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Michał Wasiucioneck's book *Țările Române și Înalta Poartă în secolul XVII, Rivalități și alianțe în secolul al XVII-lea* succeeds in reinterpreting the political dynamics in Eastern and Southeastern Europe between the 17th and 18th centuries from a new perspective. The author discusses the power relations between elites and the way in which they transcend aspects such as territory, ethnicity, religion, family, or state entities. The author is a researcher at the "Nicolae Iorga" Institute of History of the Romanian Academy and his work focuses on network theory, patronage and clientelism, and peripheral communities in Southeastern Europe in the 17th century. His research interests include the history of the Ottoman Empire, the Romanian Principalities, and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The present work is a translation into Romanian of *The Ottomans and Eastern Europe; Borders and Political Patronage in Early Modern World*. It is structured in two parts, *Mechanics of Cross-Border Patronage* and *Factional Macro-Politics*, preceded by an introduction that provides political and historical contextualization.

The Polish historian uses an impressive amount of unpublished and published documents, from Ottoman, Polish, and Romanian sources. With regard to the secondary sources, the book is distinguished by its engagement with very recent works in Western, Polish, Turkish and Romanian historiography.

At the outset of the "Introduction," Wasiucioneck recounts the episode involving the Polish ambassador Romaszkievicz in Constantinople, who was forced to remain at the Sublime Porte following the defeat of Tabanyassi Mehmet Pasha. Thus, factionalism in the Ottoman Empire is portrayed by showing how it influenced the internal evolution of the Romanian Principalities and affected the authority of the members of the groups involved. The episode in question illustrates one of the book's central ideas: the role of factions and cross-border relations. From the outset, the author addresses the issue of state formation and development in the pre-modern era. Wasiucioneck engages with the historiographical debates and argues that the state in premodernity represents a *joint enterprise* shaped by factional interests. By maintaining power, these factions sought to accumulate capital, status, and privileges.

In the first part, *Mecanismeale patronajului transfrontalier (Mechanics of Cross-Border Patronage)*, Wasiucionek highlights the ways in which these cross-border relationships are formed. The factions acted in accordance with their own rules, and families played a crucial role in these political games. Through them, properties, offices, and privileges were monopolized and passed down throughout generations in order to prevent the decline of the group. The importance of family was so great, that even Michael the Brave constructed a genealogy different from the real one. However, belonging to an aristocratic family did not automatically guarantee political advancement, idea point convincingly demonstrated by the author.

Wasiucionek also offers examples of political advancements owed to *ethnic solidarity*, illustrating the importance of such *identities*. For example, he discusses the connection between the Albanian Duca and Ghica families, marked by political and matrimonial alliances. The meaning of the title “*Greek*” is also discussed, as it came to function as a pejorative term, synonymous with “*foreigner*.” Wasiucionek also notes a similar analogy in the case of those who converted to Islam, who came to be described as “*Turkicized*.”

In the case of these patronage relationships, the author observes the development of certain *cross-border* and *cross-religious* relationships through the rise of figures such as Abhaza Pasha. Wasiucionek presents him in the context of the formation and consolidation of support networks that facilitated the political rise of figures such as Matei Basarab and Miron Barnovschi. What the author observes is the surprising game played by the Sublime Porte, which tolerated pro-Polish rulers in order to counteract the influence of this figure in the area – as a private individual who cultivated local political rivalries and used them to his own advantage. For Wasiucionek, this was also a constant in the military field, where, in addition to the *country's army*, the private retainers of patrons, i.e. *mercenaries*, also played a role. Hence, the author argues that the political developments in the 17th century were largely shaped by the personal interests of influential patrons. Wasiucionek correlates this system with the developments within the Ottoman Empire, where the power was decentralized and *political houses* were formed, which then became *the backbones of factionalism*. Thus the political investment in the peripheral areas of the Empire, such as the Romanian Principalities, proved to be rather profitable.

