

## THE TOPICALITY OF RULER NEAGOE BASARAB'S MILITARY THINKING ON WAR AND ARMY

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Our great poet Vasile Alecsandri, making reference to the brilliant minds and epochal achievements of waivodes, rulers and past famous men of culture of the Romanian people, who served and protected in an exemplary manner our Country, Origin and Language, the language of former homilies, wrote in one of his works: "There are names intended / To stand unshaken on time boundaries/ And forever to spread a glorious light/ Through centuries that in shadow, passing, they pray.

Among these bright minds which the so-called „**Brad de la Mircești**” took into consideration, one of the most exquisite is Neagoe Basarab, the illustrious ruler of the Romanian Country between 1512-1521. As he was portrayed by the historian A. D. Xenopol, he was „**a kind, good, and pacifist chosen ruler**”.

According to the highbrow Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu's assessments, Neagoe Basarab was „*a Great Aurelius of the Romanian Country, prince, artist and philosopher who makes us witness an extraordinary era of peace and culture in the middle of a dark storm which lasted for several centuries, shortening the period between 1512 and 1521*”. Finally, last but not least, Nicolae Iorga, the Light of Romanian historiography, rightfully considers that Neagoe Basarab „*was not only a kind, good and pacifist chosen ruler, but also a great thinker and writer on issues of religion, culture, moral and military areas*”. This was actually so, for after his reign, due to everything that he left behind, especially in the field of culture, his followers came to consider him a true „*Renascence prince of the Romanian territory*”.

In the cultural area, aspect that we mainly deal with in the present paper, it is required and essentially important to be highlighted, as a priority, that there were

two unmatched achievements in the Romanian medieval era and even in the European era which bear the seal of Neagoe Basarab's name. First of all, it refers to building the splendid monastery from Curtea de Arges, place of worship which is reckoned, both nationally and on European plan, as "a true wonder of the world". Secondly, it is about the writing of the book having a brand new theme for the given age, entitled simply and expressively, "Neagoe Basarab's teachings to his son, Theodosius". The book with this challenging and appealing title, may be considered as a genuine treaty of political, philosophical, religious and military literature, a bright learning book for those who were to be made rulers, but also for their close collaborators, advised on how to behave and act in order to serve their country with honor, dignity, responsibility and real success both at peace and in times of trouble, especially at war. Many passages represent real learning springs for those who rule and not only that. The respective paper became important for the times when it was written and afterwards, through its originality, through its content of ideas, theses and advice it contains, but also through practical use, through originality, because it represented the first Romanian work having such a rich theme not only within the Romanian territory but also in Europe, through content of ideas, theses and advice because they have been carefully chosen, are to the point and cover a wide range of fields of activity, starting with the cultural and historic, philosophical, religious, ending with the purely military ones. Making reference to this major aspect of the book, the teacher and historian Dan Zamfirescu, the one who brought to light the texts contained in the book we mentioned above, is fully convinced that „*Neagoe Basarab is, for the literature of the past, what Eminescu is for the modern one*". Further on, the same author, a member of the Academy of Scientists in Romania, considers that this teaching book is: „*the full expression, at a level that no other author had reached, of the moral profile and intellectual value the Romanian people have...Few literatures could take pride- at that time and even later - in such a synthetic, clear and firm expression of the ethos and value complex of the people who created it*".

The book of "teaching" written by Neagoe Basarab draws one's attention because it contains clear, direct and specific activity and behavioral teachings for the one who was to rule – his son Theodosius – but also for the ones close to him as well as for the common people. For instance, the Romanian Country's ruler urged his son and those around him to appreciate and judge all people, that is those in high places and those below, who represented "the sole of the country", „*judging by faith and by actions. ...Rightfully judged, both, friends and strangers, the big ones and the small ones. Shame no one, and our ultimate judge is God. That is why the wise do not praise about their wisdom, nor the mighty about their power, nor the rich about their richness, should they at least be emperor, noble,*

*conqueror, may they all know God who created everything and rules it all, with fear doing justice on earth.*” Regarding the straightforward and clearly stated content of the above mentioned quote, we feel the need to make the following assessment, inordinately: the findings that Neagoe Basarab made 500 years ago, concerning the way the members of the medieval Romanian society were seen, treated and judged, from great to small, are not only valuable and intriguing, but also fully valid, even for our times.

