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Epitomes of Dacia: Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania in Early Modern English Travelogues

Abstract: This essay examines the kaleidoscopic and abridged perspectives on three early modern principalities (Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania), whose lands are now part of modern-day Romania. I examine travelogues and geography texts describing these Eastern European territories written by Marco Polo (1579), Abraham Ortelius (1601; 1608), Nicolas de Nicolay (1585), Johannes Boemus (1611), Pierre d'Avity (1615), Francisco Guicciardini (1595), George Abbot (1599), Uberto Foglietta (1600), William Biddulph (1609), Richard Hakluyt (1599-1600), Fynes Moryson (1617), and Sir Henry Blount (1636), published in England in the period 1579-1636. The essay also offers brief incursions into the representations of these geographic spaces in a number of Shakespearean plays, such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, as well as in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* by Shakespeare and Wilkins. I argue that these Eastern European locations configure an erratic spatiality that conflates ancient place names with early modern ones, as they reconstruct a space-time continuum that is neither real nor totally imaginary. These territories represent real-and-fictional locations, shaping an ever-changing world of spatial networks reconstructed out of fragments of cultural geographic and ethnographic data. The travel and geographic narratives are marked by a particular kind of literariness, suggesting dissension, confusion, and political uncertainty to the early modern English imagination.

Keywords: early modern English geography, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Pericles*, Shakespeare, travelogues.

Many kinds of travellers (in early modern England and abroad) offered kaleidoscopic perspectives on the places they travelled to and produced eccentric texts based on their experience of travel. As Melanie Ord notes, “the literature of advice on travel in early modern England includes recommendations addressed to specific travelers preparing to make particular journeys, travel guides,

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position papers on the benefits and dangers of travel, and *ars apodemica*, or travel methods, which are not clearly distinct from these other subgenres" (1). This method of travel narrative is not different when concerning marginal parts of Eastern Europe. In "Maister Rotherigo to the Reader" at the beginning of the *Travels of Marco Polo*, translated by John Frampton (1579), Dacia is included in a European continent composed of "Portugale, Britania, Spaine, France, Almaine, Italie, Grecia, Polonia, Hungarie, or Panonia, Valachia, Asia the lesser, Phrygia, Turkia, Galatia, Lydia, Pamphilia, Lauria, Lycia, Cilicia, Scythia the lower, Dacia, Gaetia, and Trasia" (Polo sig. *iii^v). This long list is a curious amalgam of early modern names of countries and of ancient regions, as well as downright geographic eccentricities, such as the inclusion of countries of Asia Minor in a larger Europe—probably a result of their being part of the Roman Empire. Such a hotchpotch was the norm in late sixteenth-century travel and geographic writing. Readers and translators did their best to find their way in this jungle of classical allusions and quotations, mingled with travellers' comments. The common practice of collating a variety of texts and commentaries shapes a hazy notion about the three principalities of Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania. These places lie in the region of ancient Dacia, but at the time in which these travelogues were produced or translated, the kingdom of Dacia was more than one millennium away from its former denotation in ancient texts.

Relevant for the constructed early modern English concept of Dacia is the possible definition of the area of modern-day Romania (the principalities of Wallachia, Transylvania, and Moldavia) in early modern travel writing. Is it the geography, topography, ethnography, cultures and peoples in these provinces that we are looking for? Or does this area suggest a looser, more conceptual and broader political allegory of empire, unrelated to a specific location, but emerging out of the idea of early discourses associated with the region? My purpose is to try to disentangle geocritically the engagements between the global and the local involved in the manipulation of space in early modern English travelogues, which percolated into Shakespeare's oblique and metaphoric use of contrastive and often incongruous locations. I argue that these Eastern European locations configure a specific spatiality that conflates ancient place names with early modern ones in order to reconstruct a space-time continuum that is neither real nor totally imaginary, but it represents a fictional world of spatial networks reconstructed out of fragments of cultural geographic and ethnographic data. When confronted to such exotic place names, writers, translators, and compilers of early modern English travelogues responded by adding their own impressions and creativity to the experience of space activated by these names.

