The main objectives of the article are to identify what characteristics defined the starosts in the first half of the 15th century and to specify the responsibilities and the territories entrusted to the starosts in the abovementioned period.

Among the members of the Moldavian prince’s council during the Late Middle Ages, the title of starost stands out in the nomenclature of documented high offices, mentioned for the first time at the beginning of the 15th century during the rule of Alexander the Good (1400–1432). For the second half of the 15th century, this term has been acknowledged in current historiography as belonging to the governors of the northern counties, on the borders with the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and of Putna County, mentioned for the first time in the context of the conflicts that broke out between Moldavia and Wallachia during the reign of Stephen the Great (1457–1504). Taking into account the fact that the title of pârcălab and starost were applied to the same persons, responsible for the governance of the aforementioned lands, this historical fact became a commonly accepted one for the entire period of documented mentions of this title during the medieval and early modern era in the history of the Principality of Moldavia.
However, applying this observation retroactively to all the mentions of the Moldavian starosts made in the first half of the 15th century may not seem as justified at first sight, as is the case with the time period of Stephen the Great and his successors, since there are mentions of starosts with a high-ranking status in the prince’s council. For this reason, the purpose of the present study is to determine the role of these particular starosts in the political-administrative system of Moldavia before the reign of Stephen the Great. The main objectives of the article are to identify what characteristics defined the starosts in the first half of the 15th century and to specify the responsibilities and the territories entrusted to the starosts in the abovementioned period.

The Origins of Starosts in the Moldavian Administrative System

Before analyzing all early mentions of the starosts in the council of the Moldavian voivodes, it is necessary to take a look at the origins of this title. Coming from the old Slavic language, starosta experienced a special evolution in the political landscape of the Kingdom of Poland and the Principality of Halych-Volhynia. Originally designating the leaders of village communes and low-ranking administrative units in both medieval Slavic states, the notion of starosta experienced a significant change in its meaning in the 14th century. In the case of Halych-Volhynia, the rule of Starost Dedko in Halych became a pivotal moment for the evolution of this political institution in the context of the conflict between Poland, Hungary, the Golden Horde, and Lithuania for the Halych-Volhynian inheritance between the years 1340 and 1349. Although this episode was a short one, it had repercussions in the subsequent history of Halych and Volhynia, because the reimagined version of the institution of the starost was inherited and further developed by the royal administrations of Casimir III the Great and Louis I of Hungary. As for the Kingdom of Poland, the starosts became the main instrument for consolidating royal power during the reigns of Władysław I Łokietek and Casimir III the Great, appointed as royal representatives with wide administrative and judicial powers in the Polish voivodships, including the newly incorporated Red Ruthenia and Podolia in the second half of the 14th century, which were bordering the Principality of Moldavia.

The similar mission of representing the monarch’s power in the field in the cases of the Polish and Moldavian starosts led to the opinions regarding the Polish origin of this office, which designated the prince’s representatives on the northern border of Moldavia. Regardless of whether the term “starost” is a borrowing from the Polish or Halych administrative circles, this Slavic notion
was essentially a synonym for the terms “pârcălab” and “capitaneus” (of Hungarian and Latin origin, respectively) utilized in the Moldavian acts. Internal documents of the Polish chancellery confirm the direct relationship between “starosts” and “capitaneus,” while official Latin documents tied to the Moldavian–Polish relations in the 15th century directly indicate the translation of the title “pârcălab” or “starost” into “capitaneus.” The latter term was also used in the administrative system of the peripheral lands in the Kingdom of Hungary, such as in the case of Maramureș (Máramaros) and the captaincy of Belgrade during the 15th century. The precedent of the “capitaneus” in their role as territorial officials in the Kingdom of Hungary and especially in Maramureș could be the main source through which this title was utilized in the early days of the Moldavian chancellery.

In conclusion, the Moldavian starosts served as territorial dignitaries with the goal of representing the central authority in the regions even before the reign of Stephen the Great, and had a similar role to the Moldavian pârcălabs. The origin of the term could be the result of the influence coming from the administrative practices of the time in Maramureș, Halych-Volhynia, or the Kingdom of Poland.

The Four Starosts of Moldavia before the Rule of Stephen the Great

After reviewing the conclusions accepted in historiography regarding the meaning of “pârcălab,” “starost” and “capitaneus” in the Slavonic and Latin documents of the Moldavian and Polish chancellery, we can proceed to the direct analysis of the mentions of starosts in the prince’s council before the reign of Stephen the Great, comparing their position in relation to the total number of the councilors. The first mention of a dignitary with the title of starost belongs to Starost Dragoș in the act of 28 June 1401, better known in the internal documents as Dragoș Viteazul (the Brave). Although his first mention dates from 30 March 1392, D. Constantinescu believed that Dragoș had been in office since the rule of Peter I Mușat (1375–1391), while M. Costăchescu draw parallels between the multiple toponyms of Drăgușeni in Moldavia, which were connected with the name of this dignitary, and the frequent use of the name Dragoș in Maramureș in the 14th–15th centuries.

