

# The Portraits of Michael the Brave Discovered by Nicolae Bălcescu in Paris

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**Abstract:** Paris, 2 August 1847. Nicolae Bălcescu and Alexandru Golescu were working in the reading rooms of the National Library of France. They discovered a set of images that would significantly shape how later generations viewed the ruler Michael the Brave. Within a collection of prints, they identified six engraved portraits depicting the Wallachian Prince. Not all of these images entered the Romanian cultural circulation. The portraits were subjected to a process of selection and visual legitimation that would later be canonised in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century national imaginary. The present study builds on the discovery made in the summer of 1847 and traces the paths through which the identified engravings were integrated into Romanian culture. The analysis addressed both the mechanisms of dissemination and reception of these images and the ways in which they influenced the iconographic repertoire of Romanian painting in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the study of the engravings provides an opportunity to clarify the data concerning when and where they first appeared, as well as to interpret the inscriptions and the physiognomic features of the depicted figure.

**Keywords:** Michael the Brave, engraving, iconography, Nicolae Bălcescu, 19<sup>th</sup> century, historical painting, visual canon, Aegidius Sadeler, Dominicus Custos.

**Rezumat:** Paris, 2 august 1847. Nicolae Bălcescu și Alexandru Golescu se află în sălile Bibliotecii Naționale din Franța. Cei doi descoperă un set de imagini care vor influența semnificativ viziunea posterității asupra domnitorului Mihai Viteazul. Într-o colecție de stampe au identificat șase portrete de tip gravură care îl înfățișau pe domnitorul muntean. Nu toate s-au propagat în circuitul cultural românesc.

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Portretele au fost supuse unui proces de selecție și consacrare vizuală care avea să fie ulterior canonizată în imaginarul național din secolul al XIX-lea. Cercetarea își are punctul de plecare în descoperirea din vara anului 1847 și urmărește traseul prin care gravurile identificate au fost integrate în cultura română. Analiza vizează atât mecanismele de difuzare și receptare ale acestor imagini, cât și modul în care ele au influențat repertoriul iconografic al picturii românești din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. În același timp, studiul gravurilor oferă prilejul de a preciza date legate de momentul și locul apariției lor, precum și de a interpreta inscripțiile și caracteristicile fizionomice ale personajului reprezentat.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Mihai Viteazul; gravură; iconografie; Nicolae Bălcescu; secolul al XIX-lea; pictură istorică; canon visual, Aegidius Sadeler, Dominicus Custos.

On 2 August 1847, while working at the National Library in Paris, Nicolae Bălcescu (1819–1852) and Alexandru G. Golescu (1819–1881) discovered, among other prints, an engraving executed in 1601 by the Flemish artist Aegidius Sadeler, depicting Michael the Brave. Having identified the portrayed figure, they decided “to promptly empty our modest purses in order to produce a beautiful and faithful engraving after it, and to thus offer the Romanians a true portrait of their hero as a keepsake.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, they identified six engraved portraits depicting the Wallachian ruler. These were extracted from a print collection entitled *Condica colecțiunii pentru Transilvania*<sup>2</sup> [Register of the collection for Transylvania]. Bălcescu, however, was most interested in the “true portrait.” In a letter to Vasile Alecsandri dated 1 October 1847, he confessed how he had found “among other things here, at the Royal Library, I have uncovered the true portrait of Michael the Brave, after which I shall make a beautiful engraving at once. The mere idea of the work I intend to undertake now sustains me and gives me renewed strength.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nicolae Bălcescu, *Opere I. Scrieri istorice, politice și economice 1844–1852*, critical ed. Gh. Zane, revision and name index by Dorina N. Rusu, foreword by Dan Berindei, introduction by Eugen Simion (București: Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă; Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2017), XCVI. Original text: “îndată a ne deșerta ușoarele noastre pungi spre a stampa după dânsa o gravură frumoasă și credincioasă și a da în amintirea românilor adevăratul portret al eroului lor”.

<sup>2</sup> Constantin V. Obedeanu, *Portretele lui Mihai-Viteazul*, lecture delivered at the Romanian Atheneum on 27 February 1906 (Bucharest: Göbl, 1906), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Valentin Hănulescu, “Întâlnire cu Nicolae Bălcescu, pe Valea Topologului”, in *Lumea lui Bălcescu*, eds. Astrid Cambose, Cătălina Mihalache, and Antonie Dumitru Chelcea (Cluj-Napoca:

The copying of Sadeler's engraving was entrusted to the painter Barbu Iscovescu (1816–1854), who brought copies of the portrait back to the country.<sup>4</sup> “Soon this engraving will be finished and we will be on our way back home with it,” Bălcescu noted in *Buletinul despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldovei* [Bulletin on the Portraits of the Princes of Wallachia and Moldavia], written in Bellevue, near Paris.<sup>5</sup> The text recounts his journey to the French capital and the identification of the portraits depicting Michael the Brave, among which Sadeler's was considered “the most beautiful.”<sup>6</sup> Motivated by this discovery, the historian began, in the summer of 1847, work on the book that would later solidify his reputation: *Românii supt Mihai Voievod Viteazul* [Romanian under the rule of Michael the Brave].<sup>7</sup>

His enthusiasm is also evident in the same letter sent to Vasile Alecsandri while he was still in Paris. Bălcescu informed the poet of the preparations he envisioned for a work dedicated to Michael the Brave and shared an overview on the scholarly itinerary he intended to follow in order to expand his documentary corpus. In his words:

I shall therefore set to work in earnest. For the moment, I am gathering here [in Paris], from libraries, the historical documents I can find. I wish to produce an extensive work, a historical poem on Michael the Brave. When I have finished gathering all that I need from here, I shall go to Vienna and through Hungary and Transylvania in order to complete my collection, and then return home to set to work.<sup>8</sup>

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Mega/Argonaut, 2021), 20. “între altele, aci, la Biblioteca regală, și adevăratul portret al lui Mihai V.V., de pe care o să fac îndată o frumoasă gravură. Ideea lucrării ce voi să fac mă hrănește acum și îmi dă viață”.

<sup>4</sup> Anca Maria Zamfir, “Mihai Viteazul în pictura românească”, *Cumidava* 26 (2003): 265.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolae Bălcescu, “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei, ce se află în cabinetul de stampe de la Biblioteca Regală din Paris”, in *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia*, vol. 4 (1847), 264. “Preste puțin această gravură va fi gata și o vom porni în țară”.

<sup>6</sup> Bălcescu, *Opere*, I, 244.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, XCVII.