Why do such eccentricities and inaccuracies occur in early modern travelogues about the three principalities of modern-day Romania? Why is it so difficult to trace a consistent pattern in the wilderness formed of contradictory,

repetitive and incomplete information? Unavoidably, travel writing in late-sixteenth- and early seventeenth centuries was far from what one might consider to be the genre. As William H. Sherman cogently observes about travelogues in this period, “the written record of travel is haunted by missing texts and persons” (Sherman 18). Travelogues were mixed with any sort of geographic, historical, political, religious, ethnographic, and miscellanea writing; there was little pretence to accuracy and texts addressed a variety of readers. The transmission of texts was fraught with difficulties and interpolations, which mostly belonged to English editors and translators. This is mainly because the first English print publications about travel were translations from foreign texts; in their turn, these source texts in Italian, French, Flemish, Latin, or Spanish followed the insidious pattern of unreliable transmission and publication, so they were far from the expectation of truth that we have come to think as suitable for the genre of travelogue. Since there were no actual travelogues to speak of in late-sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries that described the principalities of Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia, readers and writers relied on expertise provided by geographic treatises. A variety of travel writers brought along their cultural baggage in their writings, but few of them condescended to depict a remote area of Eastern Europe which, in ancient times, was called Dacia, and which largely comprised the early modern principalities of Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania.

The experience of travel in the early modern period was superimposed on various models of travel writing as produced by various types of travellers. The interest these travellers invested in the regions to which they travelled was essential in shaping travelogues and it depended on ideology related to imperial aspirations. By travelling horizontally and vertically through texts, early modern readers were exposed to the operations of an ideology of cultivation, in the sense that travel writers used their cultural background to enrich the material about the less-known Eastern European spaces. Travel to the faraway areas of Eastern Europe, however, was well beyond English travellers’ scope and interest. One might hope that ambassadors to the area would be those who could best describe the places and leave reliable testimonies. Yet not many English travellers ventured to the three provinces in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. No English ambassador was assigned to the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia in this period, as this function was fulfilled by the ambassador of England to the Ottoman Porte.¹ Starting with 1583, Elizabeth I appointed ambassadors to the Ottoman Porte, such as merchant William Harborne (1583-1588), Sir William Barton (1588-1596), or Henry Lello (1597-1606). Yet these

¹ I am indebted to Paul Brummell, the British Ambassador to Romania (2014-2018), for this information concerning the history of British diplomacy to Eastern Europe, mainly in this period up to 1700.

English diplomats did not write about the three principalities and were not interested in the life of the local people.

Because of the scarcity of information and the few English travellers actually going to the three principalities, early modern texts about Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania are based on the common pool of geographic and cartographic knowledge propagated via translations. Abraham Ortelius (in the 1608 edition of *Theatrum orbis Terrarum*) quotes Steven Broderith (a Croatian-Hungarian bishop) and Hungarian historian Antony Bonfinius, who described Transylvania as “sometime a part of *Dacia*” (*Theatrum* 97). Ortelius continues with a brief description of the three principalities and their various names, as they are integrated in a larger map of Europe:

The two Walachies *Walachia Transalpina*, *Walachie* beyond the mountaines, and *Moldauia*, do enclose *Transsilvania*: that resteth vpon the riuer *Donaw*, this vpon the Euxine sea, or *Mar maiore*, as the Italians call it; both of them together with *Transsilvania* do now possesse that part of *Europe*, which anciently was called *Dacia*. (Ortelius *Theatrum* 97)

No one could argue about the accuracy of the geographic information in Ortelius, but the close association of the names of the early modern provinces (Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania) and the ancient one (Dacia) creates an eerie feeling of something that is not real.

