing points used by the Genoese on their journeys up the Danube. One would naturally expect them to have used the ports of the Danubian agglomeration — Braila, Hirsova, Cernavoda, Silistra, Turtucaia, Giurgiu, Zimnicea, Corabia, Calafat,

⁶² See V. SENCU & I. ZAVOIANU, *Morfometria și morfologia albiei Dunării* (Morphometry and morphology of the bed of the Danube), in «Atlasul complex "Portile de Fier"», Bucarest 1972, p. 139.

⁶³ For the date, see: MATEI CAZACU, *Sur la date de la lettre de Neacșu de Cîmpulung*, in «Revue des études sud-est Européennes», IV, 1968, 3, pp. 525-8.

⁶⁴ C. C. GIURESCU, *Istoria romanilor*, II, 4th edn, Bucarest 1943, p. 591: «I inform you that the engineers of Constantinople are trying to get their vessels through this narrow stretch which you know well».

⁶⁵ C. C. GIURESCU, *Viata și opera lui Cuza Voda* (The life and work of prince Cuza), 2nd edn, Bucarest 1970, p. 117.

⁶⁶ V. SENCU & I. ZAVOIANU, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

Severin, or at least some of them. Further information from Genoese archives is needed to clarify this, but there can be no doubt that it was normal for the Genoese to be present in both Giurgiu and Calafat — the name of this village is identical with the Italian name — and also in Severin, and can not in any way be seen as something exceptional.

How long did the Genoese continue to sail up the Danube? As long as there were Christian states on both banks of the river there was no great danger, but once the Ottoman Empire put an end to the Bulgar state in 1393 and occupied the right bank of the river then the danger began to increase. Ships could be attacked and goods plundered at any moment. This I believe is the main reason why Genoese navigation on the Danube came to a halt after the Turks became established on the right bank. The Genoese then began to use the more difficult land route from Zara on the Adriatic across the mountains of the Balkan peninsula to Buda.⁶⁷

At the same time the fierce competition from goods arriving along the continental route from Flanders via Cologne, Prague, Buda, Brasov, Tirgoviste, or else via the Polish branch (Prague, Cracow, Lwow-Suceava), meant that the long up-stream journey on the Danube from Vicina became less and less worthwhile for the Genoese. Lombard cloth was now overtaken by Flemish cloth from Ypres and Louvain or else by cloth from Cologne or from the Czech lands, as is evident from the privileges granted by the Roumanian *voivodes* in the early XVth century. And in this way, the chapter of Genoese expansion along the Roumanian Danube drew to its close.

⁶⁷ The route to Zara is also mentioned in the document of 24 June 1349, but only after that along the Danube.