<sup>8</sup> Bălcescu, *Opere*, II, *Românii sub Mihai Voievod Viteazul. Corespondență. Scrisori. Memorii. Adrese. Documente*, eds. Daniela Poenaru and Gh. Zane, revised ed. and name index by Dorina N. Rusu (București: Academia Română, Fundația Națională pentru Știință și Artă; Muzeul Național al Literaturii Române, 2017), 632–633. “mă voi apuca dar de lucru cu temei. Deocamdată adun aci [Paris], din biblioteci, documentele istorice ce găsesc. Voi să lucrez o scriere întinsă, o poemă istorică asupra lui Mihai VV. Viteazul. Când voi sfârși aci adunarea ce fac, mă voi duce la Viena și prin Ungaria și Transilvania, ca să completez colecția mea, și apoi mă întorc în țară ca să mă pui pe lucru”.

Bălcescu's own testimony shows that he had found the six portraits of Michael the Brave in Paris. Among them, the engraving by Aegidius Sadeler was selected and circulated from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward, thus becoming a source of inspiration for historical paintings by artists such as Constantin Lecca, Carol Wallenstein, and Theodor Aman, who belonged to the first generation of artists, as well as Nicolae Grigorescu, Sava Henția, and George Demetrescu-Mirea, representative of the younger generation. In his five-page study, Bălcescu briefly describes, in just a few sentences, all six portraits, mentioning only the names of their authors together with the inscriptions on the engravings. The order in which they were presented in *Buletinul* is as follows: the engraving included in the book by Hieronymus Ortellius (1603); the engraving published in the book by Johannes Bisselius (1675); the engraving by Dominicus Custos (1601); the engraving by Giovanni Orlandi (1599); the engraving by Giacomo Franco (1608); and the engraving by Aegidius Sadeler (1601).

Before Nicolae Bălcescu turned his attention to the image of the Wallachian ruler, the subject had already been approached by a Transylvanian intellectual. Anton Kurz was the first 19<sup>th</sup>-century author to undertake a search for portraits of Michael the Brave. One year prior to Nicolae Bălcescu's discovery, Anton Kurz published the article *Portretul lui Mihai Viteazul*<sup>9</sup> [The portrait of Michael the Brave] in *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia*. The text describes three engraved portraits of the ruler: the one reproduced by Johann Siebmacher in the book by Hieronymus Ortellius, the engraving included by Johann Alexander Böner in the work of Johannes Bisselius, and the engraving executed by Dominicus Custos.<sup>10</sup>

The present study focuses on Bălcescu's discovery in Paris and primarily seeks to trace the ways in which these engravings entered Romanian cultural circulation. It examines the process through which they were disseminated and the use of iconographic patterns in Romanian painting during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the analysis of the engravings allows for the clarification of issues relating to the year of their production and the place of publication, as well as the meaning of the inscriptions and the physiognomic features depicted.

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<sup>9</sup> Anton Kurz, "Portretul lui Mihai Viteazul, Principe al Țării Românești și al Moldovei, locțiitoriu al Transilvaniei", *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia* II (1846): 371–374.

<sup>10</sup> Obedeanu, *Portretele lui Mihai-Viteazul*, 11.

## The first portrait

“The portrait from the book by Hieronymus Ortelius, after which an oil copy was made and donated by Mr. Meyer to the National Museum.”<sup>11</sup> (Fig. 4)

Serving as a court historiographer to Rudolf II,<sup>12</sup> Hieronymus Ortelius (1524–1614) offered posterity an extensive chronicle written in Gothic German, in which he described the major military confrontations that had taken place in Upper and Lower Hungary between 1349–1603. Comprising 618 pages,<sup>13</sup> the first edition was published in Nuremberg in 1603, titled *Beschreibung aller Kriegsemporungen und Belägerungen der Stätt und Vestungen auch scharmützel* [The chronicle, or the historical description of all military campaigns].<sup>14</sup> The work comprises 30 panoramic descriptions of geographic areas in Hungary and Transylvania, alongside a series of 26 portraits of contemporary political figures,<sup>15</sup> with Michael the Brave as the 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>16</sup> It had several subsequent editions and additions, even decades later (see, for instance, the Dutch edition of 1619, or those of 1620 and 1665).<sup>17</sup>

The portrait depicting Michael the Brave was made by Johann Siebmacher and was included in Ortelius' chronicle of 1603.<sup>18</sup> The ruler is

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<sup>11</sup> Bălcescu, “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei,” 259. “Portretul din cartea lui Hieronymus Ortelius, după care s-a făcut copia în oliu, dată de d. Meyer la Muzeul Național”.

<sup>12</sup> Barbu Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul, însoțite de un nou portret* (București: Imprimeria Națională, 1933), 209.

<sup>13</sup> Vasile Oltean, *O cronică necunoscută din vremea lui Mihai Viteazul. Nurenberg - 1603 de Hieronimum Ortelium Augustanum* (Sibiu: Editura Andreiană, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> *Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibung aller Kriegsemporungen und Belägerungen der Stätt und Vestungen auch scharmützel, und Schlachten so in ober-und unter-ungern, auch Sibenbürgen mit den Türcken von Ao 1395. Biss auff gegenwertige Zeitt gedenck, würdig geschehen*, cited in *Mihai Viteazul în conștiința europeană*, Vol. 2, *Cronicari și istorici străini. Secolele XVI–XVIII. Texte alese*, ed. Ion Ardeleanu (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1983), 44, 57.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Livia Ciupercă, “O cronică necunoscută din vremea lui Mihai Viteazul”, *Revista Limba Română*, no. 3–4 (2020): 353.

<sup>17</sup> Kurz, “Portretul lui Mihai Viteazul,” 373.

<sup>18</sup> The engraving was noted by Victor Petrescu and Serghie Paraschiva in the study “Mihai Viteazul în conștiința poporului român – Bibliografie selectivă”, *Valachica - Studii și cercetări de istorie și istoria culturii* 7 (1975): 75. The portrait is located in Hieronymus Ortelius,

shown within an oval frame, in three-quarter profile facing right, clad in a fur-trimmed cloak with embroidery and wearing an elongated, fur-lined tall fur cap (Rom. *guşiumană*) on his head. His facial features appear slightly aged, with round, dark-rimmed eyes and a long beard. The inscription encircling the portrait reads *Michael Weywodt aus der Walachey*, while beneath the bust the date of the ruler's death is recorded: OCCVBVIT XVIII AVG A. MDCI ("died/fell in battle on 18 August 1601"<sup>19</sup>).