The 1601 English edition of Ortelius’s treatise, *An Epitome of Ortelius his Theater of the vworld*, is a translation of a Latin abridgement (or epitome) published in Antwerp and is accurate in the description of Moldavia. This principality is placed under the general heading of Polonia: “*Moldauia* is a parte of Walachia, the chief cittie is *Sotschen*, the people are good soldiers, and it is said that the regents of this country do cause their yong children to be marcked with hot irons, that thereby their descent may the more certainly bee knowne” (Ortelius *An Epitome* 94). Sotschen was the German variant of the name of the Moldavian city of Suceava, currently in modern Romania. The cruelty of treating children in Moldavia—even if they are royal princes—confers an unpleasant tone to the otherwise impersonal narrative, as does the image of martial aggressivity suggested by the allusion to soldierly practices.

A similar impression of cruelty to children—even if accompanied by an aestheticized collection of images—can be inferred from the travelogue by French geographer and diplomat Nicolas de Nicolay, entitled *The nauigations, peregrinations and voyages, made into Turkie* (1585), translated by T. Washington the Younger. Apart from the illustrations showing men and women from the Ottoman Empire in various costumes, Nicolay subtly emphasizes the viciousness and corruption of the Great Turk. Nicolay mentions the Turks’ tradition of taking young children as “Azamolgans,” or “children of tribute” from “Grecia,

Albania, Valaquia, Seruia, Bossina, Trebisonda, Mingrelia and all other prouinces of his Dominion of the Christians” (69^r). Nicolay denounces this “tribute of soules” as “Barbarous infidelity” (69^r) and invites all Christian princes to try to free these unfortunate children from servitude. An exotic figure described by Nicolay is the “Dellis or Zatasnicis” (126^r), a kind of armed bodyguard who accompanied “Achmed Basha into Transsilvania” (126^v). Nicolay even provides an illustration of the fearful warrior, whose terrible attire is meant to impress and terrify the enemies (Nicolay 127^v see Figure 1). The name of Transylvania is mentioned in association with the Turks’ aggressivity, as the Sultan uses these *sui generis* warriors to project an image of invincibility when facing the Transylvanian prince. The exoticism and eccentricity of Nicolay’s account of the Ottoman warrior is extended to the region to which he accompanied the pasha, suggesting that the Sultan needed such imposing figures of Turkish men of arms to keep people in the area in awe and under control.

Other English translations mentioning the three provinces of Dacia draw directly on classical sources, with no relation to actual travel to these regions. *Omnium gentium mores* by German humanist Johannes Boemus was translated by Edward Aston as *The manners, lauues, and customes of all nations* (1611). The account gives a lengthy history of the country of Dacia, drawing on Pliny, who wrote of that part of Thrace which is called Getica, and which “is now called Valachia” from the Flacci, a Roman family (Boemus 212-13). As concerns the language in Wallachia, Boemus notes: “the Romaine language is yet spoken in that Countrie, but they speake it so corruptly, as a Romane can scarce vnderstand it, the Romaine letters also bee there vsed, sauing that the forme or fashion of the letters is somewhat altered” (213). About the climate of Wallachia, Boemus mentions that “the ayre is very intemperate and cold” (214),



Figure 1. A “Delly” in Nicolas de Nicolay, *The nauigations, peregrinations and voyages, made into Turkie* (1585), p. 127^v

with almost “continual” winters, so the soil is barren and barely gives sustenance (214). People have no houses or set places, “but rested where euer they were weary” (214), which gives them a semi-nomadic existence. According to Boemus’s description of the Wallachians, “Their diet was very vile and base, by reason of the horrible intemperatnesse of the aire, and they went alwaies bare-headed” (215). Not only was the local food unpalatable and basic, but the covered head—which was a mark of higher social status and implied respect for hierarchy—was not a practice among the semi-savage Wallachians. Language, however, which is a defining element of culture, associates these uncivilized peoples with the nobility of Latin. This description offers an image of half-savage people at the margins of the civilized world, whom neither climate nor natural resources favour, and who live precariously in harsh conditions.