This boyar had a long political career, having served for almost 40 years as a member of the prince’s council during the reigns of Roman I (1392–1394), Stephen I (1394–1399) and Alexander the Good. The document of 28 June
1401 is the only evidence of Dragoș the Brave as a starost, placed first among the other members of the prince’s council. Given the fact that Dragoș appears in the same leading position as early as 1400, it is most likely that he supported Alexander the Good since the beginning of his rule in Moldavia, which allowed him to increase his rank in the new prince’s council as a reward, and obtained the title of starost for a short period. At some point after 28 June 1401, Dragoș the Brave lost the title of starost, but he remained in the leading positions within Alexander the Good’s council, having been later appointed pârcălab of Neamț, between 8 March 1407 and 16 September 1408. Judging from the history of Dragoș the Brave’s mentions in the princely charters (fig. 1), he kept his high-ranking positions in the council in relation to the total number of present members; however, Dragoș occupied the first place among the councilors of Alexander the Good only during the time when he served as a starost.

Giurgiu of Frătăuți is the next and the longest known holder of the title of starost in the first half of the 15th century. He was mentioned for the first time in the act issued on 18 November 1392 during the reign of Roman I. This Moldavian boyar was one of the five sons of Dragomir Albul and Albul’s grandson. M. Costăchescu believed that the latter two witnessed the founding of the Principality of Moldavia, while I. C. Miclescu-Prăjescu considered the possibility that this family from Maramureș had settled east of the Carpathians before
or after Bogdan I’s arrival here, but he noticed that Albul and his son Dragomir were among the closest supporters of the first Moldavian voivode. L.-V. Lefter brought to attention the connections between these Moldavian boyars and the Romanian noble Stan Albu from Maramureș, who was the master of a knezate in the Cosău Valley. The Romanian historian explains the loss of half of Stan Albu’s possessions after Louis I of Hungary’s intervention by the departure of his brother or cousin to Moldavia, alongside Bogdan I.

Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s first appearance on 20 July 1404 as a member of the prince’s council coincides with him obtaining the title of starost, previously held by Dragoș the Brave. From that moment on, he enjoyed a very long political career, serving for 35 years in the prince’s council during the reigns of Alexander the Good and his sons, Iliaș I and Stephen II. The evolution of his mentions in the acts of the Moldavian chancellery deserves special attention, given the multitude of testimonies about this dignitary from the first half of the 15th century.

“Giurgiu staroste” was systematically listed in the first place among the members of the prince’s council between 1404 and 1408 (fig. 2), reconfirming the high significance of this office, as it had been with Dragoș the Brave. After the last mention of him holding this title, Giurgiu of Frătăuți continued to be present among the councilors of Alexander the Good, but during the years 1409–1415 a gradual fall in his position is observed, culminating with him oc-

![Fig. 2. Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s mentions in the Moldavian charters issued between 20 July 1404 and 8 October 1408](image-url)
cupying the 10th place towards the end of this period (fig. 3). If we relate his position to the total number of members of the prince’s council, the year 1413 can easily be called the lowest point of his career, when he appeared in the last place among other councilors. During this time, Giurgiu was given various political tasks, being mentioned on 22 September 1411 as a *vornic* and on 3 April 1412 as a *hotarnic* (a person appointed by the prince to set the boundaries of disputed landed estates; this task was usually offered to people that held other offices in the prince’s council, since it often required long travels from the Moldavian capital to different regions). These records prove that Giurgiu of Frătăuți did not hold the office of starost during the years 1409–1415, having been periodically entrusted with other missions on behalf of the voivode.

After a period of absence in the documents of the Moldavian chancellery, Giurgiu of Frătăuți reappeared in the second place in the prince’s council on 15 January 1418, while in the princely charter issued on 23 April 1420 he was once again referred to as “Giurgiu staroste.” From that moment on and until the document issued by Iliș I and Stephen II on 27 August 1436, Giurgiu of Frătăuți remained an active high-ranking official in the council, but it was never specified what kind of title he held during all this time. Until the death of Alexander the Good, the dignitary’s positions fluctuated in comparison to his colleagues from the 2nd to the 7th place (fig. 4). Taking into account the peculiar traditions practiced by Alexander the Good’s chancellery (which rarely named the offices held by most of the boyars present in the council), as well
as the absence of any other starosts during this time, we can assume that for the rest of Alexander the Good’s reign and during the first reigns of Iliaș I (1432–1433) and Stephen II (1433–1435), Giurgiu of Frătăuți continued to be a starost without any interruptions. An indirect clue in favor of this hypothesis is the much later mention of Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s son, Mihul Starostici. His nickname came from the eponymous title of starost and it suggests that his father served in this office for a very long time—so much so that this fact was commemorated in the act issued by Peter Aron on 5 June 1456, 16 years after the death of Giurgiu of Frătăuți. As for when exactly Giurgiu returned to his position as a starost, in 1418 or 1420, we shall return to possible explanations later in this study.