The engraving reappeared in the 1665 edition entitled *Ortelius Redivivus et continuatus*, published in Nuremberg under the patronage of Paul Fürst. The only difference from the 1603 engraving is the placement of the title beneath the bust rather than around the medallion, likely intended to make it easier to read, thus abandoning the Renaissance convention of integrating the legend within the oval frame.<sup>20</sup> The engraving was identified in 1844 by the Bucharest-based physician Johann Meyer in the course of examining the *Universal history* authored by the Flemish geographer Abraham Ortelius (1527–1598).<sup>21</sup> It was subsequently described in the article published by Anton Kurz in 1846.<sup>22</sup> One year later, following his research in Paris, Nicolae Bălcescu reported a copy of the engraving. The image was revisited in the lecture delivered on 27 February 1906 by Constantin V. Obedeianu at the Romanian Athenaeum in Bucharest.<sup>23</sup> References to the engraving also appear in the study published by Barbu Slătineanu in 1933.<sup>24</sup>

Kurz regarded the engraving published by Hieronymus Ortelius as the earliest known representation of the ruler.<sup>25</sup> Citing the lack of evidence,

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*Chronologia oder Historische Beschreibungen* (Nuremberg, 1603), 452–453, digitized edition, Internet Archive, [https://archive.org/stream/bub\\_gb\\_cRhaAAAAYAAJ/bub\\_gb\\_cRhaAAAAYAAJ\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/bub_gb_cRhaAAAAYAAJ/bub_gb_cRhaAAAAYAAJ_djvu.txt) (accessed on 22 August 2025).

<sup>19</sup> Occumbō, -ere, cūbuī, cūbitum = "to fall in death, die." See Charlton T. Lewis, *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square, 1891), 559, s.v. *occumbō*.

<sup>20</sup> Hieronymus Ortelius, *Ortelius Redivivus et Continuatus, oder der ungarischen Kriegs-Empörungen historische Beschreibung*, edited and continued by Paul Fürst (Nuremberg, 1665). Digitized edition. Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf: <https://digital.ulb.hhu.de/ihd/content/pageview/3579727> (accessed on 25 August 2025).

<sup>21</sup> Andrei Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1987), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Kurz, "Portretul lui Mihai Viteazul," 474.

<sup>23</sup> Obedeianu, *Portretele lui Mihai-Viteazul*, V.

<sup>24</sup> Slătineanu, *Contribuţiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 209.

<sup>25</sup> Kurz, "Portretul lui Mihai Viteazu," 477.

Obedeanu rejected Kurz's hypothesis on the grounds that the engraving may have been inspired by either the work of artists active at the time in Wallachia, such as Nicolae Cretanul (Nicholas the Cretan) or Petru Armeanul (Peter the Armenian), or by an oil portrait said to have been in the possession of Cardinal Malaspina.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, he characterised the image as unrealistic, arguing that the facial features appear excessively aged for a man who died at the age of 43.<sup>27</sup> An oil copy was donated to the "St. Sava" National Museum by Johann Meyer.<sup>28</sup> Andrei Pippidi likewise described the image as "strange" and advanced the hypothesis that it may derive from the adaptation of an older plate originally intended to depict the Transylvanian folk costume.<sup>29</sup>

## The second portrait

"The portrait from Johannes Bisselius' book."<sup>30</sup> (Fig. 6)

Born one day after the assassination of Michael the Brave, the professor of rhetoric, ethics and theology Johannes Bisselius (1601–1677), originally from Babenhausen (Swabia) authored the work entitled *Aetatis nostrae gestorum eminentium* [The historical contents of the most eminent deeds of our time]. The chronicle was published in Amberg (eastern Germany) in 1675, under the patronage of Johannes Burger. It presents a series of events that unfolded within the Holy Roman Empire between 1601 and 1621.<sup>31</sup> As a promoter of Christianity, in general, and of the Counter-Reformation in particular, Bisselius wrote from the viewpoint of a cleric defending his defining values. A member of the Jesuit order, he composed his chronicle driven by a deep anti-pagan sentiment. His desire to free his country from Ottoman rule was so intense that any political leader who shared this ideal earned his immediate respect. Michael the Brave was one such figure: his anti-Ottoman struggles and Balkan campaigns resonated with the author's ideals, thus leading Bisselius

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<sup>26</sup> Obedeanu, *Portretele lui Mihai-Viteazul*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>30</sup> Bălcescu, "Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei," 259. "Portretul din cartea lui Joannes Bisselius".

<sup>31</sup> *Mihai Viteazul în conștiința europeană*, Vol. II, 288.

to devote no fewer than 113 pages to the ruler, in a chapter entitled “Michael, Wallahiae Waywoda.”<sup>32</sup>

Bălcescu’s notes indicate that within Johannes Bisselius’s work, there is an engraving depicting Michael the Brave, after a certain J. A. Böner.<sup>33</sup> Johann Alexander Böner (1647–1720) was a German engraver born in Nuremberg, specialised in copper engraving and in the lead-casting technique. He produced an extensive gallery of portraits and tableaux, his preferred subjects being urban scenes and folk costumes.<sup>34</sup> The engraving of Michael the Brave noted by Bălcescu and identified by him in Bisselius’s book is, in fact, a copy after Dominicus Custos, drawn by Jonas Umbach (1624–1693) and subsequently engraved by Johann Alexander Böner. The ruler is depicted wearing clothing similar to those of Custos’s print: the cap secured with a clasp, the fur-trimmed cloak, decorated with floral motifs and fastened at the neck, are indeed comparable. Although the facial features rendered by Böner are more tense and angular, they display the same defining traits: a coarse, wrinkled face, arched eyebrows, and a piercing gaze.

Beneath the portrait, there is an inscription identifying the markers of the image: *Umbach fecit* (on the left) and *J.A/ Boner Sc* (on the right). The ruler’s title appears below: *MICHAEL Wallachiae WAYWODA*. The absence of the laudatory stanza present in Custos’s 1601 portrait gallery indicates the fact that the engraving was intended for circulation among the broader public, rather than for its use merely in scholarly works. Thus, the emphasis falls on the dissemination of the image itself, rather than on the encomiastic message conveyed through the titulature. Ioan C. Băcilă attested to the existence of copies of this engraving after Johann Alexander Böner, held both in the National Library of Paris and in the Imperial Collection in Vienna.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Johannes Bisselius, *Aetatis nostrae gestorum eminentium medulla historic, per aliquot septennia digesta. Septennium I. Ab anno MDCI usque ad annum MDCVII, inclusive* (Amberg, 1675), 53–166.