Not only are the Wallachians famed for the inclement climate of their country and the indomitable nature of their inhabitants, but also the geographical positioning is rather uncertain, according to the historians’ point of view. Transylvania is included in the Kingdom of Hungary, while Moldavia is associated to the Kingdom of Poland, and even Russia. *The estates, empires, & principallities of the world* (1615) is the English translation by Edward Grimeston of *Estats, empires et principautez du monde* by the French historian Pierre d’Avity.² Avity describes the kingdom of Hungary under the rule of Matthias Corvinus, but he somehow turns to Ptolemy’s ancient description of the country, which lies between the rivers of “Danou” (Danube) and “Tibisce” (Tibiscus, or the Timiș River in Latin). In relation to the kingdom of Hungary, Avity says that “it doth also imbrace that part of Dacia, which they call Transilvania, the which notwithstanding, hath his Vayuodes, and obeies not this new prince” (Avity 613). An image of recalcitrance and adversity is transferred to the people and their princes, as passed on from ancient times. Despite being part of the kingdom of Hungary, as the narrative goes, the principality has its own voyevode and is relatively independent of this country. Yet the phrase “obeies not” (Avity 613) sends a signal of unruliness, preserved and transmitted from the ancient inhabitants of this territory. The scholarly references about

² Pierre d’Avity, sieur de Montmartin (1573-1635) was a French writer who received his early education in the Jesuit college of his native town of Tournon, on the river Rhône, where he acquired a good knowledge of Latin and Greek. He studied law in Toulouse and Paris. Considerable part of his life was passed in military service and he spent some of the intervals of military service in travelling. He visited Italy and Germany and accumulated materials for his *Estats et Empires du monde*, a work on which he was engaged but left incomplete; part of the work had been published during his lifetime and part was in the press at the time of his death. Although Avity travelled to Italy and Germany, it is not certain he travelled to Transylvania, which he describes in this treatise. Probably this is why he relies on ancient sources in using the ancient name of the country, Dacia.

Transylvania in Avity's treatise are incontestable, but the veracity of the account is not so, as it is flawed with ideological bias. It is certain that the French historiographer never travelled to this area and the information is collected from classical sources.

Since there are no actual travelogues to speak of in late-sixteenth- and early seventeenth-centuries describing the principalities of Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia, readers rely on historical and geographic treatises, which are, in their turn, mostly based on classical texts. From this perspective, Dacia is the land inhabited by the barbarous Goths. In Francisco Guicciardini's famous *History of Italy* (1595), translated by William Jones, the Goths invading Italy are described as "Christians by name and profession, and tooke their firste beginning from the partes of *Dacia*, and *Tartaria*" (Guicciardini 19). Indeed, what better association could the Italian historian find for the distant lands of Dacia than with the aggressiveness of the Goths (who sacked civilized Rome), and who had their ancient origins in Tartaria? This historical region of Asia and Eastern Europe formed part of the Tartar Empire in the Middle Ages. The area was associated with barbarity and death in the Western imagination, as the name "Tartar" came from the infernal region of Tartarus in classical mythology. In *The Merchant of Venice*, during the trial scene, the Duke implies that Shylock has borrowed his indomitable and unforgiving attitude towards Antonio "From stubborn Turks and Tartars, never train'd / To offices of tender courtesy" (IV.i.32-33). Indeed, Guicciardini's Venice—which the Duke implicitly invokes as an epitome of civility—may be associated with compassionate behaviour, while Tartaria, inhabited by warlike Tartars, as well as the regions of the vilified Turks, represent marginal areas of Europe, where brutal practices are opposed to Western notions of civility.