After the death of Alexander the Good, Giurgiu of Frătăuți became one of the leading officials during the first reigns of Iliaș I and Stephen II. The latter ruler tried to win the sympathies of the old dignitary’s family by offering to Danco, the son of Giurgiu, the village of Minăuți together with four Tartar fees as a gift on 9 November 1433, but despite his high position and the attention he received, Giurgiu of Frătăuți was mentioned for the last time in Stephen’s council on 10 February 1434. Due to the fact that the old boyar was later mentioned again, on 8 October 1435, during the reign of Iliaș I, we can assume that at some point Giurgiu of Frătăuți switched sides and joined the camp of Alexander the Good’s eldest son, supporting his efforts to regain the throne between 1434 and 1435.
With the return of Iliaș I as the prince of Moldavia in 1435, Giurgiu of Frătăuți not only resumed his previous duties, but he also became the leader of the new princely council—a fact that remained unchanged even after the compromise between Iliaș I and Stephen II in 1436 (fig. 5). Although he was mentioned in many charters only by his name, the appearance of “Giurgiu staroste” three times on 27 August 1436, 12 March 1437, and 18 May 1438, as well as the fact that he kept the leading position in the joint council of the two voivodes, indicate that he maintained his office unchanged between 1435 and 1439. Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s last mention in Iliaș’s council dates from 28 October 1439, after which the old dignitary most likely died.

In addition to Dragoș the Brave and Giurgiu of Frătăuți, among the dignitaries who served as starosts before the reign of Stephen the Great we can also include Giula capitaneus and Mihail “capytaneus moldaviensis.” Although Giula and Mihail were mentioned under this title only once, the former being among the Moldavian boyars who swore the oath of fealty to the Polish King Władysław II Jagiełło (1386–1434) at Lwów on 27 September 1387, and the latter among the members of the prince’s council who approved the safe-conduct offered to the duke of Podolia, Spytko of Melsztyn, on 3 September 1397, both can be put in the same category as Dragoș the Brave and Giurgiu of Frătăuți, as holders of the office of starost, for three reasons: 1) Giula and
Mihail appeared in the Latin texts of the oath of fealty in Lwów and the safe-conduct issued for Spytko of Melsztyn with the title of “capitaneus,” which is a synonym for both “starost” or “pârcălab” in Moldavian internal sources and for “starosta” in the administrative system of the Kingdom of Poland, denoting the territorial aspect of this governorship; 2) Giula and Mihail held the first place among the boyars of Peter Mușat and Stephen I, just like Dragoș the Brave and Giurgiu of Frătăuți would later appear in the same position in the first half of the 15th century; 3) Giula and Mihail are the only officials with the title of “capitaneus” in Peter Mușat’s and Stephen I’s councils, similarly to the cases of Dragoș the Brave and Giurgiu of Frătăuți. These observed similarities can be considered sufficient to support the equivalence of this title held by Giula and Mihail with that obtained later by Dragoș and Giurgiu.

As it has been established in the case of Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s ancestors, Giula was also closely tied to the Moldavian elites from the times of the founding of the principality. His only other documented mention appears in the earliest charter of the Moldavian chancellery, on 1 May 1384, where he was named “dominus Jule.” He was the owner of a feudal residence in Giulești (located in Boroaia commune, Suceava County, Romania), whose ruins were dated to the second half of the 14th century.44 L. Bătrîna and A. Bătrîna see in this high-ranking official one of the many Romanians from Maramureș who joined Bogdan I during his departure to Moldavia. The main arguments brought by the two historians are the name of Giula himself, which alludes to his kinship with the Giulești family, who were Romanian nobles in Maramureș, and his personal seal, present on the act of the oath of fealty taken in Lwów on 26 September 1387, which contains similar elements with the seals discovered in the necropolis of the Maramureș nobles.45

Thus, after having surveyed all mentions of Giula capitaneus, Mihail capitaneus, Dragoș the Brave and Giurgiu of Frătăuți, we can proceed to some preliminary conclusions about the character of the office of starost in the Principality of Moldavia at the end of the 14th century—the first half of the 15th century. Having been documented between 1387 and 1439, this territorial governorship was most probably offered to distinguished boyars in the prince’s council, which underlined the starost’s special status within the political-administrative system of Moldavia. During the reigns of the first Moldavian voivodes, documentary records indicate the presence of only one dignitary with this title, often joining the ranks of the most prominent officials during the reigns of Peter Mușat, Stephen I, Alexander the Good, Iliaș I, and Stephen II. Some of the holders of this office, like Giurgiu of Frătăuți and Giula capitaneus, were directly related to those Romanians from Maramureș who joined Bogdan I and contributed to the founding of the east-Carpathian principality. However, all men-
tions of Giula capitaneus, Mihail capitaneus, Dragoș the Brave and Giurgiu of Frătăuți do not provide a direct answer to the main question: between 1387 and 1439, what territories were under the direct responsibility of the starosts in Moldavia?

The Two Hypotheses: Starosts in terra Sepeniczensi or in Cetatea Albă?

The solution may be provided by the late mentions of Giurgiu of Frătăuți with the title of starost. His presence in the leading positions of the prince’s council during the second reign of Iliaș I (1435–1436), his appearance in the acts issued exclusively by the same prince during his joint reign with Stephen II (1436–1443) and his absence among the witnesses to the charters issued by the second son of Alexander the Good confirm that he continued to exercise the prerogatives of starost even after the division of the subject territories between the two sons of Alexander the Good. Because of this fact, Giurgiu and, in retrospect, his predecessors could hold the office of starost in the territories of the Upper Country, which were still under the direct responsibility of Iliaș I, and whose territorial dignitaries also appeared in the documents issued by the voivode of Suceava. This considerably narrows the probable size of the lands under the jurisdiction of the four starosts and excludes other lands in the Lower Country, whose rulers are not mentioned in the documents, such as the pârcălabs responsible for the fortress of Chilia (Kilia) or the area of the Moldavian–Wallachian border between the curve of the Carpathians and the course of the Danube.