<sup>33</sup> The engraving is on page 54.

<sup>34</sup> Ulrich Thieme, Felix Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Leipzig: Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1910), 311. In 1702, Böner published a first edition of the work titled *Des Heil. Röm. Reichs Stadt Nürnberg Zierdte*, in which, alongside numerous representations of folk costumes worn by children and craftsmen of Nuremberg, he included a series of 180 portraits. These were largely based on paintings and drawings by other artists active in the German sphere, such as Hieronymus Holzschuher (1469–1529), Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), Michael Herr (1591–1661) and Georg Strauch (1613–1675).

<sup>35</sup> Ioan C. Băcilă, *Portretele lui Mihai Viteazul* (Sibiu: Editura Asociațiunii, 1926), 28.

Kurz also analysed Böner's engraving in the same article dedicated to the representations of Michael the Brave. He concluded that it could not depict the ruler's true likeness, since the figure is rendered as too old, whereas at the time of his death, the voivode was only 43 years old. Moreover, the clothing accessories are far too Oriental for a commander who fought against the Turks.<sup>36</sup> A copy of the engraving was donated by Alexandru Papiu-Ilarian to the National Library in Bucharest.<sup>37</sup>

### The third portrait

“The third portrait resembles the one above, from Bisselius's book, both in physiognomy and in dress.”<sup>38</sup> (Fig. 3)

This is the portrait on which Bălcescu placed the least emphasis in his *Buletin*, where it is mentioned only in passing. The historian was unaware of the fact that the engraving before him was, in fact, the one produced by Dominicus Custos. The image entered the Romanian cultural circuit only in 1860, when Alexandru Papiu-Ilarian donated it to the National Library in Bucharest.<sup>39</sup> During the same period in which Aegidius Sadeler depicted Michael the Brave in his print, Dominicus Custos (1560–1612) was part of the court of Rudolf II. A Flemish engraver and printer born in Antwerp, Custos descended from a family with a long-standing tradition in this field. He initially settled in Augsburg, where he opened a workshop that rapidly gained prominence. His debut was marked by an engraving dedicated to Ferdinand II of Tyrol, an image included in the *Armamentarium Heroicum*.<sup>40</sup> In his workshop in Augsburg, he collaborated both with his stepsons (Wolfgang and Lukas Kilian) and with the humanist Marcus Henning. Together, they produced a

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<sup>36</sup> Nicolae Bălcescu pointed out the same issues. See “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei,” 260.

<sup>37</sup> Obedeanu, *Portretele lui Mihai-Viteazul*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Bălcescu, “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei,” 260. “Al treilea portret se aseamănă cu acest din sus, din cartea lui Bisselius, atât la fizionomie, cât și la îmbrăcăminte”.

<sup>39</sup> Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Jörg Diefenbacher, Eckhard Leuschner, “Dominicus Custos,” *Hollstein*, <https://www.hollstein.com/running-research-projects/dominicus-custos.html> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

portrait gallery comprising representations of 28 princes, from Albert IV to Rudolf II.<sup>41</sup>

Between 1600–1602, Dominicus Custos published a volume of portraits entitled *Atrium heroicum* (“The heroic gallery”).<sup>42</sup> It also incorporated the engraver’s earlier works, taken from previous volumes published in 1593 and 1599.<sup>43</sup> The album is comprised of four parts<sup>44</sup> and brings together a total of 171 portraits depicting political leaders, military commanders, and nobles of that time.<sup>45</sup> Custos was responsible for the engravings, while Marcus Henning authored the laudatory texts that accompanied the visual representations. The image of Michael the Brave appears in the third part of the gallery, printed at the press of Michael Manger in Augsburg, between March and August 1601. Under the title *Atrii heroici pars III. Eiconum XXXX. Ex caelatura et officina Dominicus Custos eiconographi; Augustae Vindel*, the volume presents a new set of 40 images, accompanied by inscriptions by M[arcus] H[enning].<sup>46</sup>

The volume contains a subchapter entitled “To the most illustrious and the most noble count, Lord Gottfried, Count of Oettingen, his lord, honouring him with the greatest distinction.”<sup>47</sup> The text speaks of a number of illustrious men whom Henning and Custos included, in order to commemorate their memory:

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<sup>41</sup> “*Tirolensium principium comitum eicones*,” by Dominicus Custos (1560–1612), Google Arts & Culture, <https://artsandculture.google.com/entity/dominicus-custos/m05f9tpt?hl=en> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

<sup>42</sup> Dominicus Custos, *Atrium heroicum Caesarum, Regum, aliarumque summatum ac procerum, qui intra proximum seculum vixere, aut hodie supersunt* (Augsburg, 1601).

<sup>43</sup> *Fuggerorum et Fuggerarum imagines* (1593) and *Tirolensium principum comitum eicones* (1599), in Dominicus Custos, *Atrium heroicum Caesarum, regum...*, <http://mateo.uni-mannheim.de/desbillons/eico.html> (accessed on 7 March 2025).

<sup>44</sup> The first part appeared in 1600; the second, in the spring of 1601; the third, between March–August 1601 (this is where the representation of Michael the Brave appears); the fourth, in 1602. See Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 206.

<sup>45</sup> “Engravings by Dominicus Custos,” The Public Domain Review, <https://publicdomainreview.org/collection/engravings-by-dominicus-custos> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

<sup>46</sup> Marcus Henning, Dominicus Custos, *Atrii heroici pars. III. Eiconum XXXX. Ex caelatura et officina Dominicus Custos eiconographi*, Augustae Vindel (Augsburg), in Michael Manger’s print, 1601, <https://www.e-rara.ch/sbs/content/zoom/22431637> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

<sup>47</sup> “*Perillustri et generosissimi comiti, domino Gottfrido comiti Oetingensi, domino suo maxima observantia colendo*,” see *ibid.*, 235–241. The Latin-Romanian translations used for the English translations in the present article were made by TRANS.SCRIPT – The Centre for Diplomatic and Medieval Documentary Palaeography, <https://ts.centre.ubbcluj.ro/>. See also note 87.

[...] nor will they perish from the praiseworthy memory of posterity: neither the Palatine of Wallachia or of Transalpine Dacia, Michael, who sought both to manfully free his Wallachians from Turkish servitude and to hold and steadfastly preserve Transylvania within the Christian realms.<sup>48</sup>

The mention of Transalpine Dacia shows Marcus Henning's familiarity with the ancient world and his awareness of the continuity of this toponym into the period of Michael the Brave's rule. Ultimately, the voivode's anti-Ottoman deeds provided sufficient grounds for his inclusion in the portrait gallery.