English geographers, on the other hand, tend to give a more balanced view of what they call Dacia in Europe. Bishop George Abbot never travelled, but he wrote about the countries of the world from the comfort of his home. In his *Briefe Description of the Whole Worlde* (1599), Abbot writes: "On the South-side of *Hungarie*, and South-east, lyeth a countrie of Europe called in old time *Dacia*, which is large and wide, comprehending in it *Transyluania*, *Valachia*, *Moldauia*, and *Seruia*. Of which little is famous, saue that the men are warlike, and can hardly be brought to obedience" (sig. B3^r). While being accustomed to point out the most salient features of peoples from various regions, nothing seems to emerge as worthy of note for the nations in the three provinces of Dacia, except for the fact that they are indomitable warriors. This judgemental note comes from an Englishman who never travelled abroad, but compiled information about various countries from other people's narratives. Alternatively, Shakespeare and Wilkins offer a broader view of the cosmopolitan social space of the brothel in *Pericles*, where "a poor Transylvanian" (4.2.19) is already dead for having lain with the diseased prostitutes at the brothel in

Mytilene. Although he has no voice in the chorus formed of Western European ailing men (the Spaniard and the Frenchman) who frequented the brothel on the island of Lesbos, the poor Transylvanian is redeemed through his death, even if he died from venereal disease.

Italian historians paid attention to the Eastern European principalities (Wallachia, Transylvania and Moldavia) because of the Venetian and Genovese interests in these territories. Ralph Carr of Middle Temple was the English translator of Uberto Foglietta's *De causis magnitudinis imperii Turcici*. In *The Mahumetane or Turkish historie* (1600), the author shows sympathy for the chaotic state of the provinces of Dacia, then under Ottoman rule, but he introduces several errors. Writing of the Hungarian victories against the Turks, Foglietta mentions John Huniad, who was "Prince of *Transilvania* at this present *Moldavia*, and by the *Hungarians* named *Sibenbourg*, that is to say, *Septemcastrum*, but by our elders *Dacia*" (Foglietta 34^v). There is great confusion in this passage; not only is Transylvania mistaken for Moldavia (while they were two separate provinces at the time), but the group of seven Transylvanian cities (Siebenburgen) metonymically replaces the entire province of Transylvania, which is also referred to by its ancient name, Dacia. When Sultan Soliman died, in 1566, as the Italian historian narrates, his son Selimus succeeded to the throne of the Ottoman Empire, but the "Intestine and inward contentions and diuisions" continued, as in the "infortunate countries of *Thracia*, *Dacia*, *Maesia*, and the most part of their wofull and miserable neighbour the Kingdom of *Hungary*" (Foglietta 101^v). The conclusion is a Latin adage, translated into English: "There is no Kingdome or Power, be it neuer so great and mightie, which discord and ciuill discencion in it selfe, doth not distroy and bring to confusion" (Foglietta 102^r). The reference is to the ancient names of these Eastern European regions, which proves the overwhelming influence of classical literature. This is the general view that English geographers and historians traded about the three provinces at the margin of Europe, ruled by the Ottoman Empire: as a result of their geographic marginality, politics in these countries is dominated by confusion, corruption, and internal dissension, borrowing the features of the decaying Empire to which they belong. As the Ottomans were arguably viewed as the others, the enemy, in the Western European imagination in early modern times, countries falling under their area of influence were indiscriminately perceived as having dishonourable features of dissension, confusion, and political uncertainty.

A small number of English travellers actually wrote about these regions, but it is almost certain that they never travelled to the provinces. The Protestant chaplain William Biddulph's *The Travels of Certain Englishmen* (1609) is a carefully edited epistolary narrative that seeks to challenge previous accounts, which sees the Ottoman world through a highly prejudicial lens of biblical knowledge. As Gerald MacLean notes in *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English*