Reviewing all the documentary mentions of Dragoș the Brave and Giurgiu of Frătăuți during their service as starosts, it is possible to exclude other governorships held by their colleagues present at the same time in the prince’s council. Thus, in various Moldavian internal documents we note the presence of the pârcălabs of Hotin (Khotyn), Țețina (Tsetsyno), Neamț and Dorohoi, the vornics of Suceava and Siret, together with the two aforementioned starosts. Due to the fact that there are no known examples of duplication of the holders of territorial offices during the reign of Alexander the Good, we can assume that the starosts during this time were not responsible for the lands and towns mentioned above. The same can be accepted for the cases of Old Orhei and Soroca, whose rulers in the prince’s council appear for the first time in documents only during the reign of Stephen the Great.

A tempting answer would be to identify the area of the Moldavian starosts’ responsibility with recently acquired territories, at least since the rule of Peter
Mușat, when Giula capitaneus was already in office. Such a scenario seems to have happened in Putna County, whose territories were contested during the 15th century by the Moldavian and Wallachian voivodes, until the conflict was solved in favor of Stephen the Great by 1484. However, equating the title of starost with the newly annexed territories to the Principality of Moldavia is ruled out by a closer examination. The first mentions of the Putna starosts were made six decades after the end of the Moldavian–Wallachian border conflicts: on 30 April 1546 the Moldavian prince Peter Rareș offered the Șendrești village on the Putna River to Giurgea Bolea, the starost of Putna, while his son, Toader Bolea, served in the same office between 12 November 1552 and 24 April 1553. Although these late appearances of the starosts of Putna do not immediately rule out the possibility of their existence since the rule of Stephen the Great, the mention of Mihul, the pârcălab of Crăciuna on 13 May 1484, proves the initial presence of another territorial governorship in the Vrancea region after the stabilization of the Moldavian–Wallachian border along the Milcov River and suggests a later reorganization of Putna County, led by a starost. Thus, starosts cannot be linked to a recently integrated region in Moldavia without further documented evidence.

This contradiction did not stop the searches for a starost institution on the other side of the Moldavian border with the Kingdom of Poland, special attention being given to the case of the Șipeniț (Schipenitz, Shypyntsi) region. In recent historiography an attempt to explain the significance and prerogatives of starosts in the late 14th and early 15th century was made by Constantin Burac. The Romanian historian believed that after the Moldavian princes extended their control over the terra Sepeniczensi, they began to appoint a starost in the region from among their own relatives. Moreover, C. Burac also adds to the list of the Șipeniț starosts the name of a certain “Costea the Wallachian,” who swore allegiance to the king of Poland in 1402. In the original text of the document, this Costea appears without any mention of a title, while in the Moldavian internal documents of the time there are no indications in favor of identifying Costea as a starost. The Romanian historian does not offer a definitive answer regarding the main residence of the Șipeniț starosts, remarking that it declined over time and was eventually replaced by the dignitaries sent to Hotin and Țețina, which “not only borrowed the name of the office, but also its duties.” According to C. Burac, the starosts of terra Sepeniczensi disappear in the administrative-territorial system of the northern Moldavian borders after 13 December 1433.

The hypothesis regarding the association of the first Moldavian starosts with the Șipeniț region due to its later integration into the voivodeship founded by Bogdan I has some flaws. Firstly, there is the problem of the main residence
for such an administrative unit on the northern borders of Moldavia. Out of the three main known centers of the Șipeniț region, the starosts of this land could not govern from Hotin or Țețina, where we have early mentions of local governors present among the members of the prince’s council. Taking into consideration the fact that the practice of having two pârcălabs and starosts in the main fortresses of Moldavia became common during the rule of Stephen the Great, the residence of a starost in the Șipeniț region could only be the town of Khmeliv, whose officials are not identified in the texts of princely charters. Little is known about the past of this town, given the lack of historical sources regarding this subject. It was mentioned for the first time together with Țețina in the message of the Moldavian nobles addressed to the Polish King Władysław II Jagiełło in 1395 on the occasion of the planned meeting with Stephen I. This town appears in other later documentary sources, such as the Moldavian–Polish border treaty of 13 December 1433 between Władysław II and Stephen II, as well as in the act of cession of the Șipeniț region to Poland by Iliaș I, of 23 September 1436. The last mention of Khmeliv is the document issued by Maria Holszańska, the wife of Iliaș I, and Manoil Grecul, the pârcălab of Hotin, who offered to Poland this town together with the rest of the Șipeniț region. After 1444 there are no more indications of the existence of Khmeliv: on 1 April 1457, Peter Aron proposed to the Podolian and Red Russian starosts the appointment of Polish governors only in Hotin and Cernăuți in the context of the future conflict for the Moldavian throne with Stephen the Great, confirming indirectly the disappearance of this center of the Șipeniț region throughout the previous 13 years.

