

VIOLETA-ANCA EPURE, **Geographical, Political and Linguistic Frontiers of the Romanian Principalities in the Vision of pre-1848 French Consuls and Voyagers**

Abstract: The Romanian Principalities, which were located at a suitable distance from Western Europe, and hence from France, were perceived by Western Europeans as the exotic boundaries of Enlightenment Europe. French testimonies written the end of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the next one identified the Romanian countries with a geographical area little or not (yet) known to the French public.

In the chronological interval mentioned, observers such as Carra, Marquis de Salaberry, the Counts d' Hauterive, de Langeron, de Rochechouart, de Guilleminot and de Lagarde, the Prince de Ligne, the consuls Parant, Flury and Reinhard, as well as Leclerc, Barthélémy Bacheville, Charles Pertusier, Emile Gaudin, Saint-Marc Girardin, J. Jacquin, Bois-le-Comte, Auguste de Marmont, Raoul Perrin, Stanislas Bellanger and Adolphe Billecocq all mentioned in their writings the geographical and political borders of the Romanian Principalities. They noted their geo-strategic position on the border of three empires, and also discussed the Eastern Question, which has brought many disadvantages over time, turning the Principalities into a real bone of contention between Russia, Austria and Turkey. Although often perceived by the pre-1848 French voyagers and consuls as part of the Ottoman Empire, the Principalities stood out thanks to their economic and natural potential, as Ottoman power declined. They also noted the rise of Russia in the area and the ascendancy achieved because of religious identity. Most French visitors noticed the similarities between the two Romanian provinces and their importance with regard to the Eastern Question.

Linguistic borders were more permissive compared to the political ones, French consuls and travellers evoking rightly the Latin character of the language and linguistic borrowings from the populations that natives came into contact or lived with over time. The boyars spoke mainly the then fashionable Greek and French, speaking Romanian less; the last was, in most French observers' view, unjustly despised and spoken mostly by common people.

Keywords: Romanian Principalities, travellers, France, image, borders.

Violeta-Anca EPURE, PhD, is a Lecturer in the Faculty of History and Geography at "Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava, Romania; e-mail: violetaanca@atlas.usv.ro.