A substantial area of Neagoe Basarab’s book, “Teachings”, is dedicated to a wide and interesting range of direct military issues. We refer, of course, to those with respect to war and the army. Speaking directly and effectively of these problems, two valuable military analysts from the latter part of the past century, namely general dr. Ion Cupșa and colonel Traian Mutașcu, both former professors at the department of art history at the former military Superior School of War, underlined, among others, in a research study: *„In terms of military issues, Neagoe Basarab’s teachings to his son, Theodosius, the first attempt of analysis and theoretical generalization of the richly accumulated experience by the Romanian troops in the wars they had to fight. They can be regarded as being part of an authentic guide of the Romanian military art for the ancient and medieval ages. Besides, the cornerstone of the famous Romanian prince’s notorious writings (also a soldier-warrior and head of the Romanian army of his age,) was the thorough and critical analysis of the military events from some of the great princes’ glorious times and army commanders forerunners to Neagoe Basarab, like Basarab the Ist, Mircea the Elder (1310-1352), Bogdan the Ist (1363-1367), Vladislov the Ist (1364-1377), Mircea the Elder (1386-1418), Iancu of Hunedoara (1441-1456), Vlad the Impaler (1448, 1456-1462 and 1476), Ștefan the Great (1457-1504), Radu the Great (1495-1508) and many others”*. The military ideas, thesis and concepts contained in Neagoe Basarab’s book, “Teachings”, represent, on one hand his extensive cultural background, his deep military thinking, and on the other hand, his power to bring brilliant ideas, theses and military concepts which were to be valid not only during his time, but also afterward, we would say even to this day.

Although the book largely deals with a wide range of military issues, Neagoe Basarab was never considered to be a warrior by his descendants. He was not considered a warrior prince not only because he was afraid or was not able to confront his invader enemies, but because he had the great wisdom that, during his reign, through pacific thinking and actions, he replaced the sword with the weapon of diplomacy, he agreed upon things with his potential adversaries over “the green table”, as they say in diplomacy. Referring to these obvious attributes and qualities Neagoe Basarab had, speaking about the unpaired authors of the book of ‘teachings, the renowned scholar Virgil Căndeia said: *„What did Neagoe mean to*

*us and why do we glorify him today, with more reverence than the ones before us, why does our soul quivers hearing his name and actions called ? Because we find our ancestors and our Romanian nature in many of the prince's features.... First his clairvoyance, at a time when the biggest empire in the eastern Mediterranean was staging the moment for an expedition to the Central Europe, Neagoe appears calm, courageous and rational above all, keeping his opponents at a distance”.*

Keeping his potential military opponents at a notable distance through well thought and firmly accomplished actions and measures, Neagoe Basarab advised his son, who, according to traditions was to be a prince, how to behave when the country's borders and independence would be in danger.

The father urged his son in a fatherly and convincing manner, that both in life and reign be driven by ongoing peaceful feelings, so that he would not engage in warlike actions, without a reason. On this line, in a special chapter of the book in focus, he requested the following to the claimant to the throne and those around him: „Do not love the times of riot and do not start actions of pride... And if the enemy, who is stronger, wants to start a war against the country, and the country is not prepared for a battle, the ruler seeks a way to avoid war through diplomatic actions, try to placate the enemy with sweet and wise words ...” If, with all the prince's efforts and attempts, the potential enemy or adversary can not be persuaded by peaceful means, the Prince and his collaborators were advised to act with dignity and determination, fast, fearless and military-like, meaning to “go to war in the name of God”. In this respect, Theodosius receives the following advice from his father: „So, if your enemies should come upon you and you will see that they are stronger than you, and your friends will advise you to attack them without wasting time, or if they scare you out of your own country, do not flee, do not believe those “friends” and advisers, believe that they do not wish you well... Do not do so, for is far better to die with honor than to live in bitterness and shame.” Further, with very well chosen words and with a profound content, Neagoe Basarab tells his son and those around him, in fact to all people: „Do not be like that bird called cuckoo, that gives its eggs to be sat out by other birds and hatch the chickens, but be like the hawk and guard your nest, because the hawk, my sons, has other examples and it has a brave heart in itself, it protects and defeats many birds and he fears no one, and he hunts for something all the time”.