This third part also contains a list of the names of 35 political leaders and military commanders, alongside their respective titles. In the second column, Michael the Brave's name is the 28<sup>th</sup> entry (*Michael Palatinus Valachiae Transalpiniae etc.*). He is listed among a number of other rulers, such as commander Lamoral von Egmond (1522–1568), Prince Charles de Bourbon (1566–1612), or Protestant Count Gottfried Graf von Öttingen (1554–1622).<sup>49</sup> The geographical scope selected by Henning and Custos for their representations was not limited to the territories of the Holy Roman Empire – it included figures from the Oriental sphere as well, such as the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed III, the Persian Shah Abbas I, as well as officials of lower rank, such as the Turkish viziers Sinan Pasha and Ferhat Pasha.<sup>50</sup>

The engraving depicting Michael the Brave is on page 301.<sup>51</sup> It bears an inscription set within an oval – *MICHAEL PALATINUS VALACHIAE*. Below it, there are two lines which, according to Bălcescu's translation, state the following: "This is Michael, who can, once he so desires, deliver all the people of Dacia from the Turkish yoke."<sup>52</sup> In the lower part, separate from the engraving itself, a six-line Latin stanza was added by the hand of another scribe, praising the voivode's military virtues:

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<sup>48</sup> "[...] nec Palatinum Valachiae seu Daciae Transalpiniae Michaelem, et Valachos suos e Turcica servitute viriliter eximere et Transsilvaniam christianis partibus strenue conservare atque adferere conatum," *ibid.*, 240.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 149, 151, 155, 159.

<sup>51</sup> Another version of the print is accessible today on The British Museum website: [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P\\_1873-0510-2856](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1873-0510-2856) (accessed on 22 August 2025).

<sup>52</sup> "*Si DEUS.O. vellet. Dacorum hic colla MICHAEL/ Eximeret Turca. Libera tota iugo,*" in Bălcescu, "Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei," 261. Romanian-language quote from the aforementioned publication: "Acesta e Mihai, care poate, îndată ce va voi, să mântuiască pre toți locuitorii Daciei de jugul turcului" (my translation).

Long ago, the Turk from Asia, dreaded king of the Argolic land,<sup>53</sup> cast the Dacian down from his ancient crest. Yet, seeking to mend the wrongs of the past, MICHAEL, recalling his ancient forebearers, strove to drive the Thracian from the Dacian hearth. Thus it would have come to pass, had fortune favoured him. May it yet be so.<sup>54</sup>

On the right side of the page illustrating the engraving, the capitalised notation “GOTT.” appears, which is likely an abbreviation of the name of the Protestant count Gottfried, to whom the chapter of the work is dedicated.

Both Barbu Slătineanu, in his 1933 study, and Andrei Pippidi, in 1987 work that approached the portraits of Michael the Brave, place the creation of Dominicus Custos’s print prior to 1601. Pippidi argues that certain phrases used in the inscription, such as *Contendit factum modo sorte favente fuisset Fiat adhuc Daco pellere Thraca lare*, attest that the engraving was made when the voivode was still alive.<sup>55</sup> Slătineanu dates the engraving even earlier than the one made by Aegidius Sadeler, given that, in order for it to be published between March-August 1601, the gathering of materials would have required time and prior preparation.<sup>56</sup>

In his analysis of the engraving, Andrei Pippidi emphasises the terminology and the meaning of certain words: thus, the term *palatinus* (appearing within the oval) is used, in his opinion, in order to avoid infringing upon the prestige of Prince Sigismund Báthory (who is usually represented bearing the title *princeps*<sup>57</sup>). In the phrase from the final line, “*Daco pellere Thraca lare*,” translated as “strove to drive the Thracian from the Dacian hearth,” Pippidi points out a terminological error: the term “Thracians” is erroneously

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<sup>53</sup> With regard to Greece. The Ottoman sultan controlled ancient Constantinople, which lay along an old Greek commercial artery. “*Argolicus*” = adj., Argolic, Greek, in Philip Sandford, *The Aeneid of Virgil*, Book III (London: Blackie & Son, 1900), 112.

<sup>54</sup> “Deiecit ueteri pridem de uertice Dacum  
Turca Asiae, Argolici rexq; timendus agri.  
Damna tamen tentans reparare priora MICHAEL,  
Et ueteres referens indole mentis auos;  
Contendit (factum modò sorte fauente fuisset,  
Fiat adhuc) Daco pellere Thraca lare.”

<sup>55</sup> Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 32.

<sup>56</sup> Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 207.

<sup>57</sup> The title of Sigismund Báthory as given in the medallion is reproduced at <http://mateo.uni-mannheim.de/desbillons/eico/seite103.html> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

used to designate the Turks.<sup>58</sup> However, rather than a mistake per se, this should be understood as a usage characteristic of the period in question, employed to either designate the Turks, based on phonetic similarity, or to indicate the geographical area in which they waged war, namely Thrace.

For a long time, Custos's engraving was believed to be a copy of that of Sadeler. Barbu Slătineanu challenges this view, arguing that, in Custos's case, "the voivode's physiognomy is more aged," his facial expression seemingly emanating cruelty, whereas in Sadeler's print, the voivode is depicted as younger, with a piercing gaze and a well-defined expression.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, both portraits present the head turned to the right – thus, according to Slătineanu's hypothesis, if Custos had copied Sadeler, the orientation of the former's engraving would necessarily have been reversed.<sup>60</sup>

A copy of Dominicus Custos's engraving was purchased in Berlin by Alexandru Papiu-Ilarian in February 1860 and donated to the National Library. However, this version has not been preserved.<sup>61</sup> The original engraving was acquired in 1873 by Wilhem Eduard Drugulin, a print dealer from Leipzig.<sup>62</sup>

## The fourth portrait

"The fourth portrait differs from the one above, both in physiognomy and in dress."<sup>63</sup> (**Fig. 1**)

The image to which Bălcescu refers in the quote above is an engraving made by Giovanni Orlandi, in Rome, according to the inscription beneath the portrait. The engraving depicts a man turned to the left in a semi-profile. The physiognomy is harsh: he has a bald head, large, round eyes, a prominent nose, and an elongated, wrinkled face, framed by a black beard and a long, twisted moustache. The attire evokes that of a battle-ready knight, consisting of a fur-trimmed cloak fastened at the neck, a suit of knightly armour and

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<sup>58</sup> Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 32.

<sup>59</sup> Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 207.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 207–208.