In the second part, *Factional Macro-Politics*, Wasiucionek examines the pre-modern state's efforts to address the problems of the era, the rulers acting as the main mediators. Therefore, the chronicles were meant to portray rulers as virtuous, constantly at odds with their rivals. This chapter focuses on the conflicts within the Romanian Principalities and on the influence of factionalism on power dynamics.

The conflict between Matei Basarab and Vasile Lupu truly stands out and is presented within a new analytical framework. Wasiucionek argues that it is misleading to analyse the aforementioned conflict from an anti-Ottoman perspective, given that both sides were supported by factions in Constantinople. Even chroniclers of the time (Miron Costin, for instance) were aware of this factionalism. Likewise, Wasiucionek discusses the case of the Cantacuzino and Duca families in relation to the Köprülü dynasty of viziers. This example illustrates how political conflicts were resolved following the decline of the Köprülü dynasty, leading to the marriage alliance between the Cantacuzino family and the Duca family. The members of the Movilă family did not share the same fate, becoming victims of internal conflicts caused by the Polish noble patrons.

Referring to these patrons, Wasiucionek presents the case of Jan Zamoyski. He received his education in the West and benefited from a political rise owing to Stephen Báthory. In this way, he secured offices, privileges, properties, and other such levers that enabled him to achieve his political objectives. However, as the author notes, despite his influence, Zamoyski was not capable of monopolizing the political authority in the Romanian Principalities, largely due to the political context marked by the rise of Michael the Brave. Moreover, this setback was also due to the self-interest of the local boyars, who did not tolerate the Polish nobleman's plan. A similar case reveals the failure of Jan Sobieski and his son, Joseph, to conquer Moldavia. The nobility, the clergy, and the local population harassed the new Polish administration, and authority was ultimately taken over by Constantin Cantemir. However, what Wasiucionek observes is that the boyars of the Costin family, despite having supported Cantemir against the Poles, were accused of conspiracy and killed. This plot was the work of rival boyars, Lupu Bogdan and Ruse. The paradox presented by Wasiucionek is that they subsequently fled to Poland, despite having initially supported pro-Ottoman interests.

Drawing on such examples, Wasiucionek observes the distortion of reality by historians through the creation of pre-established political frameworks (pro-Ottoman or pro-Polish) and emphasises that the boyars positioned themselves according to their political and economic interests. Their primary aim was to preserve their own wealth, and to this end they resorted to various means, such as the intervention of foreign powers or the formation of patronage networks. These networks could muster power, influence, and resources to sustain themselves, in addition to being truly transnational. Every network was driven by personal interests. While Sobieski's Poles sought to strengthen their authority, the Ottomans were only interested in financial resources and therefore supported the creation of loyal and influential networks to collect the tribute. However, the nobility of the Romanian Principalities sought to defend their own interests, the state being considered a *joint enterprise*. From this perspective, we can better understand the relations of the nobility with both the Polish and the Ottoman worlds, which guaranteed their rights and privileges in exchange for their submission.

Eliminating historiographical schematics facilitates both the work of the historian and the reinterpretation of the past. Although some may view it as a deconstructive exercise, the merit of Michał Wasiucionek's work lies in his reinterpretation of a historical era considered to be overstudied and in his highlighting of nuances overlooked by Romanian historiography. The employment of certain modern concepts related to *state entities* or to *the power relations* enables a better comprehension of the political relations and developments, in terms more closely aligned with the vision of the era under study.

In conclusion, through an innovative methodology, Michał Wasiucionek highlights the origins of factionalism in the political history of Southern and Eastern Europe, marked by the formation of factions based on financial, ethnic, territorial, or dynastic grounds. These groups were often unstable and shaped by the interests of each actant, regardless of their origin, as well as by the influence of other factions. This was the political environment of the late medieval period and the beginning of modernity, in which personal interests and those of political groups would often take precedence in the unfolding of political developments.