In another paragraph of the book, Neagoe Basarab advises his son, the aspirant for the royal throne, with these beautiful and touching words which are suited, in our views, to be placed as mottos in any book of history or Romanian military theory: „And you, without any fear, go straight in front of your enemies. And if they are more, nothing should frighten you because the brave and warrior man does not fear the crowd, yet as a lion kidnaps a deer's heart and as a wolf

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*kidnaps a flock of sheep no matter how big, the same the brave and the man... do not fear many people”.*

Going the same line of wise and inspiring advice, Neagoe urged his son that, in case of distress he should lead the war with bravery, with maximum force, to the expulsion or total suppression of the enemy. In such situation, the ruler of the Romanian Country said, „*do not be afraid of the enemy, but face him with bravery, because he started it*”. The war in which he urged the sons of noble rank and those under his authority to enter with a just character, of defence, the prince was firmly convinced that the victory would be, after all, on the side of those who defended their land, wealth, freedom and independence of the Country with determination, bravery and heroism. In case of a just war, Neagoe said, let us fear nothing and, let us take into consideration “*that it is better to die with honor, than to have a shameful name!*”

In the same manner, Romania’s rulers had to act with a lot of courage, patriotism and wisdom when, based on provisions of Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, Stalin gave an ultimatum to Romania’s government to give Bessarabia away, in 1940.

After Poland was attacked by the Nazi Germany from the West, and by USSR from the East and fought bravely on the two fronts, being defeated, but giving an example of heroism to other nations, the policy makers in Romania should have understood from this lesson that, if they hadn’t had the chance of winning on the two battlefields, they could have fought on one front only. Hence, in 1940 it was absolutely necessary for them to make an urgent political and military mobilization decision of the Romanian Army, to cover the Eastern border, of defending Bessarabia, Hertsa and Northern Bukovina against the Soviet invasion especially since Germany was to attack the Soviet Union.

Therefore, according to Neagoe Basarab’s teachings, in 1940 the Romanians should have acted “fast and fearless, with dignity and determination, that is to go to war in the name of God”. So here is how actual the military and political thinking of our great ruler is, as he urged us, over centuries, to a holy war of defending the land of Bessarabia, Hertsa and Northern Bukovina.

Neagoe Basarab’s teachings to his son, Theodosius, comprise valuable ideas, theses and advice regarding the structure of the great army, the making of battle orders, conducting and training those who were to fight in war, who during the battles behaved heroically, like true heroes, as direct followers of those who died on the battlefield. Neagoe Basarab urged the would-be prince, as well as the commanders of troops to be rewarded and glorified by the judgement of their deeds, with goods and land, to be praised and mentioned on different occasions in front of families and successors. „*The worthy* – Neagoe *clearly stated* in warm and touching

words – be repaid according to their virtues”, without considering their social or military rank.

The dead, while in battle, the ruler said, „*should be remembered and their descendents should get great honor from the prince*”.

In Neagoe Basarab's book of „teachings” there are numerous and valuable ideas, theses and recommendations regarding the structure of the army, the great one, the making of battle orders, the management and development of war itself. In this regard here is what the ruler recommended to the future prince, who was also to hold the high dignity of ‘head’ of the army: „*So, one had to foreordain all weapons (all troop categories- n.n.) and to encourage his crowd (of fighters – n.n.), each one where he belongs and to form each one as it is written*”. Then, when he refers to the starting period, in the passages in which he specifically refers to the military composition of the Romanian Country, Neagoe Basarab shows that it is composed of “the small army”, being the one that has the main scope of ensuring the ruler's security and of his state institutions, but also of “the great army”, the one comprising the country's all able-bodied citizens who were called to arms in case of “riots”, that is war. In their turn, the two basic components of the army were divided into categories of troops or weapons, according to the prince, in his position as head of the army, as required by military specialties and needs.

Next, in terms of actual combat tactics the prince would talking to the throne claimant about how to act at the beginning of a war. In case of war, he would advise Neagoe, with these word wisely and well formulated: „*So, when your enemies turn against you, first foreordain and establish a garrison (in modern terminology a first fighters echelon), that go forward then, after it, a second garrison which deals with this “great army” (meaning all the combat troops), especially considering the novelty and value of information that Neagoe Basarab recorded in his book of ‘teachings’, regarding the structure of his army and the level of actions of troops in case of campaign, our great historian Nicolae Iorga,*” makes frequent references to the work of the Romanian Country prince in his brilliant work called “The history of the Romanian army in order to present issues concerning “the composition and combat style of the Romanian army in our more distant historic past”.