Visitors to the Ottoman Empire: 1580-1720, “While chaplain in Aleppo, Biddulph travelled to Jerusalem using the Bible as his guidebook and disbelieved anything he saw that was not confirmed by it” (MacLean xiii). Biddulph’s notions about Wallachia and the area of the Black Sea draw mainly on classical sources, not direct information. For this reason, Biddulph uses the ancient name of the Black Sea (*Pontus Euxinus*) and references to Ovid to justify his description of Byzantium/Constantinople. Biddulph propagates an image of sovereignty that the Turks have over the area, with examples from classical culture: “for the Turke is master of the Sea *Pontike*, which hauing 2. mouths, the one comming from *Propontidis*, and the other from the Sea *Euxinum*, (which is the Blacke sea) is by *Ouid* called the Port of two Seas” (Biddulph 17). Nowhere in Biddulph’s text do we find direct references to Wallachia, Transylvania, or Moldavia, not even to the ancient province of Moesia inferior, of which Wallachia was part in ancient times. However, Biddulph spices his discourse with references and direct quotations in Latin from Ovid, as if, for him, this is the only source of information for the area to which the Latin poet was banished, at Tomis,³ on the shore of *Pontus Euxinus*. Perhaps it is for this reason that Shakespeare has Othello compare the powerful surge of his emotions with “the Pontic sea” (III.iii.460), which gushes forth “To the Propontic and the Hellespont” (III.iii.463). There is nothing more compelling than the emotions suggested by these troubled seas, whose names of ancient Greek origin scan beautifully.

Other English travellers were less focused on Biblical matters and the salvation of the soul and more concerned with practical notions of travel and trade. Richard Hakluyt’s compendium of travel writing includes the voyage of Master Henry Austell from Venice to Constantinople, and from there, by way of Moldavia, Polonia, and Silesia to Hamburg in Germany. Austell was an English factor to Constantinople in 1582 and travelled with a caravan of merchants (Hadžilemović 68). From the Ottoman capital, the ambassador William Harborne sent Austell on a mission to Moldavia, Poland, Germany and The Netherlands in 1585. Sultan Murad III offered Austell a free pass through the territory tributary to the Ottomans and he was accompanied by the Italian Giacomo Manucci, a secret agent of Sir Francis Walsingham. Austell followed the same route as the English merchant John Newberrie in 1582, through Eastern Bulgaria and Dobrogea. When the English party reached the country of “Bogdania” or “Moldavia” (Hakluyt 196), Austell’s main point about the inhabitants is that “they are *Christians* but subiects to the *Turke*” (Hakluyt 196). When the party arrived to Iași, the capital of Moldavia, they were well received by the prince of Moldavia: “wee came to *Yas* the principall Towne of *Bogdania*, where *Peter* the *Vayuoda* prince of that Countrey keepeth his residence, of

³ Modern-day city of Constanta, Romania.

whom wee receiued great courtesie, and of the gentlemen of his Court: And he caused vs to be safe conducted through his said Countrey, and conueyed without coste” (Hakluyt 196). The narrative about the generosity and hospitality of the Moldavian prince matches the general impression of benevolence that the English merchants encounter in the Romanian principalities. Yet the matter-of-fact tone of the narrative is suitable to an English merchant accustomed to being received well by the local authorities. The reference to the Moldavians’ Christian religion is one of the few accurate remarks about the Romanian principalities. In general, early modern English travellers presuppose that the Eastern European countries under Ottoman rule are converted to Islam.

Some English travelogues vehiculate the idea that the Ottoman Empire is the vilified enemy, while others keep an objective tone when referring to the three provinces. Countries of the East exerted a certain fascination among English travellers, especially when they travelled to Jerusalem and the Middle East on land. When they passed through the Romanian principalities going south, they left records of the inhabitants’ life. However, these records are not always accurate because much of the knowledge is acquired indirectly and is influenced by the classical culture accumulated before the travel and the geographic texts they had consulted. Fynes Moryson’s four-volume *Itinerary* (1617) is a travelogue first written in Latin and then translated into English by the author. However, Fynes Moryson and his brother Henry travelled from Venice to Jerusalem by sea, and from there they went to Constantinople. Therefore, Moryson never actually crossed the three principalities by land, and the information about these countries draws on the writer’s excellent classical scholarship. In Chapter 3 of the third book, Moryson gives a geographic description of Turkey and he includes the countries that are under the domination of the Ottomans. In this context, Moryson writes of the two parts of the ancient province Moesia, the lower and the upper Moesia, which is divided into three parts, “*Bulgaria, Wallachia and Moldaui*” (119). Moryson gives an objective description of Dacia, as gathered from geographic treatises: “*Dacia or Transilvania*, was of old possessed by the Saxons, who there built seuen Cities or Castles, of which the Prouince is called *Septem-Castrensis*, vulgarly *Sieben burgen*, and of old it belonged to the Kingdome of *Hungary*, but at this day is tributary to the Turks” (119). Moryson’s account about this region is a compilation of information gathered from books written mostly in Latin; for this reason, he names the seven cities of Transylvania, built by the Saxons, in both Latin and German. Then he passes to the description of Hungary and the countries of Greece. The information, therefore, is objective, with no emotional involvement or particular details, because he never travelled to the region of former Dacia.