<sup>61</sup> Băcilă, *Portretele lui Mihai Viteazul*, 28.

<sup>62</sup> F. W. H. Hollstein, *German engravings, etchings, and woodcuts, ca. 1400–1700* (Amsterdam: M. Hertzberger, 1954).

<sup>63</sup> Bălcescu, "Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei," 261. "Al patrulea portret se deosebește de acesta de sus atât în fizionomie, cât și în îmbrăcăminte".

a sword with a wolf's-head-shaped hilt. His right hand is holding a commander's baton, while the other rests at his waist, with the fingers covering the sword's hilt. In the background, mounted figures can be discerned, and in the upper left corner, a heraldic emblem is displayed.<sup>64</sup> The symbols of the coat of arms suggest, according to Andrei Pippidi, "the capture of a fortress on the banks of the Danube."<sup>65</sup>

Beneath the bust, there is a Latin inscription reading: "Michael, Voivode of Wallachia, who captured the city of Nikopol in Bulgaria in the year 1598."<sup>66</sup> In the lower right corner, the author's name and place were added by hand: "*Ioan Orlandi forma in Roma.*" The inscription refers to Michael the Brave's anti-Ottoman military campaign south of the Danube in the autumn of 1598. After the Wallachian ruler's army supported the troops of Sigismund Báthory, by coming to the aid of Oradea Mare, which was under Turk siege, Michael the Brave advanced into the Balkans in September and managed to capture Nikopol, Vidin and Kladovo.<sup>67</sup>

Andrei Pippidi proposed a hypothesis regarding the dating of the image. He discusses the chronicle by Balthasar Walther, *Brevis rerum a Michaele Moldaviae Transalpinae sive Valachiae palatino gestarum descriptio* [A brief and true account of the deeds accomplished by Io Mihai, Voivode of Wallachia], printed in Görlitz in 1599.<sup>68</sup> In 1597, the Silesian chronicler produced a description of the ruler, later published in his 1599 book.<sup>69</sup> The text appears

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<sup>64</sup> The Semitic shield bears a crenellated fortress with an open gate, flanked by two key-shaped openings and surmounted by three towers.

<sup>65</sup> Andrei Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 23. "ocuparea unei fortărețe de pe malul Dunării".

<sup>66</sup> "Michel Vaivoda della Vallachia, il qvale prese la città di Nicopoli nella Bvlgaria l'anno 1598."

<sup>67</sup> Petre P. Panaitescu, *Mihai Viteazul* (Bucharest: Editura Fundația Regele Carol I, 1936), 149.

<sup>68</sup> Gheorghe Oprică, "'Momentul Mihai Viteazul' - Consecințe în istoriografia și mentalitatea istorică a vremii", *Buletinul Societății de Științe Muzeale din România*, no. VI (2008): 110–111.

<sup>69</sup> According to Balhasar Walther: "This is the likeness of the prince, animated by the proud and manly spirit within his breast, which endows his right hand with formidable strength. Not even the skilful hand of Apelles could portray him, and scarcely could wise Apollo sing him in fitting verse. He is the leader of the Getic crowds, the bulwark of Christendom and its avenger. Few in number are his soldiers, yet great is he in arm and in heart: he overcomes countless enemies, delivering them to death and flight. O Christ, in Your name we beseech You: from force, deceit, blows, or treachery, protect the prince. In You lies all salvation, and as You grant all things heartily, according to Your will, Lord, a cause pleasing to You often finds favour" – English translation based on the Romanian translation in Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 22.

to be based on an image available to the author at the time (now lost) in which Michael the Brave is presented as a skilled warrior, aided by divine support in confronting his enemies. A comparison between Walther's 1597 description and Orlandi's 1598 engraving reveals certain similarities that point to a possible visual influence. Thus, Pippidi deems that Walter may have drawn inspiration from Orlandi's engraving and proposes an earlier dating, around 1596, when the engraver also produced the portrait of Sigismund Báthory.<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, the year referenced in the engraving corresponds to the anti-Ottoman military event, rather than to the publication of the portrait. Given the fact that, while in Rome, by 1599, Orlandi had finished editing the work featuring portraits of contemporary political leaders, a safe assumption would be that the engraving of Michael the Brave was published together with this series.<sup>71</sup>

The engraving in question sparked a lively controversy within the Romanian historiography over time. From its very first identification by A. Kurz, the print was poorly received, as Michael the Brave's appearance did not match the image that his contemporaries had come to project onto him. Bălcescu stated that "in this portrait, rather poorly printed from a woodblock onto a small quarto sheet, the prince's bust is shown in full. The figure is elongated, harsh and slender [...] the head is bare, the forehead broad and slightly shaven, the hair short."<sup>72</sup> D. A. Sturdza referred to the representation as "the prince's bust with a Spanish beard," and considered it to be a merely imagined portrait.<sup>73</sup> Nicolae Iorga deemed it to be "of inferior value to the one we are familiar with"<sup>74</sup> (referring to the print by Aegidius Sadeler).

Barbu Slătineanu and Andrei Pippidi advanced the hypothesis that Orlandi's engraving does not, in fact, even depict Michael the Brave at all. Both scholars drew attention to the existence of another engraving titled

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>71</sup> Gemma Cornetti, "Portrait Prints of Rulers and Military Commanders in Sixteenth-Century Italy" (PhD diss., The Warburg Institute University of London, 2022), 181.

<sup>72</sup> Bălcescu, "Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei," 261. "în acest portret, stampat cam rău de pe lemn, pe o foaie în 4<sup>o</sup>, bustul principelui e întreg, figura e lungureață, tare și slabă [...] capul e gol, fruntea lată și rasă puțin, părul scurt".

<sup>73</sup> Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 201. "bustul principelui cu barbă spaniolă".

<sup>74</sup> Nicolae Iorga, *Portrete și lucrări domnești nou-descoperite. Ședința de la 19 octombrie 1928*, 219. "de o valoare inferioară față de acela pe care-l cunoaștem".