A major issue covered by Neagoe Basarab in his brilliant book of “teachings” refers to the proper management of troops during combat and the place that needed to be filled by the commander in the given circumstances. In this regard, the following considerations, made by the author in his book, are fully enlightening: „*In order for the prince, who is also the supreme commander of the army, to be able to successfully lead the battle, he must be spared of the enemy's direct strikes and possible surprises*”. To this end, Neagoe Basarab recommended

that the commander of the army sat, at least at the beginning of the fight, ‘in the second or third band (meaning, in modern terminology, second or third line of battle), *“and then, do as you will better consider”*. He also recommended that, during battle deployment *“the commander must be active, to effectively run the fight, to consult with band leaders and to take rapid and effective decisions”*. *“Not tracking closely the development of the battle, the lack of focus and the slowness in thought and action –Neagoie Basarab also said – seriously harm the development and end of a war”*.

One final issue that we make reference to, considering the time allotted for the presentation of our communication – is about Neagoie Basarab’s views regarding the soldiers’ behavior during combat. *„They – he used to tell to his son and those around him – must show bravery, manhood, spirit of sacrifice, because they are fighting for a just cause – defending the country’s borders, the ancestral estate and their future and the one of their successors”*. Neagoie Basarab wrote in his book of “teachings’ that the soldiers’ hard life in the army and, especially, in the campaign, “strengthens both physically and spiritually the one that carries the weapon”, it teaches him “with privations and hardships”, and when he returns home, he will be a more vigorous citizen, better prepared for work and life.”

In conclusion, the military concepts, ideas and theses comprised in the work “Neagoie Basarab’s teachings to his son, Theodosius” are a real trove of lessons, many of those ideas, theses and concepts being valid even today, so we believe. This treasure trove of lessons still must be studied and improved by researchers and specialists in Romanian history and military theory, taking into account the new conditions in which it evolved and there is the current military organism of the country. In this respect, we wish to mention the fact that many decades ago, within the Superior School of War, the department of History of Military art used to teach Neagoie Basarab’s book of “teachings” for several months in a row. Even if nowadays it is no longer studied in an organized manner, it would be necessary that in some military and civilian higher education institutions it were recommended as compulsory study book, both for teachers and students. By studying this exceptional work written 500 years ago, one might still get useful lessons and conclusions for those working in the country’s military institutions or other fields of activity. Thank you for your attention!

### **Conclusions**

Historical research is not only a science of the past, but also of the present and future because history offers us lessons, meaning that history lessons make us draw conclusions about society and people’s development processes, stressing, on one hand, what was beneficial, progressive, and, on the other hand what has

hindered the development of society and destroyed the values of humanity. Therefore, the results of historical research can be useful to humankind and to nations by disclosing the development laws (objective) of human society.

Military history reveals the nations that have used the military force to conquer foreign lands, enslaving other peoples and those who have not done so, meaning, they have defended their territories and national independence without attacking other countries. .

For example, this is how the Romanian people has always fought against the invaders wherever they came from, leaving the plow and peaceful work to enlist in the army of the people, the defence of life and wealth of the citizens. Today, some believe it can no longer be the same, but such a statement has no historical basis.

Considering our civilization, military history searches for an answer, to questions that, can not be circumvented even under the unexpected conditions of globalization. How did the Romanian people manage to drive seemingly invincible invaders away, to eliminate enslaving foreign dominations that thought they were eternal, to progress, step by step, towards the UNION and the formation of the Romanian unitary national state? We, the Romanians, believe that the word "national" must not be mistaken for ethnicity. The nation is becoming more and more of a community, a state which includes, without any discrimination, all citizens, all inhabitants of a country.

Achieving the national and social ideals of the people was the result of the thirst for freedom and progress and its capacity to turn its will into action and to bravely bear the sufferings caused by tough and uneven confrontations with the enemies, but also of the wisdom which combined the armed with non-military forms of combat: political, economic, diplomatic etc. These achievements were possible due to the fact that the other nations stood up to fight for freedom and protection of ancestral land alongside the Romanian people, those who came from the wider world and settled, in different historical periods, on the Romanian territory (Dacian-Romanian). Now, this land is also theirs. It is our country, of all of us; it is our home, of all the Romanians, no matter religion, ethnicity, vocation or political view. The successes of the Romanian people are also due to the brilliant military leaders, true military geniuses without whose help the resounding victories against some imperial armies (Persian, Macedonian, Hungarian, Turkish, Russian, Austrian or German) could not have been possible. Of course, Romania was generally aided by the allies, friends, the great powers, but most often it was left alone. This possibility must always be taken into account, as alliances are temporary, and the states, the only subjects, are the cells and civilization monads of all time.



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