

ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES, EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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1. Coverage

This questionnaire discusses the customs data for Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania during the eighteenth century.

2. Documents

None of these states drew up a balance of trade from the information collected by their customs institutions. Still, a few overall annual revenue estimates are preserved from customs duties in Wallachia and Moldavia. These data were collected by officers and civil servants working for the Habsburgs. However, their results are doubtful. They suggested an annual revenue of only 30,000 Thalers (approximately 12,000 Venetian gold ducats) in 1716, under the ad valorem taxation of 3%. After 1733, with the generalized system of excise by specific duties applied on each product, the increase in overall revenues was of course substantial; therefore it is impossible to accept annual revenues from customs duties of approximately 11,000 Venetian gold ducats for the year of 1759 for Wallachia, or of 46,000 Venetian gold ducats for Moldavia and Wallachia together.

Customs registers are another potential source. In Wallachia and Moldavia, until the customs regulations of 1733, goods were registered by their quantity and value, the basis on which they were taxed. Thus the “Great Excise” was the duty imposed on the quantity of goods (calculated in *okas*, a capacity unit representing 1.272 kg, or one burden/bale, named after the goods’ place of origin: from Adrianople, from Brusa, from Venice), and the “Little Excise” was imposed on the estimated market value of goods. Most of these registers have been lost.

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In Habsburg Transylvania, the imperial bureaucracy established a thorough record of customs duties receipts as the eighteenth century represented a distinct stage of administrative modernization. The preservation of registers and of receipts issued to merchants who paid the customs duty allows some accuracy in reconstituting the customs revenues to the Treasury.

Tariff lists are another potential source.

Habsburg rule in Oltenia (Lesser Wallachia) for two decades from 1719 introduced detailed lists of goods and products subject to customs clearance, setting out in minute detail the tolls to be paid in florins and their subdivision, the dinars (a silver coin equivalent to the money of account named ban or leu). These existed also in Transylvania throughout the period. The same model was followed by the authorities in Wallachia and Moldavia, who during the eighteenth century introduced detailed lists of goods subject to customs clearance; those lists included hundreds of product names.

There is no information on detailed lists of goods categories subject to customs clearance in Wallachia and Moldavia before the end of the seventeenth century. The lists became more detailed during the eighteenth century. At the end of the seventeenth century these category lists for taxable goods encompassed some dozens of products, and in the eighteenth century several hundred goods were listed. Such tariffs are widespread in Wallachia and Moldavia after 1733. On the basis of these sources, we know the variety of goods imported and exported. One can notice, for example, the exponential growth of cereal exports from the Romanian Principalities after 1774, when the Ottoman Empire had to accept the opening of the Black Sea Basin for international maritime trade, at first under the Russian flag and then under the flags of Austria and other Western states. However, we can only guess the revenues resulting annually from excise or trade.

For maritime and fluvial trade, neither the customs registers of the ports nor the written record of commercial shipping entering or leaving ports have survived for Wallachia and Moldavia. In the Danube ports under direct Ottoman rule, such data were assiduously collected and are still held in archives in Turkey. Some sources touching on the situation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the Bulgarian ports and in Dobrudja have been published.

It is unlikely that we will be able to reconstruct the missing information, since in the case of Wallachia and Moldavia customs registers do not even survive for the cities where goods were subject to internal

customs duties; here too the extant sources are mostly price lists of goods. So we know the variety of imported and exported goods, and can only guess at the customs revenues resulting from excise on those goods.

Given the current state of preservation and the statistical data we possess, it would be impossible to reconstitute the balance of trade of the Romanian Principalities and Habsburg Transylvania during the eighteenth century.

3. Institutions

During that period, border customs points registering the flow of goods in and out of the Romanian Principalities were entrusted to the Treasury of Wallachia and Moldavia. Thus, the central authority, represented by the Grand Exciseman, a great state officer appointed by the Prince himself and responsible to him alone, could control the revenues due both to the Prince, namely to his personal Treasury, and to the state Treasury. The Treasury centralized and annually checked the flow of goods into and out of the country through records kept by the Exciseman's secretaries at every border customs office. In Transylvania, which became a province of the Habsburg Empire at the end of the seventeenth century, records concerning the collection of duties were delivered to the *Regio Thesauriatu Magni Principatus Transylvaniae*, which was thus also an over-arching institution also, although in this case it was a more local institution under the Imperial governor.

In the case of Wallachia and Moldavia, as in the case of Transylvania, there were no central institutions other than the Treasury tasked with establishing trade statistics.

4. Motivation

In Wallachia and Moldavia, when the Treasury was directly controlling the customs, there was of course an administrative logic in collecting data, because duty revenue was to a certain extent directed towards the personal Treasury of the Prince, who was therefore directly interested, personally and as head of State, in the high customs officials delivering the total amounts received. Where the customs were leased to merchants, the Prince would appoint his own customs officers to shadow those of the leaseholder and guarantee the proper functioning of the customs, to prevent abuses by the leaseholder, and to collect part of the duties that were due to the Treasury of the state.

5. Methods

For goods subjected to ad valorem customs duties, the value in tariff lists was established by a committee of experts, made up of merchants and high officials, mostly nobles who were active in the central and local administration. This committee would draw up lists of goods mentioning the value of each item, to be taxed at a customs duty of 3%.