*Giorgio Basta*. The figure is rendered in the same clothing and with the same facial features that are usually attributed to Michael the Brave. Moreover, since heraldic symbols were at the time generally reserved for Western princes, the presence of a coat of arms above the head is rather atypical. Therefore, the historians argue that the titles of the two political leaders had been reversed due to an error made by the Italian engraver.<sup>75</sup>

### The fifth portrait

“The fifth resembles the sixth in all respects, of which we shall now speak, although it is rather poorly engraved.”<sup>76</sup> (Fig. 5)

The reference is to an engraving made by the Venetian artist Giacomo Franco (1550–1620), produced in 1608 and included in the album *Effigie Naturali Dei Maggiori Prencipi e piu Valorosi Capitani di questi et con l’arme loro* [Natural likenesses of the greatest princes and the most valiant commanders of their time, together with their coats of arms].<sup>77</sup> The portrait gallery comprises 53 representations of kings and princes of that time, with Michael the Brave’s portrait appearing on page 34.<sup>78</sup>

Nicolae Bălcescu noted that this portrait resembled the sixth one (i.e., the print by Aegidius Sadeler), given that the inscription encircling the medallion is identical. The clothing accessories were faithfully copied by Giacomo Franco. The only differences that stand out are the inscription beneath the bust, which reads *Franco forma* (“made by Franco”), and the facial features, which the Venetian engraver rendered rather awkwardly and somewhat schematically. Even the elements of dress are far more hashed, with the kaftan and the tall fur cap appearing blurred. The fact that the Italian artist’s engraving does not include, as we shall see in the following, the stanza that Sadeler placed beneath the bust suggests that the engraving was reproduced for wide circulation and commercial distribution within the

<sup>75</sup> See Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 213–215 and Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 27.

<sup>76</sup> Bălcescu, “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei,” 262. “Al cincilea seamănă în toate cu al șaselea, de care vom vorbi acum, deși e mai rău săpat”.

<sup>77</sup> Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 208.

<sup>78</sup> Băcilă, *Portretele lui Mihai Viteazul*, 19–20.

Latin public sphere. Moreover, its production seven years after the voivode's death points to the sustained interest within the Latin sphere in the Christian commanders who fought against the Turks.

### **The sixth portrait**

“Upon coming across the sixth, we burst out at once: This is it! The inscription on the portrait then fully convinced us.”<sup>79</sup> (**Fig. 2**)

The portrait that so deeply impressed Bălcescu and Golescu is the print made by the Flemish engraver Aegidius Sadeler (1570–1629). A large proportion of the artists active at the court of Rudolf II came from the Antwerp region, an important economic centre of that time,<sup>80</sup> renowned for its major commercial fairs, where merchants and craftsmen conducted their activities on both local and international markets.<sup>81</sup> Under Emperor Rudolf II's patronage, the Prague court attracted numerous artists from Flanders, who came to exercise their craft not only in their regions of origin but also on an international stage. These painters and engravers produced remarkable works, and their subjects included many contemporary historical figures, including that of Michael the Brave.

The portrait was made in Prague in 1601 and it is an emblematic engraving. Such representations typically depicted the subject frontally and were reserved almost exclusively for political and social elites (rulers, nobles, or officials attached to the imperial court). Sadeler frequently employed a standardised compositional formula: the portrait was framed within a decorative oval medallion, surrounded by two circular registers intended for inscriptions, which usually indicated the rank or public office of the depicted

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<sup>79</sup> Bălcescu, “Buletin despre portretele principilor Țării Românești și ai Moldaviei,” 262. “Când văzurăm pe cel de-al șaselea strigarăm deodată: Acesta este! Citirea cuvintelor scrise pe portret ne încredință desăvârșit”.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Limberger, *Sixteenth-century Antwerp and its Rural Surroundings Social and Economic Changes in the Hinterland of a Commercial Metropolis (ca. 1450 – ca. 1570)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 1.

<sup>81</sup> Donald J. Harreld, “Trading Places: The Public and Private Spaces of Merchants in Sixteenth Century Antwerp,” *Journal of Urban History* 29, Issue 6 (2003): 662, <https://doi.org/10.1177/009614420325346>.

figure.<sup>82</sup> The image is part of an emblematic register; according to the 1989 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “emblem” designates a visual sign intended to represent an institution or a person, most often a public figure or a political leader.

In order to clarify the context in which the image was produced, namely its function and possible commission, a presentation of its author is necessary. Aegidius Sadeler came from a family of printers in Antwerp and he surpassed in renown the works of his uncles, Jan and Raphael Sadeler. Because of the economic, political and religious pressures exerted by the Spanish administration in Flanders, he left his hometown in 1586 and subsequently worked in workshops in Mainz and Frankfurt. In 1588, he settled in Munich alongside Jan Sadeler, where he came into contact with artists such as Friedrich Sustis and Pieter Candid and produced his first major works.<sup>83</sup> After several periods of working in Italian art centres such as Venice, Rome, and Florence, Sadeler was appointed imperial engraver at the Prague court, in the autumn of 1597, where he quickly integrated into the circle of the court’s most prestigious artists.<sup>84</sup>

The authenticity of the engraving dedicated to Michael the Brave is confirmed by the artist’s signature (*sculptor AEG. Sadeler*), by the indication of the place of execution (*Prage*) and by the date inscribed on the work (*MDCI*). The identity of the subject is indicated by the inscription incorporated into the emblematic composition. Executed as a bust portrait, the image depicts the voivode in a slight right-facing profile, wearing an oval cap adorned with ostrich feathers, i.e. an attribute of high rank. The physiognomic features are strongly emphasised: a direct gaze, arched nose, full moustache, and a thick beard; the attire consists of a light-coloured cloak with a fur collar, worn over a dark garment. The figure is placed within a mandorla, framed by two concentric circles containing the inscription of the voivode’s title: “Michael, Voivode of Transalpine Wallachia: equally illustrious in favourable and adverse fortune, and in both displaying the same unbending valour.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Dorothy Limouze, “Aegidius Sadeler, Imperial Printmaker,” *Bulletin of the Philadelphia Museum of Art* 85, no. 362 (Spring 1989): 15.

<sup>83</sup> Limouze, “Aegidius Sadeler,” 3–4.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–8.

<sup>85</sup> “MICHAEL WAIVODA WALACHIAE TRANSALPINAЕ, VTRAQVE FORTVNA INSIGNIS: ET IN VTRAQ, EADEM VIRTUTE.” in Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 34.

The inscribed text also indicates the voivode's age at the time the portrait was produced: 43 years old (*ÆT. XLIII*). Beneath the bust image, within the same medallion, the printing privilege granted to the engraver under imperial authority is noted (*cvm priul. S. Cae. M<sup>lis</sup>*),<sup>86</sup> translated as "printed with the privilege (authorisation) of His Imperial Majesty." Below the frame, several lines are inscribed in Latin, in order to state: "So greatly does he cherish the name of Christ, His Majesty, the Christian commonwealth, and the peace of its Church under the Pope, with a generous heart, devoted to the common good, even when all is dire and adversaries oppose him. He who crushes what is feigned by deeds."<sup>87</sup> As mentioned earlier, the lower part of the composition bears the engraver's signature, together with the date and place of execution of the print: *S. Cæs. M.tis Sculptor Æg. Sadeler ad vivum/delineavit, et D.D. Prage. MDCL.*, thus reinforcing the authenticity of the portrait.