The identification of the territories subordinated to the starosts in 1387–1439 with the fortress of Khmeliv is supported by several arguments. First of all, the chronological interval of the activity of this town coincides with the documentary mentions of the four starosts. The disappearance of any other holders of the title of starost after the death of Giurgiu of Frătăuți in the following few years could be explained by the outbreak of the fight between the pretenders to the Moldavian throne, when Khmeliv could have been abandoned or destroyed during the military clashes. In addition, the very notion of a “starost” can be easily associated with a town on the border with the Kingdom of Poland, from where the title of this territorial governorship may have originated and was later extended in the years of Stephen the Great’s reign to the princely officials of Hotin, Cernăuți, and Soroca.

However, the connection between Giula capitaneus, Mihail capitaneus, Dragoș the Brave, and Giurgiu of Frătăuți with Khmeliv has some flaws. First of all, it is not possible to exactly assess the real political and administrative value of this town in the eyes of the Moldavian rulers, because its ruins have not been
discovered yet. The location of Khmeliv in the Șipeniț region, through which passed the main commercial artery between the Principality of Moldavia and the commercial centers of Lwów and Kraków, could justify its high status, so much so that any dignitary appointed in this town obtained or already held the highest rank in the prince’s council, but even in this case there are two counter-arguments against locating the main residence of the four starosts in Khmeliv. Firstly, all mentions of Khmeliv in the Moldavian–Polish bilateral agreements place this town behind the other two centers of the Șipeniț region, Hotin and Țețina, suggesting a lower political, military or economic value in comparison with its counterparts. Secondly, this hypothesis would indicate that the Șipeniț region was already part of the Moldavian lands at the time of Peter Mușat’s oath of allegiance to the king of Poland in Lwów in 1387. However, doubts have recently been expressed in Romanian historiography regarding such a scenario: in his study about the evolution of the Moldavian–Polish border, A. Pinzar argues that the Șipeniț region was offered to Moldavia after 1395 by Władysław II Jagiełło in exchange for the abandonment of the debt payment offered earlier by Peter Mușat to his Polish liege in 1388. 

C. Burac’s assumptions also contain a major flaw in adopting the vision of I. I. Nistor and T. Bălan about the origins of the title of starost from a hypothetical voivodeship of Șipeniț, considered to be a political entity that had existed before the foundation of Moldavia and the main cause of the battle of Plonini (1368) between the voivodes Peter and Stephen, the latter supported by his allies from Poland. At the same time, however, other contemporary historians, such as C. Cojocariu and A. Pinzar, question the existence of such an independent voivodeship between the Dniester and the Prut. The Anonymous chronicle of Kraków, which covers the period between the 13th and the early 17th centuries and of which a copy translated into French was written towards the end of the 17th century or at the beginning of the following century (first brought to the attention of Romanian scholars by C. Rezachevici), refutes this old view of interwar historiography, showing clearly that the two brothers, Peter and Stephen, were in fact direct nephews of Bogdan I and could not have been the leaders of a state independent from the Principality of Moldavia. Thus, there were no actual reasons to create a special territorial-administrative unit headed by a starost in parallel with the Hotin and Țețina pârcălabs, at least in the manner proposed earlier by C. Burac.

The uncertainties listed above are the weak points of the link between the four Moldavian officials and Khmeliv, which call into question the placement of the lords of this locality on such a high place in the ruling council of Peter Mușat, Stephen I, Alexander the Good, Iliiaș I and Stephen II. Together with the previous observations regarding the starosts of Putna from the middle of the
16th century, it shows the lack of any arguments behind the identification of the Moldavian starosts with some recently integrated lands into the east-Carpathian principality. Thus, if Hotin, Țețina, Khmeliv, Suceava, Siret, Neamț, and Dorohoi were not the residences of the Moldavian starosts, then the only possible option left among the county centers that were directly subordinated to Iliaș I after 1436 is the town of Cetatea Albă.

The main port of Moldavia has, like Khmeliv, several gaps in terms of the studies devoted to its political-administrative status: its first documented pârcălab, Iurghici, was mentioned since 1443 in the council of Stephen II. Researching the history of Cetatea Albă during its presence in the Principality of Moldavia is also complicated by its special position in relation to the princely power, which was highlighted several times during the 15th century. The title of Lord of Parthalassia associated with Alexander the Good, the peculiar local monetary emissions compared to those minted at the Suceava court during the first half of the 15th century (especially the Asprokastron coins bearing Greek inscriptions), the mention of a “dominus Maurocastri” who had an unknown political status and negotiated in 1435 with representatives of Venice about the opening of a vice-consulate in the town, the withdrawal of Alexander II to Cetatea Albă in the last years of his life and the episode of the conflict between the inhabitants of Cetatea Albă and the Genoese colonies in Crimea over the settlement of Illice at the mouth of the Dnieper during the reign of Peter Aron portray a very active urban community in its relationship with the rulers of Moldavia, especially during the struggles for the Moldavian throne after the death of Alexander the Good. The facts listed above made it difficult to identify Iurghici’s predecessors as representatives of the ruling power in Cetatea Albă.