The exoticized English narratives of the East and the Islamic countries in many travelogues contrast with other travellers’ stories about their travels to

the Ottoman-ruled regions. Sir Henry Blount's *A Voyage into the Levant* (1636) proposes a secular, rationalist, Baconian inquiry into the Islamic world by a wealthy, classically-educated, gentleman traveller. The political situation was favourable to Englishmen travelling to the Levant, in the sense that, as Gerald MacLean observes, "By the late sixteenth century, English merchants and diplomats were as eager to deal with the Ottomans as the Ottomans themselves were keen to ally themselves with the English against the Spanish, and formal hostilities were set aside" (MacLean xvi). However, travelogues referring to the Ottoman regions emphasize the dangers of travelling by land or sea; robbery, kidnapping, captivity, being taken as a spy were real dangers threatening travellers to the Ottoman-occupied regions. For the Staffordshire gentleman who travelled to the Levant, the purpose of travel was "knowledge" of "humane affairs" (Blount 1), as he admits in the first page of the travelogue. Part of his journey from Venice to Constantinople was on land, while accompanying the Pasha of Bosnia, which offers the opportunity to comment on the places he encountered on the way. In a wood near the confines of Hungary, the merchants divided the caravan into two parts because they believed the wood to be "full of Theeves" (Blount 8); they were robbed, indeed, but they managed to arrive safely to Belgrade (Blount 9). Since he travelled to Constantinople south of the Danube, via Belgrade and Sophia, Blount did not actually go via Wallachia (north of the Danube), but he did stop on the banks of the Danube and he describes the majestic river as follows: "*Danubius*, of old called *Ister*, now *Duny*, and is held the greatest River in the world, deepe and dangerous for Navigation, runnes Eastward into the *Euxine* or the *blacke Sea*" (9). Blount says he tasted some of the Danube water, which he found "as cleare and pure as well" (Blount 10). The natural resources and the beauty of the southern Danube area of Europe are commendable, on the whole, but dangers of being robbed by thieves in the woods lurk in every place. Despite the lure of the Levant for the English traveller in the seventeenth century, he is always extra careful of the travelling conditions on land.

Several views are valid in relation to this marginal area of Eastern Europe, from which, as many travellers agree, nothing good seems to emerge. "Dacia" can be viewed as an exotic but also real space unto which early modern England projected discursively, if not in reality, its colonizing fantasies. Since the three principalities were mostly in and out of Ottoman rule—either part of the Ottoman Empire or principalities tributary to it—they were a projection of the destructive side of the Turkish domination. Members of early modern communities learned to conceptualize countries of south-eastern Europe as epitomes, or abbreviations, of the collections of texts about these places. Since few English travellers actually ventured to these regions, the principalities projected an image of untrodden paths, places that could linger in the imagination and were enriched through classical learning. For this reason,

references in English travellers' texts about the three principalities display a particular kind of literariness: while based on mostly literary and historical sources, and little factual information, these texts acquire an aura of improbability, just as fictional literature. This is why the remotely valid association of Dacia and Transylvania is possible in the minds of early modern English readers: as in fiction, borders between reality and imagination are blurred and readers may come to take imagined truth as reality about a faraway land in Eastern Europe, to which few have travelled, and about which even fewer have recorded impressions. This is the Neverland of scarcely documented fact and fictionalized discourse, whose inhabitants are not described as real people but rather as characters anticipating picaresque novels.

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