Shortly after Michael the Brave's death, copies of this print began to circulate, most of which faithfully reproduced the original. This is reflected in the copied made by Isaac Major (1588–1642),<sup>88</sup> Giacomo Franco (1550–1620)<sup>89</sup> and Johann Ludwig Gottfried (1584–1633).<sup>90</sup>

## Epilogue

After 1848, interest in the image of Michael the Brave shifted from the initiatives of independent scholars towards the systematic organisation of art collections and their integration into a more coherent scholarly framework.

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<sup>86</sup> "Terms in Print Addresses: Abbreviations and Phrases on Printed Images 1500–1900," an updated version of "Appendix 3," in Arthur M. Hind, *Engraving and Etching 1400–2000: A History of the Development of Manual Intaglio Printmaking Processes* (London & Houten: Archetype Publications, 2012), 10. PDF available at <https://www.delineavit.nl/wp-content/uploads/Terms-in-print-addresses.pdf> (accessed on 22 August 2025).

<sup>87</sup> "Tanti facit nomen Christi: Maiestatem Cæsaris: Remp[ublicam]: Christianam, et Ecclesiæ, Sub Pont[ifice]. Max[imo]. Concordiam: Sue prodigus, publicæ devotus Saluti: etiamsi dira omnia, et diri adversarentur: Ficta obruens factis."

<sup>88</sup> Băcilă, *Portretele lui Mihai Viteazul*, 19–20.

<sup>89</sup> Slătineanu, *Contribuțiuni la studiul portretelor lui Mihai Viteazul*, 208.

<sup>90</sup> Pippidi, *Mihai Viteazul în arta epocii sale*, 36–37.

The collections assembled by Iordachi Beldiman, Dimitrie Papazoglu and Cezar Bolliac represented the first efforts to bring together the portraits of the rulers.<sup>91</sup>

Of the six engravings described by Nicolae Bălcescu, only two effectively entered the Romanian cultural circuit at the time, and they were incorporated into the artistic practices of the two Principalities, namely those produced by Aegidius Sadeler and Dominicus Custos.

Sadeler's print was copied in Paris immediately after its discovery by Barbu Iscovescu and brought back to the country.<sup>92</sup> By 1850, a lithograph after Sadeler's engraving, produced by the Wallachian painter Mihail Lapaty (1816–1860) in Paris, is documented.<sup>93</sup> The portrait made in France served as the basic model that the artist used three years later in producing a historical painting sent to the country.<sup>94</sup> In 1852, another Romanian painter, Theodor Aman, likewise studying in Paris, painted the dramatic composition *Cea din urmă noapte a lui Mihai Viteazul* [The final night of Michael the Brave]. In this depiction, the semi-profile pose of the subject's head, the long and imposing beard, the black fur cap, and the clasped feathers all echo Sadeler's engraving.

Custos's engraving did not circulate as widely as that of his contemporary. A first possible use of it as a model, albeit still debated in historiography, has been identified in Constantin Lecca's painting *Intrarea triumfală a lui Mihai Viteazul în Alba Iulia* [The triumphant entry of Michael the Brave in Alba Iulia] (1855–1856). The depiction of the ruler in semi-profile, with an intense gaze, a full beard, and resolute bearing, led some art historians (Remus Niculescu) to hypothesise that the physiognomic type derived from Custos's engraving.

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<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>92</sup> Zamfir, "Mihai Viteazul în pictura românească," 262.

<sup>93</sup> Virgil Căndea, *Mărturie românești peste hotare II. Cercetări românești și izvoare despre români în colecții din străinătate. Seria Nouă, Finlanda-Grecia* (București: Editura Biblioteca Bucureștilor, 2011), 170. Moreover, see a reproduction of Mihail Lapaty's lithograph after Aegidius Sadeler on *Artmark* – the lithograph in question is part of the collection of literary historian Șerban Cioculescu (1902–1988): <https://www.artmark.ro/ro/licitatie/licitatie-de-hartii-importante-inclusiv-o-selectie-din-colectia-criticului-literar-serban-cioculescu-5082023/lot/litografie-mihai-viteazul-de-mihail-lapaty-paris-cca-1850-ro-80927?srsId=AfmBOopo3urmDPzL41p2mCV2dDCHEFsB0osagWsGRuQIEZs-1AWR4Kea> (accessed on 28 December 2025).

<sup>94</sup> Adrian-Silvan Ionescu, "De la galeria de tablouri la pinacoteca națională" [From the painting gallery to the national pinacotheca], *Revista Istorică*, New series, vol. 13 (2002): 157.

The fact that the other engravings found by Nicolae Bălcescu in Paris in 1847 were not used indicates that the painters who shaped the ruler's image from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century made a selection, conserving only those features considered relevant for their compositions. The remaining representations were recovered primarily on an erudite level, through studies published in the second half of the century. Michael the Brave's image thus became the object of scholarly interest for researchers such as A. Papiu-Illarian (1862), D. A. Sturdza (1875), Constantin V. Obedeanu (1906), George Oprescu (1910, 1922), Alexandru Busuioceanu (1925), Ioan C. Băcilă (1926), Nicolae Iorga (1927), Barbu Slătineanu (1933), Emil Țirțosu (1936), Radu Victor Bossy (1937) and Andrei Pippidi (1987).

Artist and inscription	Date and place	Status	Motivation	Engraving
<b>Giovanni Orlandi</b> "Michel Vaivoda della Vallachia" (Fig. 1)	1599, Rome	ORIGINAL	The first autonomous Western portrait; a "news-sheet" print (Nikopol, 1598). Does not generate a canonical type.	
<b>Aegidius Sadeler,</b> "Michael Waivoda Walachiae Transalpinae" (Fig. 2)	1601, Prague	ORIGINAL canonical type, <i>ad vivum</i>	Produced at the court of Rudolf II, under <i>cum privilegio</i> ; becomes the preferred model for subsequent dissemination.	



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<b>Johann Alexander Böner</b> , in J. Bisselius's <i>Aetatis nostrae gestorum</i> , "Michael Walachiae Waywoda" <b>(Fig. 6)</b>	1675, Amberg	SECONDARY (after Custos)	Book re-engraving produced 70 years after the original; simplified title; late editorial dissemination.
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