But the connection of Giula capitaneus, Mihail capitaneus, Dragoș the Brave, and Giurgiu of Frătăuți with the main port of Moldavia may explain the specific features of the starost governorship for the years 1387–1439. First of all, the leading positions of the starosts in the council of several Moldavian princes can be explained by the special value of Cetatea Albă in the eyes of the central power, which always needed to keep an eye on the situation in this town with a very active community, both commercially and politically. Secondly, the mentions of the starosts in the prince’s council until 1439 do not contradict the first appearance of Iurghici as the pârcălab of Cetatea Albă in 1443.

Thirdly, the hypothesis of a starost in charge of Cetatea Albă may explain the reason for Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s unexpected return to this governorship in 1418–1420. If we assume that he was appointed to this position around 15 January 1418, when Giurgiu comes in second place among the boyars of the prince’s council, this decision could have been prompted by the Ottoman successes in the conquest of Dobruja and the subsequent conclusion of the peace
with Wallachia led by Mircea the Elder in 1417.\textsuperscript{84} If the appointment of Giurgiu as a starost took place after 1418 and before the mention of “Giurgiu staroste” on 23 April 1420, the Ottoman intervention north of the Danube in the spring of 1420, the murder of the Wallachian Prince Michael I and the following Ottoman attack on Cetatea Albă may have motivated Alexander the Good to return the experienced former starost to the town on the Dniester estuary with the intention of strengthening the Moldavian defense system in this direction. Taking into account that, according to the letter of Władysław II Jagiełło to Sigismund of Luxembourg of 27 July 1420, the first message from Alexander the Good about the Ottoman offensive arrived on Pentecost (26 May 1420),\textsuperscript{85} the possibility of Giurgiu’s participation in the events around Cetatea Albă during April–May of the same year cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, the attack of the Ottoman fleet was eventually repelled, which probably secured Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s position of starost for the rest of his life, except for an interruption in 1434–1435 due to him joining the camp of Iliaș I.

Another interesting moment is the absence of any mentions of Giurgiu of Frătăuți after 28 October 1439. M. Costăchescu suggested that the cause of this disappearance was the death of the long-serving dignitary of Moldavia due to old age,\textsuperscript{86} but the context of external events could provide further details on the circumstances of the demise of the last starost of Cetatea Albă. Both I. Minea and Ș. Andreescu drew attention to the changes in the title of the ruler of Wallachia Vlad II Dracul in his acts of 8 September 1439 and 16 September 1440, where the expression “as far as the Great Sea” was utilized for a short time, claiming that during this period the fortress of Chilia came under the control of the Wallachians.\textsuperscript{87} If I. Minea believed in the presence of Stephen II’s dignitaries in Cetatea Albă before these events (which is contradicted by the accounts of Iliaș I in his message to the Polish king dated 1 September 1435, where he did not mention Cetatea Albă among other cities and counties given to Stephen II\textsuperscript{88}), Ș. Andreescu highlights the prince’s name mentioned in the inscription of 10 November 1440 as the primary contributor to the reconstruction and consolidation of Cetatea Albă. He further suggests that Stephen II’s presence here was a result of the earlier loss of Chilia to Vlad Dracul.\textsuperscript{89}

Taking into account the reports of Grigore Ureche and Nicolae Costin about a Tatar invasion in the Lower Country in December 1439 (which was under the responsibility of Stephen II according to the compromise reached in 1435 with his elder brother, Iliaș I) and comparing them with the last documentary mention of Giurgiu of Frătăuți, on 28 October 1439, it is possible that the old starost died in the Tatar attack against Moldavia, especially since other major towns, such as Vaslui and Bârlad, were sacked during the same invasion.\textsuperscript{90} Stephen II’s later intervention in the strengthening of the fortress in 1440 could
be a sign of its transfer under his personal authority for a more effective defense of the Lower Country, which allowed him to appoint here his own pârcălabs, as was the case with the much later appearance of Iurghici on 6 March 144391—although it had already happened after the dethronement of Iliaș I.

**Conclusions**

Thus, according to the arguments listed above, we can argue that the list of the princely governors appointed in Cetatea Albă can be completed with the names of Giula capitaneus, Mihail capitaneus, Dragoș the Brave, and Giurgiu of Frățăuți, present in the prince’s council of the voivodes in Suceava in the late 14th and first half of the 15th century. The high position of these boyars among the witnesses to the princely documents issued in this period can be explained by the particular value that the Moldavian rulers ascribed to the commercial hub on the Dniester River, as well as by their intention to project their power as effectively as possible in the abovementioned region. In addition, the reconstruction of the list of dignitaries appointed in Cetatea Albă confirms the presence of the Moldavian administration here at least since before the time of Peter Mușat’s oath of fealty to the king of Poland, in Lwów in 1387.