6. Information

Values are given in various monetary units. Twenty-two different foreign currencies were in circulation in Wallachia and Moldavia in the eighteenth century, with the following most commonly used: the lion dollar issued by the Republic of the United Provinces, which entered Romanian as the *leu* (from the original *Leeuwendaalder*), the Ottoman piastre (*guruş*), the Imperial Thaler (*Reichsthaler*) and the florin issued by various German cities, and after 1754 the Austrian Gulden. Edmund Chishull (1671–1733), one of the attendants of Lord William Paget, the British Ambassador to Constantinople, wrote in 1702: “[...] the one that usually circulates in this country [Wallachia] is either the Dutch Thaler or the Venetian Thaler with the lion, together with the quart of Poland and a Transylvanian Saxon coin named *ban*, of which 132 make one *leu*” (Holban *et al.*, 1983, p. 201). In 1711, the customs duties for sable, fox, and wolf furs brought from Transylvania south of the Carpathians were paid in these currencies (Hurmuzaki, 1913, doc. MMDCCCXLV, p. 1511 and Iorga, 1937, p. 5). In 1717 the customs at Vâlcan took tariffs on goods imported from Wallachia (grain, cattle, pigs, goats, sheep, wine, raw wax, Danube fish, salted fish, pelts of wolf, bear, fox, and polecat, butter, whey cheese, wool, smoke tree bark, hemp, cordovan) and on goods exported to the south of the Carpathians (iron farm tools and quicksilver) (Giurescu, 1913, doc. 117 and Iorga, 1937, p. 8).

Commodity names in the tariff lists were mostly names that are found in the commercial terminology of the entire Balkan region. Such names were also used for animal materials (cattle hides), raw and processed: for instance *cordovan*, used for the production of footwear and harness components. Less often, local names were also listed.

As long as the goods were charged for by quantity rather than by their market value, the origin of goods was mentioned: from Constantinople, from Brusa, from Adrianople, from Venice and so on. In the tricesimal registers (for the collection of tricesimal excise tariffs – 3% –

for goods sold in the cities of Transylvania) in Cluj, Braşov, Sibiu etc., there was only a general mention of the point of origin: “Oriental goods” came from the Ottoman Empire, with no further detail given; even carpets generically called “Persian” or Iznik pottery could not be considered as being made in Persia or Iznik/Nicaea.

As for their place of destination, the markets targeted by merchants can be guessed depending on the customs points where goods were taken out of the country. The transit trade through Wallachia and Moldavia was destined for the Polish city of Lwów, in the north, a centre for the redistribution of goods throughout Poland and to the shores of the Baltic. Transit trade through Transylvania aimed either at the German cities, if we consider the cattle exported on those markets from Moldavia, or Lwów again, for goods coming from the north of Italy and Hungary, in the latter case during the Venetian-Ottoman Wars in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

7. Research questions

A first possible area of research is customs policies. In Wallachia and Moldavia, tariffs had been fixed since 1691 (this included customs duties ad valorem 3% imposed for every 125 kg of goods, depending on their place of origin: 250 *bani* for goods from Adrianople; 166 for goods from Brusa; 166 for goods from Persia; 333 for goods from Venice; at the time, one United Provinces *leeuwendalder* = 133 *bani* = 133 Ottoman silver *akçe*; 330 *akçe* = 1 Venice gold ducat), and a few taxes imposed per product: 1000 *akçe* to the *oka* of saffron; 140 *akçe*/the raw cotton *oka*; 168 *akçe*/the cotton yarn *oka*; 80 *akçe*/the rice *oka*; 150 *akçe*/the olive oil *oka* etc. With the establishment of a protectionist economic policy, especially in Transylvania, following a decision of the Court in Vienna, imports for some finished products were either forbidden or subject to huge duties of 100–200%, to discourage imports and steer the market towards the consumption of internal products from the Habsburg Empire. The authorities in Wallachia and Moldavia prohibited imports of salt, raw wax, cattle, wool, and grain (except during periods of critical food shortage).

The small amount of information on the functioning of the customs in this part of Eastern Europe means that we cannot use methodologies that could provide a set of data comparable to what is available in Western Europe. For the Romanian Principalities, we can only make informed guesses with a high margin of error.

The situation in the Romanian Principalities concerning customs, excise, and the revenues resulting from duties is complex, given the lack of sources; this is where the gaps in the documentation hit hardest. At the present stage of research, we can record goods imported and exported goods in the case of Wallachia and Moldavia, with product categories and typical products; we can track the evolution of prices for those goods alongside detailed tariffs and profiles of the moneys of account and currencies circulating in this part of Europe. Hence, we can trace differences and similarities in relation to other economies on the continent, both part of the periphery and the core. Still, the statistical-mathematical method represents the most suitable tool for comparative analysis of the evolution of the economy in the Romanian Principalities in the eighteenth century.

A European or global database is viable as long as scholars bear in mind each national historiography's potential to analyse its sources and evaluate the results in a general framework. A register of the goods imported and exported from certain areas of Europe would shed light on the specificity of various economies and their stages of development, but also on the complementarity between economic systems and at the core and at the periphery of the World Economic System; for example, the economies exporting raw materials imported finished products in the seventeenth century, progressively importing technology and know-how from the mid-eighteenth century and over the next century. Although internal statistical data based on external sources from foreign archives are missing, surprising new data may come to light to clarify, for example, the increasing importance of grain exports from Wallachia and Moldavia to Western Europe starting in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and increasing thereafter. The preponderance of a certain type of export goods and the scale of those exports (as in the case of the grain trade) led to changes in the local economy, influencing the regional economic situation, then regional geopolitics, given that Europe's more economically developed states had an interest in restricting Russia's influence in the Black Sea area and in defeating Russian attempts to control the Mouths of the Danube, a significant outlet for grain during the nineteenth century.

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