In the light of these considerations, the question regarding the mystery behind Constantine, attested together with the Moldavian Prince Peter Mușat in the act issued at Caffa on 14 August 1386, can be brought up again.92 Was he also a starost/captain/pârcălab of Cetatea Albă? The idea of identifying this person with a Moldavian official is not new in Romanian historiography—V. Spinei formulated the hypothesis associating Constantine from the Genoese act with “a dignitary subordinated to Peter Mușat,” proposing to equate him with Costea the Brave, a member of the princely council during the reigns of the Moldavian voivodes Roman I and Iuga (1399–1400).93 However, this view is not commonly accepted among contemporary scholars, as there are also two other versions of Constantine’s true identity. According to Ş. Papacostea, Constantine should be identified with Costea Voivode, whose name was mentioned together with other previous Moldavian rulers in the Bistrița diptych of 1407 and whom the previously mentioned scholar regarded as the leader of another Romanian medieval state located in the Lower Country.94 Ş. S. Gorovei drew attention to the fact that the title “vayvoda” was used in the singular form and applied only to Peter Mușat, while the document itself was issued at a time when the process of establishing the Moldavian Metropolis on the basis of the ecclesiastical institution present in Cetatea Albă had already started, meaning that by 1386 Cetatea Albă was already under Moldavian administration.95 C.
Rezachevici claimed that the Constantine mentioned in the Genoese document was none other than Constantine Koryatowicz, the duke of Podolia between 1385 and 1390.96

Returning to the main source that led to the discussions around Constantine’s identity, the records of the Massaria contain only strictly financial data about the envoy sent by the Genoese and led by Illario de Doria—on 2 May 1386 a note was issued about Illario de Doria’s debt to a certain Gaspallo Spinola for his journey to Moncastro (Cetatea Albă), and on 14 August of the same year another document shows the payment of 2,000 aspres (akçes) by the Caffa authorities for the voyage of the Genoese representatives to Moncastro by sea during their travel to “Constantino et Petro vayvoda.”97 Taking into account all this information and the opinions expressed above, none of the three explanations can be decisively confirmed because of the absence of any mention of Constantine’s title—a mistake most likely caused by the strictly economic intent of the studied documents. If Ş. Papacostea’s arguments turn out to be true, the error would be the use of the word “vayvoda” in the singular form; in the case of V. Spinei’s opinion, it would be the placement of Constantine before the ruler of Moldavia; and for C. Rezachevici’s hypothesis, it would be the absence of the title of the Podolian duke, held by the Koryatowicz brothers.

However, the results obtained in this study raise additional questions. For example, were there any other holders of the title of starost during the reigns of Roman I and Stephen I, more precisely between Giula capitaneus and Mihail capitaneus, as well as between Mihail and Dragoș the Brave? Who took the role of starost after Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s removal from this office in the 1410s? Why the practice of assigning starosts to Cetatea Albă was abandoned in favor of pârcălabs after Stephen II removed his brother, Iliaș I, from the Moldavian throne? Was this a trend towards uniformizing the nomenclature of territorial governors initiated by Stephen II and continued in the fortress on the Dniester River by his successors? These and many other questions and considerations should receive special attention in a separate study regarding the political history of Cetatea Albă. The results obtained so far demonstrate new possibilities and perspectives in researching the history of the territorial officials appointed to the borders of the Principality of Moldavia in the 14th–15th centuries.

Notes

2. The earliest mentions of the Hotin (Khotyn) and Cernăuți (Chernivtsi) starosts can be found in the treaty negotiated by Petru Aron with the Polish officials Muzhilo (Mużyło) Buczacki, the starost of Sniatyn, Colomeea (Kolomyia) and Koropets, and Bartosh Buczacki, the starost of Podolia, on 1 April 1457—Ion Eremia, ed., *Relațiile externe ale Țării Moldovei în documente și materiale (1360–1858)* (Chișinău: Cartdidact, 2020), doc. 83, pp. 220–222—, while in the treaty between Stephen the Great and the Great Lithuanian Duke Alexander Jagiello signed on 14 September 1499 there is a mention of Costea, the starost of Soroca. Ioan Bogdan, ed., *Documentele lui Ștefan cel Mare*, vol. 2, * hrisoare și cărți domnești, 1493–1503, tractate, acte omagiale, solii, privilegii comerciale, salv-conducte, scrisori, 1457–1503* (Bucharest: Atelierele Gracice Socce & Co., Societate Anonimă, 1913), doc. 179, pp. 442–446.


9. Some examples of captains in Maramureș include the cases of Baia Mare (Frauenbach, Nagybánya), where in 1469 is mentioned a “castellanus et capitaneus de Rivulo Dominarum,” and of Berchez (Magyarberkesz), which “was a town between the 14th and the 16th centuries and had a captaincy.” Dorin Ștef, *Dictionar etimologic al localităților din județul Maramureș, 2nd edition, rev. And enl.* (Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință, 2023), 94, 112.


17. Fig. 1 is based on the mentions of Dragoș the Brave in the Moldavian charters issued between 30 March 1392 and 15 June 1431, which can be found in *DRH*, A, 1.


23. Fig. 2 is based on Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s mentions in the Moldavian charters issued between 20 July 1404 and 8 October 1408, which can be found in *DRH*, A, 1.

24. Fig. 3 is based on Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s mentions in the Moldavian charters issued between 28 January 1409 and 13 April 1415, which can be found in *DRH*, A, 1.


31. Fig. 4 is based on Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s mentions in the Moldavian charters issued between 15 January 1418 and 10 February 1434, which can be found in *DRH*, A, 1.

32. Costârcescu, 1, doc. 80, p. 247; doc. 141, p. 437.


37. Fig. 5 is based on Giurgiu of Frătăuți’s mentions in the Moldavian charters issued between 8 October 1435 and 28 October 1439, which can be found in *DRH*, A, 1.


42. Eremita, doc. 8, pp. 154–155.

43. Costârcescu, 1, doc. 168, pp. 616–617.


47. In the acts issued exclusively by Iliaș I on 30 November 1436, 12 March 1437, 23 February and 18 May 1438 Giurgiu is still listed first among the members of the prince’s council (DRH, A, 1, doc. 164, pp. 229–231; doc. 169, pp. 237–238; doc. 180, pp. 254–256; doc. 183, p. 259).

48. For example, the act of Stephen II issued in Vaslui on 10 May 1439 does not mention Giurgiu of Frătăuți among other witnesses (DRH, A, 1, doc. 195, pp. 275-276).

49. Although the first reference to a Moldavian pârcălab in Chilia can be found in the act of Stephen II to the monastery of Neamț written on 19 February 1446 (DRH, A, 1, doc. 262, pp. 371–372), the first known governors of Chilia, Isaiia and Ion Bucium, will be mentioned here in 1465, immediately after the recapture of the town by Stephen the Great in 1465 (DRH, A, 2, doc. 129, pp. 185–186).

50. The only mention in the princely charters of Mihul, the pârcălab of Crâciuna, the border fortress in Putna County, is from 13 April 1484, in the context of the frontier struggles between Stephen the Great and the rulers of Wallachia (DRH, A, 2, doc. 260, pp. 398–399).

51. For example, “Dragoș staroste” appeared together with Șandru of Hotin on 28 June 1406, while Giurgiu of Frătăuți was mentioned in the same charter as Manoil Grecul, the pârcălab of Hotin, on 20 June 1438 (DRH, A, 1, doc. 13, pp. 18–20; doc. 184, pp. 260–262).

52. In the same act of 28 June 1406, Hotco of Țețina (Tsetsyno) is mentioned together with Dragoș, while Giurgiu is mentioned from 20 December 1437 until his last documentary record together with Șteful Jumătate, who was the pârcălab of Țețina long before the only mention of his presence in this governorship on 6 August 1440—more arguments in this regard can be found here: Alexandru Bejenaru, “Țara Șipeniului și problema cedării sale Poloniei în 1436,” Akademos 68, 1 (2023): 80–87.

53. For example, “Giurgiu staroste” appears together with the same Dragoș the Brave during the time when he was the pârcălab of Neamț on 8 March 1407 (DRH, A, 1, doc. 22, pp. 30–32), 6 October 1407 (Eremia, doc. 21, pp. 164–165) and 16 September 1408 (DRH, A, 1, doc. 23, pp. 32–34).

54. Giurgiu of Frătăuți has multiple mentions together with Mihail of Dorohoi, another long-lived dignitary during the rule of Alexander the Good, starting with the charter issued on 8 March 1407 (DRH, A, 1, doc. 22, pp. 30–32).

55. In the same act of 8 March 1407, we find the names of Oană, the vornic of Suceava, and Vlad of Siret, a possible vornic of this town, according to N. Stoicescu (Șfantul domnesc și marii dregători, 194).


57. Burac, 175.


63. Burac, 72, 79.
64. The earliest mention of a princely official in Hotin belongs to Ștefan of Hotin, who was present among the witnesses to the safe-conduct issued for Spytko II of Melsztyn, the duke of Podolia, on 3 February 1397 (Costăchescu, 2, doc. 168, pp. 616–617), while in the princely charters of 28 June 1401 and 7 January 1403 we find Hotco of Țețina, the first documented pârcălab of this town (DRH, A, 1, doc. 13, pp. 18–20; doc. 17, pp. 24–25).
65. Stoicescu, Sfântul domnesc și marii dregători, 205.
66. Eremia, doc. 13, p. 158.
68. Eremia, doc. 50, pp. 188–189.
71. Bălan, 11–12.
77. Cronica Moldovei, 131–132.
78. DRH, A, 1, doc. 225, pp. 314-316
81. Nicolae Iorga, Studii istorice asupra Chiliei și Cetății-Albe (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Göbl, 1899), 93.
85. Rezachevici, 1: 85.
86. Costăchescu, 1, doc. 80, p. 247.
89. Andreescu, 224.
90. Ureche, 76; Nicolae Costin, Letopisețul Țării Moldovei de la zidirea lumii până la 1601, edited with an introduction by Ioan Șt. Petre (Bucharest: Fundația Regală pentru Literatură și Artă, 1942), 218.
94. Papacostea, 45.
96. Rezachevici, 1: 452.
97. Papacostea, 46.

Abstract
Starosts in the Principality of Moldavia: A Case Study (1387–1439)

The starosts distinguished themselves among other state officials in the Principality of Moldavia as overseers of the northern counties, on the border with the Kingdom of Poland and the Great Duchy of Lithuania, as well as governors of Putna County, in the south. While this description accurately reflects their duties since the rule of Stephen the Great (1457–1504), it remains to be seen if the same could be said about the previous time periods. The study presents a detailed analysis of the political and administrative role of the starosts in the Principality of Moldavia between the end of the 14th century and the first half of the 15th century, showcasing the political careers of their holders during this period and attempting to pinpoint the exact area of the starosts’ projected territorial power.

Keywords
Principality of Moldavia, starost, Alexander the Good, Hmielev (Khmeliv), Cetatea Albă (Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyi)